

# Linguistic Insights to Translation Teaching: Multimodality

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## **Abstract:**

The present study sheds light on the importance of using multimodal texts in technical translation teaching. It aims at measuring to what extent are multimodal texts important in explaining technical texts in the course of translation. It is based on pragmatic studies that flourished in this context. Hence, it relies on two data tools a questionnaire that has been addressed to teachers of translation in order to test whether they use multimodal texts in their course or not; and an in-class observation. The research is important in the sense that it tends to invest the latest pragmatic studies in the study of translation didactics.

**Key words:** Technical Translation; Multimodal; Texts; Teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

Translation has always been a fertile field for research. Yet, the overwhelming majority of the theories and approaches that handled translation focused on literary translation. Its teaching did not get the interest of scholars till the late 1970's with the development of functional

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school of translation. Nord's model considers the analysis of the source text as a primordial step in teaching translation, hence, she puts to the fore a whole methodology of text analysis. In addition, the interpretive theory, developed by Lederer and Seleskovitch, presented a methodology of translation didactics based on cognitive studies. Different models appeared later such as House's quality assessment, Delisle's discourse analysis, Hatim and Mason's communicative framework and Daniel Gile's effort model.

Nevertheless, few approaches tackled technical translation didactics since the stress was put on the didactics of general translation, scholars suggested to provide learners of translation with methods and techniques of dealing with different linguistic and cultural phenomena when moving from one language into another such as: how to deal with cultural words, idioms, collocations, how to analyze the source text, what are the norms to be respected. Needless to say that there is a model that gave importance to technical translation didactics, which had been suggested by Christine Durieux in her book "Didactic Foundations of Technical Translation" (2010). Durieux presents a general framework of technical translation didactics taking into account the specificities of technical texts, in one hand, and the skills required by such texts, in the other one. Hence, she dealt with the main features of technical translation: terminology, phraseology, documentary research, data banks and translation resources.

When it comes to teaching technical translation, several problems rise as the problem of understanding terminology, explaining the content of the source text, discovering the documentary and terminological research techniques, acquiring the scientific writing skills and using ICT's in technical translation.

In light of the above, the present study tends to handle the problem of explaining technical texts to students of translation. In fact, understanding the content of the source text is undoubtedly the first and most important step in the translational process. It is impossible to translate unless a full and correct comprehension of the text took place. Hence, what makes teaching technical translation a complicated task is the fact that students are not in all cases able to decipher the different ideas of the source texts since they are facing specialized texts with particular features (terminology, phraseology, specialized acronyms). Accordingly, this paper aims at exploiting multimodal texts in the teaching of technical translation. In fact, recently, there has been renewed interest in the use of multimodal texts in teaching foreign languages with regard to the importance of images and graphs in simplifying the content of texts, and, consequently, in understanding the strange or difficult passages. The paper starts from the same hypothesis, but it focuses on the use of multimodal texts in the teaching of technical translation.

Moreover, the present paper starts with an overview on translation didactics tackling the main approaches that have been suggested in this context, then, it sheds light on the definition of the concept of multimodal text in pragmatics, semiotics and translation studies. At the end, the study tends to explore the usefulness of multimodal texts in technical translation didactics through a questionnaire and observation; the study took place at the University of Mascara, students of master translation English – Arabic as case study. It follows an analytical qualitative method of research.

## **2. Research on Teaching Technical Translation - Review**

### **2.1. Technical Translation**

The concept of “technical translation” was used as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of specialized texts and discourses. The “technicality” of the text here does not refer to scientific and technical texts only, but to other specialized discourses such as legal, historical and philosophical. Since they are all categorized by the same features: terminology, phraseology, frame of cognition, etc.

In his central work, Jean Delisle (1984) distinguishes between two types of texts in translation; literary and pragmatic. Pragmatic texts are the type that primary serve to vehicle information, and in which the aesthetic dimension is not the dominant one. In spite of the multiplicity of typologies of texts (Newmark, Reiss, Gouadec), they all agree on the main features of technical texts: the specialized nature of their contents and the non-use of aesthetic forms.

Moreover, Giuseppe Palumbo defines technical translation as:

*The term is normally used as a general label for the translation of documents and texts pertaining to various domains of specialized activity, thereby including not only scientific and technical domains but also other areas such as law, finance, business and marketing. [1]*

It goes without saying that technical Translation had long been central for translation thinking. In fact, the old distinction between literary and technical texts influenced the way translation scholars tackled the phenomenon. Nevertheless, many would agree that technical translation has not got the attention it deserved in the field, as it is stated by Maeve Olohan:

*In spite of its centrality within the profession, the activity of translating in scientific and technical fields has been rather neglected by translation scholars, if one compares it with the insights that have been gained from theorizing and analyzing the translation of canonical literary and religious texts (see Franco Aixelá 2004, for a useful bibliographic survey).*

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Difficulties of categorizing translation by field or genre may, in part, explain the lack of attention; perhaps the classification of texts as literary or sacred is achieved more readily than a delineation of what is technical or scientific, particularly when the latter have to be differentiated, in turn, from prevailing concepts which include specialized translation, LSP (language for special purposes) translation, commercial translation. [2].

This may be due to the fact that the first scholars of translation were working on religious and literary fields (Cicero, Saint Jerome, Martin Luther, Walter Benjamin, Antoine Berman,...) the fact that made them focusing on style, aesthetics, connotative meanings, and other aspects that are peculiar to literary texts.

## **2.2. When a Text Will Be “Technical”?**

There are set of features that make texts technical. Several suggestions and typologies have been suggested by translation scholars in order to define and limit this type of texts. Pierre Lerat (1995) points out a number of characteristics [3]:

- Technical texts use extralinguistic and letters such as; “X-ray”;
- It is a written-focused language;
- It has a particular structure in terms of terminology and phraseology;
- It is a universal language; technical texts do not use words and concepts that are related to a specific culture or region, but terms that are universally known by the experts of that field.

Moreover, Christine Durieux (2010) states other features [4]:

- Esoteric vocabulary; technical texts use a highly specialized vocabulary that makes a general reader unable to understand the content;

- Phraseology; legal texts, for example, do not use only a specific vocabulary but also a set of phrases and expressions which concerns specific contexts;

- Notions; that are particularly difficult for a non specialized reader.

To sum up, a technical text is characterized by its language (terminology, phraseology,...), content (the kind of topics it handles) and the type of readers it aims at (experts, students of a specialized field, standard readers). Hence, the point that makes translating technical texts a grueling task is the “what” is transmitted and the “how” should it be rendered into the target language.

## **2. Translation Teaching: Overview**

Why do we teach translation? Jean Delisle (1993), in his work “La Traduction Raisonnée”, tried to answer this question. In fact, we teach translation for several aims, he listed eight major ones [5]:

- Metalanguage of translation for beginners;
- Basic documentary research skills for the translator;
- A method for translation work;
- The cognitive process of translation;
- Writing convention;
- Lexical difficulties;
- Syntactic difficulties;
- Drafting.

The purposes highlighted by Delisle constitute the core of any translation training program. For the first objective, Translation trainer tends to teach

his students the main concepts and terms of the field of translation. Concepts like; adaptation, explication, equivalence, domestication, in order to familiarize them with translation studies. For the second objective, a program of translation is taught to provide translation trainee with a methodology of documentary research which is of paramount importance when dealing with technical texts. In addition, one of the main purposes is to train students of translation with a method of translation, as illustration, the work done by the interpretive theory (Lederer, Seleskovitch), or Peter Newmark (Textbook of translation),... also, to explain the cognitive process of translation so that students will be able to follow a rational and cognitive methodology of translation... finally, a program of translation training is designed to provide students with writing conventions (rules and norms of writing in different languages), and to tackle the lexical, semantic and drafting difficulties.

Needless to say that teaching translation is a controversial topic for different reasons;

- Because we are not talking about one process: teaching translation can be for future translators, language students, programming trainees or technical students (ESP);
- The curriculum and programs design is a grueling task in translation training since the objectives of teaching translation are various;
- Since translation is an interdisciplinary science, theories and approaches that have been developed in the field are different, and, consequently, there is no absolute and consensual method of teaching translation;

- The status of translation at the university is still fuzzy and weak since it is, in some cases, a part of foreign language teaching, and, in others, an independent specialty,

The main debates and issues discussed in the field of translation didactics are:

- Curriculum design; a trainer of translation does not have an elaborated program but he tries to design courses and lectures every time he teaches new class. In this context, Christine Durieux (1988) notes that there is no program for a teacher of translation [6];

*Le jeune professeur d'histoire ou de géographie qui se présente pour la première fois devant ses élèves dispose déjà d'un cadre de travail qui dans un premier temps va le sécuriser, c'est le programme; il doit suivre le programme. C'est le cas pour tous ceux qui sont chargés de transmettre un savoir. Dans le cas de la traduction, il n'existe rien de tel.*

- Choice of texts and exercises; the teacher of translation chooses texts of translation with regard to needs of his students, but no approach has been developed to enlighten teachers of translation with the method of doing so.

- Assessment methods; as language didactics and ESP, Translation teaching knew several methods of evaluating students outcomes and works. Each approach focuses on a given perspective, Translation Quality Assessment developed by Julian House (2015) puts forward the quality of the translation from a communicative point of view, Jean-René Ladmiral (1994) focuses his approach on the errors committed by learners and students of translation.



- Methods of translation; “how to translate” is ought to be the main question of teaching translation. Students are waiting for a method for translation; hence, a number of approaches have been suggested in order to provide students with methods of translation by focusing either on the steps of the translation process (The interpretive theory by Seleskovitch and Lederer, the functional model by Nord, the hermeneutic process by George Steiner) or on particular issues (how to translate collocations by Newmark, how to deal with the semantic features of the source text by Nida).
- Quality Measurement; the pragmatic studies of translation teaching put forward the study of the quality of the outcome. Scholars debated about the norms and criteria to be respected when translating (e.g; Translation Quality Assessment by House, the model of Gideon Toury, Chasterman).
- Course design; one of the main problems of teaching translation. No approach has suggested a methodology of designing the course of translation.

### **2.1. Challenges and Obstacles**

It goes without saying that a considerable work has been done on translation didactics; yet, a lot is to be tackled. The principle challenges that face research in this field are curriculum design, assessment of technical translation and the use of ICT's in the teaching process.

Anthony Pym (2009) states the main challenges that encounter translation researchers. He argues that these challenges concern pedagogical practice, curriculum design and the possible contributions of research, besides; he believes that the current horizons of translation didactics are [7]:

- The role of technology on translation teaching; data bases, translation software, translation memories.
- The need for developing highly specialized programs for Master students so that they discover new fields like audiovisual translation, applied terminology, interpreting,
- The investment of e-learning in the translation training;

In her “Didactic Foundation of the Technical Translation” (2010), Christine Durieux presents one of the most operational models of teaching translation. She divided her work into two parts;

1- The process of translation; techniques and skills required to approach a technical text. In this perspective, she tackled techniques of documentary research, comprehension, terminological research, the cognitive process of translation.

2- Translation didactics; the choice of texts, curriculum design, method of teaching, the use of ICT’s in the teaching of translation.

### **3. Multimodal Texts**

Recently, more translational studies are shedding light on multimodal texts. As their noun may indicate, multimodal texts are the kind of texts that use more than one medium or channel of communication. They include: catalogues, comics, technical texts...the main feature of this type of texts is that they all contain images and graphs.

In her text-type theory, Katharina Reiss (1981) distinguishes between three types of texts: expressive, informative and operative, In addition to a “Hyper-type” which she called “audiomedial” that encompasses all the other

modes of communication like movies, pictures and graphs. Hence, the stress was put on multimodal texts.

Sara Dicerto points out that, recently, multimodal texts know a particular interest within the field of translation:

*Translation studies scholars have only relatively recently started to be alert to the particular problem of the interaction between different semiotic sources of meaning and the impact of this interaction on translation activity. Semiotic resources other than language, which can and do intervene in the composition of texts, are largely under-researched in translation studies with a few notable exceptions regarding specific sub-areas of the field, such as audiovisual translation (AVT) and the translation of comics. [8]*

In the context of didactics, multimodality plays a key role in facilitating the teaching-learning process. The point of departure of the present study is to see to what extent are multimodal texts helpful in understanding technical texts taking students of translation master as case study.

### **3.1. Multimodal Texts: Features**

Multimodal texts are characterized by a set of features that make the analysis and the translation of such texts particular. One can state the main features as follow:

- 1- The multiplicity of channels of communication; from verbal to non-verbal elements such as films, pictures, graphs, schemes, etc.
- 2- The harmony between the different parts of the text; as ordinary texts, multimodal ones are coherent in the sense that the different mediums are interconnected;
- 3- The use of terms and specialized concepts with explanations;

4- The ambivalence between highly specialized language and a simplified one in order to explain the scientific topic to readers with different levels of specialization;

5- Conciseness; since the multimodal texts tend to reveal many ideas in one picture or page;

6- The omnipresence of the semiotic dimension;

7- Simplification of scientific and technical concepts.

#### **4. The Purpose of the Research**

This paper research aims at defining to what extent are multimodal texts important in teaching technical translation. Starting from the hypothesis that any process of translation should begin with the full and right understanding of the different parts of the source text, the research puts to the fore a practical and pragmatic framework for teachers of specialized translation. Besides, it seeks to develop a concrete and realizable model for technical translation didactics through conducting a questionnaire and an in-class observation.

#### **4.1. Methodology**

##### **4.1.1. Participants**

The present paper seeks to test the importance of multimodal texts over students of master translation at the University of Mascara. Firstly, they were given a technical text (not multimodal one) and they were allowed to use dictionaries and other resources; secondly, they were given texts that tackle the same specialized topic with pictures (multimodal one), and they were asked to explain what the text is about (the gist), to sum it up and finally to translate it.

##### **4.1.2. Procedure**

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Students were given a text of 500 words to translate in 30 minutes. For the purpose of this study, the text was given in the first time without pictures or graphs, and students were allowed to use any kind of resources (dictionaries, glossaries, online resources,.) and without any explanation or intervention by the teacher. After thirty minutes, the teacher gathered the translations of students and gave them a new text that handles the same topic but with pictures that explain and demonstrate the topic. The second text is composed of 500 words and 30 minutes was allocated as well.

The first text, entitled “uranium enrichment”, was taken from the world nuclear association website. The second one is a multimodal text that handles the same issue using illustrations about the process of enriching uranium. The two texts were not given simultaneously in order to test the understandability of each text aside.

#### **4.2. Data Tools of Research**

The present study relies on a questionnaire that has been addressed to teachers of translation in order to test whether they use multimodal texts in their teaching or not as well as to see if they believe in the importance of this kind of texts in translation course. The second tool is observation which is the main tool of collecting data since the study is undertaken in class with students of master.

#### **4.3. Corpus Presentation**

The text that has been proposed to students deals with “uranium enrichment”, they were asked to translate it from English into Arabic. It was quoted from the specialized website of the world nuclear association; it tackles the process and the different steps of enriching uranium. Afterward, the following multimodal text had been suggested:

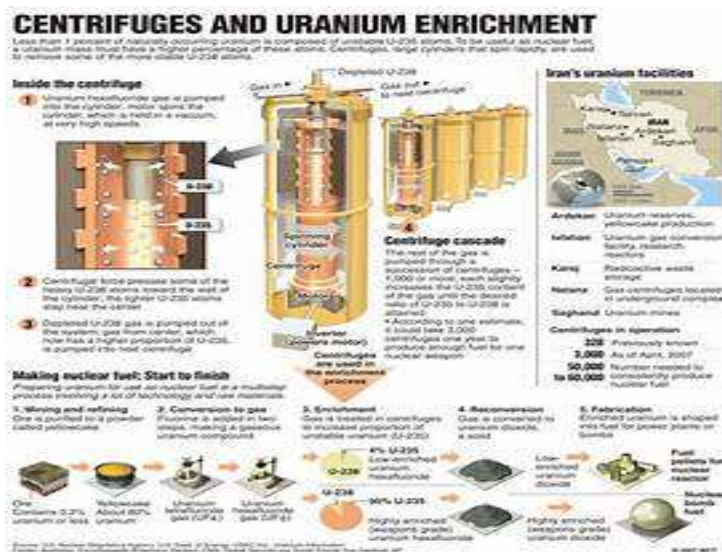


Figure 01 – Multimodal Text Dealing with Uranium Enrichment

As shown above, the multimodal text used various channels of communication ranging from the verbal elements to images. It describes the process of enriching uranium step by step, and using the same level of specialization as the original text. It is indeed a crowd text because it tries to encompass all the different ideas in one image. Though they were not familiar with such kind of texts, students show positive feedbacks when they were given the text.

#### 4.4. Results and Discussion

There are two results to be analyzed; the results of the questionnaire that had been addressed to teachers of translation, and the results of research that was undertaken during the course of translation.

##### 4.4.1. The Questionnaire

The present questionnaire focused on the importance and main difficulties of using multimodal text in the course of translation. Hence twenty teachers of translation took part in its conduction. The main results of the questionnaire were as follow;

- **Teachers' Gender;** As for the questionnaire, 20 teachers of translation answered the questions. The 1st question involves the identification of participant's gender 75% males and 25% females.

- **The Difficulty of Teaching Technical Translation;** 100% of teachers reckon that technical translation is harder to teach than general translation.

- **The obstacles of teaching technical translation;** 65% of the participants think that explaining the specialized content constitute the main obstacle, 25% believe that finding the equivalents in Arabic is a grueling task, while 10% reckon that the main obstacle is the fact that students are not familiar with technical writing skills and conventions;

- **The use of multimodal texts in the translation course;** it is the surprise of the study. 100% of the questioned teachers reckon they have never used multimodal texts in their courses.

- **The importance of multimodal texts in teaching technical translation;** 65% believe that introducing multimodal texts within the translational course may be a fruitful strategy, while 35% denied this importance.

- **The way of introducing multimodal texts within the course of translation;** a majority of 90% suggests devoting whole lectures to the multimodal text, whilst 10% said that both the original technical text and the multimodal one can be introduced simultaneously within the same lecture.

- **Teachers' opinion on the difficulties of introducing multimodal texts;** the answers varied; 50% of teachers believe that multimodal texts require

specific semiotic skills that are not always obvious to students, 25% said that students are not familiar with such texts, 15% think that it is a whole different specialty, while 10% said that it is time-consuming.

It is noteworthy that the present questionnaire focused on teachers' opinion and feedback vis-à-vis the use of multimodal texts. The most astonishing response was the fact that they never used multimodal texts in their teaching task. The point that makes the present study interesting but not a final one; more studies and research papers are to be done. Though they did not use multimodal texts before, teachers agreed on their "eventual" importance and usefulness in facilitating the understanding process which is a primordial stage in translation. Besides, the questionnaire aimed at discovering the teachers' methods of introducing multimodal texts, the majority admit that they can be introduced after handing over the source texts, which is the method we adopted in our study, while others believe that the best way is to devote whole lectures to multimodal texts i.e. without giving the source text (the ordinary one), the teacher should give, in the first place, the multimodal one and start working on it. Also, teachers admit that the main difficulty of using multimodal texts is the fact that it requires specific semiotic skills like the interpretation of pictures, the comprehension of graphs and charts, the link between verbal and non-verbal elements,... they believe that students are not familiar with such kind of analysis which makes the interpretation hard for students.

This is the use of multimodal texts from teachers' perspective, how about students' feedback toward lectures with multimodal texts? In the following passages, the study will be focusing on the observation of in-class activities using multimodal texts.



#### **4.4.2. Observation of the Use of Multimodal Texts in Teaching Technical Translation**

The case study takes place at the department of English language and literature — University of Mascara — Students are preparing their master degree in translation Arabic-English — Arabic. The module they are tackling is translation English — Arabic. The text tackles the topic of uranium enrichment, first of all the text was given to students, after a 1st reading, students were asked the following question; “how do you find the text?” answers were unanimous: “difficult and ambiguous text” because of the terminology and phraseology of this field. Then, they were asked to summarize the content of the text; two of twenty students were approximately able to give an overview about the process of uranium enrichment, the fact that makes the course and the teaching process tricky. Afterward the same topic was given but with the multimodal text.

The text explains the process of uranium enrichment using pictures and explanations. Students were satisfied since they were able to grasp the different stages and steps of enriching uranium. The same question was asked; “who can summarize the content of the text?” fifteen students of twenty did understand the content of the text. The difference was obvious. They were also asked to determine the reasons of this understanding, answers varied;

1. “Because images are easier to grasp”
2. “The text is shorter than the first one”
3. “Because the terms are simplified”
4. “The multimodal text is more illustrative then the first one”

Students were given back the first text to translate, they did not face the same problems; however, they started to translate into Arabic and the outcome was satisfying.

- **Understanding the utterance**

The first aim of this study is to see the level of understanding the source text after using multimodal texts. The paper experiment shows to what extent are multimodal texts essential to facilitating the content of the original text. It is a helping tool that makes the ST understandable. Students' feedback towards multimodal texts was positive, reaching the main ideas and thoughts of the original text, and acquiring the possibility of rendering the message into Arabic.

- **Summary abilities**

It has been acknowledged in the field of translation that the best way of testing students' comprehension of the source text is to ask them to sum it up in their own style. In fact, after tackling the multimodal text, students were able to summarize and talk about "uranium enrichment", the point that was quasi impossible before. The summary was done orally in order to avoid reading an already written text. Hence, the main ideas of the source text (origins of uranium, chemical nature of this substance, the process, and the military implications of uranium) have been tackled by students.

- **Terminology**

Students were able to understand the different terms used by the author such as "isotopes" which was translated by students to : **مماثلات - نظائر**. Though the second suggestion is not the accurate one but we find out that students tried to deal with the term as they grasped it. Also, the term

“fission” that is closely related to uranium separation has been rendered by students into "الفصل", "الانفلاق", "الانشطار". In some cases, where the exact equivalent of the English term does not exist in Arabic, we noticed that students adopted borrowing as strategy like “hexafluoride” that has been translated into "إيكسافلوريد" by some students, and to "سادس الفليوريد" by others.

### ● **Acronyms**

The text contains a set of acronyms that are related to uranium enrichment. Students were asking about the significance of these acronyms since they refer to specific technical realities. some acronyms were already defined in the text e.g. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP), International Uranium Enrichment Centre (IUEC), Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power (KHNP), Societe d'Enrichissement du Tricastin (SET); while others needed a documentary research like U235, PWR (Pressurized water reactor).

## **5. Results and Recommendations**

The main findings of the present study can be summed up as follow;

1. The main challenges of teaching technical translation are related to terminology and the specific nature of technical discourse, Any translation training program must include teaching skills of documentary and terminological research,
2. The overwhelming majority of translational theories and approaches dealt only with translation didactics, and neglecting the technical translation,
3. Technical translation didactics need more insights and investments of other disciplines outcomes and horizons,

4. The use of multimodal texts, still undiscovered field in translation studies, is very important in order to facilitate the understanding process and to transmit the technical information in the course of translation,

5. Multimodality has largely been tackled by systemic functional linguistics (SFL), also known as polyfunctional texts,

6. Though they did not use it before, teachers of translation that were questioned recognize the potential importance of multimodal texts,

7. The study reveals the usefulness of multimodal texts as pedagogical support for the understanding of the source text.

8. The main difficulties of using multimodal texts are; The problem of time since the session lasts only one hour and half, the kind of texts that deserve to be supported with multimodal texts, the way multimodal texts should be introduced, devoting whole sessions to multimodal texts versus introducing them with the source texts ( the ones to translate).

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study sought to examine the importance of multimodal texts in developing the comprehension skill. It tackled technical texts as corpus as long as they are one of the texts that students fear the most. In addition, it explored the role of multimodality in terms of understanding, familiarizing with technical terms and concepts, discovering the technical writing as well as introducing students to research documentary. The main finding of the paper is the fact that multimodal texts are extremely helpful when it comes to teaching technical translation; they can afford students with a simple and pictured explanation of the text as well as a full understanding of the technical issue.

Yet, further studies ought to be done, particularly related to: the way of introducing multimodal texts in the translational course, the kind of texts that need to be supported by multimodal ones, the efficiency of using multimodal texts in developing the technical writing competency, the semiotic dimension of multimodal texts, etc.

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