

The Importance of ESP in Enhancing Specialized Translation

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Abstract

Algerian teachers of translation are complaining about the current curriculum, which has failed to form competent professional translators. Translation is often of a bad quality and the problem of equivalence and exact translation are always raised. As translators' major problem is linguistic untranslatability and the difficulty to find the exact equivalence, this simple paper suggests the incorporation of ESP in teaching specialized translation. Because the interrelatedness of specialized translation and ESP is largely unexplored, the paper is a daring attempt to vindicate that the integration of ESP (English for Specific Purpose) in the translation syllabus is important if Algerian universities are to form competent and professional translators. It is likely to help translators transcend the assorted difficulties and translate texts as faithfully and as accurately as possible. Because it focuses on students' needs and their linguistic skills, ESP is highly recommended for students of specialized translation.

Key Words: ESP – Specialized Translation – Professional Translators – Linguistic Skills – Students' Needs

الملخص

إن أساتذة الترجمة الجزائريين يشكون من مناهج الترجمة الراهنة الذي فشل في تكوين مترجمين متخصصين أكفاء. إن الترجمة دائماً ذات نوعية رديئة و إشكالية الترادف والترجمة الدقيقة تبقى دائماً الطرح. و بما أن إشكالية الترجمة الكبرى هي لا قابلية الترجمة اللغوية و صعوبة إيجاد الترجمة الدقيقة، فإن هذه المداخلة تقترح إدماج الإنجليزية كلغة تخصص في تعليم الترجمة المتخصصة. و لأن الترابط بين الترجمة المتخصصة و الإنجليزية كلغة تخصص يبقى موضوعاً غير متطرقاً إليه عموماً، فإن هذه المقالة ترمي إلى تبيان كيفية إدماج الإنجليزية كلغة تخصص في المنهاج الدراسي و دورها الفعال في تكوين مترجمين متخصصين أكفاء، فمن شأنها أن تساعد المترجمين على تخطي الصعوبات و ترجمة النصوص بكل أمانة و إتقان. ولأنها تركز على احتياجات الطلبة ومهارتهم اللغوية، فإن الإنجليزية كلغة تخصص موصى بها لطلبة الترجمة المتخصصة.

General translators find themselves baffled by the task of translating texts in multiple disciplines, which they may not have any background about. Their possession of a considerable amount of linguistic knowledge and competence does not always ensure a translation of a high quality. Translators seek for the right equivalent in dictionaries, forgetting that the latter provide meager meanings, which are decontextualized. They may also resort to the internet, which does not provide them with the right translation. Hence, their translations will be very poor and erroneous, because of the lack of specialized terminology. Culture bound texts also makes the task of translation more difficult. Though translators are expected to produce texts with a topnotch quality, most of the time, general translators fail to find the exact equivalence at the textual, discursive, and communicative level. What makes the task of translators more exhaustive is the fact that the latter are not provided with any feedback during the translation process. In addition to that, they may not have the chance to have a face to face communication with their clients.

Indeed, Translation course at the university are shut off from the real immediate needs of the translators. General translators often find that the theory is useless in the field of work. However, in the recent years, there is an increasing awareness of the need for training students to be professional translators. In their discussion of specialized, i.e. professional translation, Maurizio Gotti & Susan Sarcevic state: “Broadly speaking, specialized translation [...] covers the specialist subject fields falling under non-literary translation, the best known of which include science and technology, economics, marketing, law, politics, medicine, and mass media.”¹ In fact, specialised texts have special characteristics. According to Popovič,

We can distinguish three levels within a specialised text: (a) the level of a general language, including grammar and syntactical structures common to both fictional and non-fictional writing, (b) the level of terminology which includes specialised vocabulary and phrases of the branch, (c) the level of formal or scientific language which includes syntactical structures used principally in non-fictional writing.²

Linguistic competence, formal and scientific language are required. Of utmost significance, terminology is a key component of specialised texts. In case the exact equivalence does not exist in the target language, the translator can provide explanations instead of terminology. Translators have to translate not word by word, but sense for sense. In this respect, Baker states that in specialized translation, there is no "one-to-one correspondence"³

Specialized translators are always prompted by an external stimulus. Ingrid Meyer and Pamela Russell state that specialized texts differ from general texts in four parameters: “purpose, target audience, subject matter, and structural conventions.”⁴ Specialized texts might include scientific and technical texts, business texts, journalistic texts and legal texts. Professional translators have to select the appropriate texts, avoiding translating texts, which fall outside the areas of their expertise. If the translator is not a specialist in the field that the text deals with, he is likely to tarnish the meaning of the text and to produce a text, which is full of errors. Ryonhee Kim quotes Tirrkonen-Condit, who states that “the best translations are produced in cooperation between professional translators who are also linguists and

experts in the subject matter of the text”⁵. So, to do better translation, translators are in need not only of more language learning but also of more knowledge about the subject matters that the translated texts treats.

When encumbered by so many overwhelming linguistic puzzles, specialized translators try to combat these problems they resort to bilingual dictionaries, a habit which is hard dying. Translation does not just require competence in two languages, but also knowledge about the field, which is treated by the text. Translators are not just in need of linguistic knowledge for equivalence and fidelity; they also have to be specialists in the domain-specific texts. A throng of scholars contend that an understanding of the subject field is very important for specialized translators. Lynne Bowker, for instance, states that “three of the most important criteria required to produce a high-quality translation are an understanding of the subject field, an excellent command of the target language, and a good knowledge of the source language.”⁶ In other words, linguistic competence is not sufficient in the translation process. Professional translators are supposed to have a deep knowledge about the subject matter treated in the text. Ignorance or lack of understanding of the subject field is likely to result in comprehension errors.

In fact, translation university courses do not meet the real social needs and the personal needs of students, who will be translators in different disciplines. In other words, there is an utter mismatch between theoretical knowledge and the needs of translators at work. Hence, integrating ESP is likely to improve specialized translation from English to Arabic and vice versa. ESP helps translators acquire the adequate specialized vocabulary and highly specialized lexicon.

As we have mentioned before, integrating ESP in teaching translation will yield great benefits for translators. In translation from Arabic to English, for instance, ESP is recommended for specialized translators, because they are in need to be deeply informed about the substantive content of the translated texts.

Teaching specialized translation in the Algerian universities becomes a necessity, especially which the LMD system aims at forming students with vocational interests. So, the curriculum should aim at meeting the increasing demand for specialized translation. An ESP-based methodology for teaching/learning specialized translation is highly required. In fact, ESP occupies a pivotal place in language teaching/learning. Ken Hyland in “ESP and Writing” states that “Teachers do not simply ‘teach writing’ but teach particular kinds of writing which are valued and expected in some academic and professional contexts.”⁷ So, translators, also, do not just need to be linguistically competent, but they also need to develop knowledge of different genres and contexts.

Very much like ESP, needs are also of paramount importance in teaching specialized translation. Educationists always emphasize the importance of needs in language learning. Specialized translation should be based on needs analysis, which is a very important aspect of ESP. According to Helen Basturkmen, “ESP is understood to be about preparing learners to use English within academic, professional, or workplace environments”⁸. So, ESP is not

learned as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end, which is attaining linguistic efficiency in the field of the translated text. Since learning General English is not the aim of the specialized translators, the latter have to be taught bits of English, which is essential in their profession. Hence, any course in specialized translation should start with needs analysis.

A survey of needs analysis should be conducted to elicit data and information the professional translators' true needs. An awareness of the translators' needs is likely to help course designers to decide about the content. Many researchers have also emphasized the importance of necessities in ESP. These necessities would also be useful a translation course design. In their definition of the term, Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters state:

We can call 'necessities' the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, a businessman or woman might need to understand business letters, to communicate effectively at sales conferences, to get the necessary information from sales catalogues and so on. He or she will presumably also need to know the linguistic features -discoursal, functional, structural, lexical- which are commonly used in the situations identified.⁹

Suggestions

- 1-The translation curriculum in the Algerian universities should move from general to specialized translation.
- 2-To form specialized translators, any translation course must be based on an ESP methodology.
- 3-There is an urgent need for dictionaries of specialized translation.
- 4-Universities should be provided with institutes for training specialized translators, who are subject-field experts. These translators must be trained in different subject fields.
- 5-In teaching translation, there should be a correlation between the theory and practice.
- 6-Empirical studies specialized translation is likely to proffer deeper insights into the field.

Conclusion

Translators have a great responsibility towards their clients. To be at the level of their expectations, professional translators should be aware of the field treated by the texts, which they are asked to translate. Among the difficulties encountered by general translators are: the lack of specialized vocabulary and the inability to find the exact equivalence of culture-bound words. To solve these problems, there is a rallying cry for implementing ESP in translation courses. This will enhance the production of translated texts, which meet the criteria of correctness, equivalence, and fidelity. Needs analysis has to be of primal importance in any curriculum design for students of specialized translation.

Endnotes

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