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THE IMPACT OF LITERAL AND FREE TRANSLATION ON THE RE-CREATION OF MEANING

Abstract: Technical translation significantly differs from literary translation in terms of various lexical and morphological categories. This particularly refers to the technical terminology that is characteristic for a particular professional field and its standardized meaning. One of the main tasks in the translation process is to discover the meaning of words in context – whether they have acquired a new meaning or whether they have been used with a metaphorical or specialized meaning, etc. Based on the theoretical framework provided by Newmark, Vinay and Darbelnet, the research in this paper focuses on the use of various literal and free translation procedures and how they affect or change the meaning when it is re-created in the target text, i.e. in the translation. For that purpose, the analysis is performed on a contemporary corpus, with specific examples demonstrating which translation procedures provide semantic equivalence with the original.

Keywords: translation procedures, specialised terminology, semantic equivalence

1. Subject and Purpose of the Research

Under the influence of the contemporary developments in today’s modern society, many countries are facing an increased need for translations in technical fields as opposed to literary translations. This is especially the case with the field of economy and finance, as one of the most dynamic sectors in every country, considering the latest economic developments on the global scene, such as the global financial crisis and the European debt crisis. These economic phenomena have had a global influence on almost all world economies as well as on the terminology in numerous languages for denoting new economic concepts and processes.

When it comes to translations in the abovementioned technical fields, the use of specialised lexis is one of the main distinguishing features of all technical translations, which results in great difficulties in the translation process regardless of the language combination. This type of lexis has a narrow specialised meaning in economic context and it often acquires a new meaning that is usually metaphorical and connected with the novelties in the economic sphere. However, literal translation of the specific lexis and professional idioms often changes the meaning of the source text in such a way that it leads to loss of the specialised meaning or to completely wrong meaning. Hence, the subject of research in this paper is the application of several literal translation procedures and free translation procedures in the process of technical translation and their effect on meaning in the target text. More specifically, the purpose of the paper is to analyse which translation procedures are adequate for use in the field of technical translations and how they affect or change the meaning when it is re-created in the target text, i.e. in the translations from English to Macedonian language.

The analysis in this paper is performed on a corpus composed of the commonly used economic terminology in two books in the field of economy and finance, originally written in English by renown economists, which are translated from English to Macedonian language by different translation agencies. Text 1 is composed of two chapters from the book “Economics of Money, Banking and Financial Markets” (Mishkin 2010) and its Macedonian translation and Text 2 is composed of two chapters from the book “International Business: Competing in the Global Marketplace” (Hill 2010) and its Macedonian translation. Both books are used as international student books on the most renown universities worldwide, whereas their Macedonian translations have great practical use because they are intended for the general public, in particular for undergraduate and postgraduate students of economy and finance, as well as for the expert public, such as economists, economic and financial analysts, etc. This contemporary corpus serves as the ground on which the practical analysis and conclusions will be based, also accompanied with a proper theoretical framework.

2. Methodology and Questions of the Research

The theoretical framework for the research is based on the model of Newmark (1988), which contains 15 translation procedures, such as literal translation, transference, adaptation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through translation, transposition, modulation, recognised translation, translation label, paraphrase, etc. This model enables the analysis to be based on three levels: the lexis, the grammatical structure and the meaning of the message that is conveyed. Furthermore, a comparison is also made with the model of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), which contains 7 translation procedures, such as borrowing, calques, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. Both applied models are focused on two main translation methods: literal translation and free translation. Hence, the main question of the paper is which procedures are more applicable in the case of technical translations when it comes to conveying the meaning in the target text – the literal or free translation procedures?

In terms of the theoretical basis, literal or direct translation is defined as a form of word-for-word translation and is deemed acceptable only if the meaning is fully preserved in the target text (Vinay and Darbelnet in Munday 2008: 57). Contrary to this, free or oblique translation implies conveying of the meaning without maintaining the form of the original in terms of grammar and lexis and it often involves paraphrasing (Newmark 1988: 40), whereas the main purpose is to achieve equivalence in meaning, not equivalency in structure.

Considering the previously stated definitions, we begin the analysis with the thesis that the free translation procedures will be more applicable for this type of technical translations than the literal translation procedures, bearing in mind that free (or indirect) translation does not imply strict compliance to the form of the original (or the source text), but it rather aims towards achieving equivalence in meaning. This initial thesis will serve as a starting point on which the analysis will be based, whereas the results of the conducted research in the paper will confirm or discard this initial thesis.

3. Results of the Qualitative Analysis

The analysed examples demonstrate that the literal translation procedures applied in the translations of the two books that make up the corpus of this paper, have often resulted in preserving the identical forms of the original in terms of the grammatical structure (for example, adjective + noun + verb) and the primary meaning of the words, collocations and even idioms (instead of conveying their narrow specialised meaning in economic context). This was mainly visible in the translations of Text 2 where the procedures of ***literal (direct) translation*** have been mainly applied at the level of the lexis as well as the grammar. This is often possible and suitable, however numerous examples show that this is rarely applicable at the semantic level.

The above statement can be demonstrated with several comparative examples of specialised terms, collocations and idioms in English and Macedonian, as elaborated with the examples bellow:

(i) The investors lost their shirts
Инвеститорите ги загубија кошулите од грбот.

The professional idiom *The investors lost their shirts* cannot be translated word-for-word, as the translator did in Text 2, because in this way the primary meaning of all constituent words of the idiom from the source language is also conveyed in the target language (Newmark 1988: 69) and in that way the wrong meaning is conveyed in the translation. This professional idiom has a metaphorical meaning signifying that ‘the investors have lost all their invested money’, not literally their shirts. This is a very simple but demonstrative example, whereas another example is given in addition:

(ii) Short-selling
Кратка продажба.

Another illustrative example is the collocation *“short-selling”*, which is typically found in stock exchange terminology, and cannot be conveyed in the target language as one-to-one translation. This is because in one-to-one translation the meaning of the two constituent words matches in the collocation, but outside of that context they are not semantic equivalents (Newmark 1988: 69). Translated in this way as *кратка продажба*, the collocation is deprived of its specialised meaning of ‘selling without coverage on the stock exchange’. In both examples analysed above, the literally translated message acquires new meaning or has no meaning at all in the target language, and thus a completely wrong meaning is conveyed in the translation, which has nothing to do with the economic context.

The most commonly used literal translation procedures in the corpus of the paper include the following ones: borrowing, through translation (calque translation) and transference, and they have been mainly applied in the translation of Text 2 (which is characterised by lower quality). The procedure of ***borrowing*** involves direct transferring of a word from the source culture or language into the target culture or language (Vinay and Darbelnet in Munday 2008: 56). This is often the case with loanwords, which are regularly encountered in economic discourse and terminology, especially from English language as it is the lingua franca on the international business scene. A typical example from the corpus that can demonstrate this is the following, even though it can be easily translated by providing a description of its function as *инвестиција од нула*:

(iii) Greenfield investment
Гринфилд инвестиција.

The specific example proves that loanwords from English are not always necessary and they can often be replaced by a domestic term, whether it is an equivalent term or a descriptive translation as previously suggested. However, the prestige and domination of the English language when it comes to doing business is irrefutable among economists, and this is also reflected in the translations of this kind due to the fact that translators cooperate with the economic experts. Furthermore, the foreign term is not as easily understood by non-experts than a domestic term.

In that respect a similar situation is created with the procedure of ***through translation*** (also called calque translation) as another form of literal translation of the constituent parts of collocations, names of organisations, noun compounds, etc. (Newmark 1988: 84). This translation procedure was often used in the corpus for translation of certain economic concepts as well as for translation of names of organizations, acronyms and abbreviations as shown in the example, especially for terms and concepts that do not exist in the target language:

(iv) NASDAQ
НАСДАК.[1]

A translator must recognize that in certain examples it is more appropriate to borrow the foreign term, than to coin a new term in the target language, in order to avoid confusion and drifting away from the original concept. Another similar translation procedure that was often applied in the corpus is ***transference,*** which involves direct conversion of a text from the source language into the target language and this is often the case with conversion from Latin to Cyrillic alphabet. This was often applied in the corpus, especially when the translators were not familiar with the economic definition or the recognised translation of new emerging economic terms in the target language, for example:

(v) swap
своп.

To sum up what was previously explained, the analysed examples excerpted from the corpus show that literal translation is possible in the following cases:

- for translation of certain technical terms or specialised terms that have been accepted in that way by the general public, and which cannot be replaced by a more suitable domestic term, for example: *consumer basket* > *потрошувачка кошница; galloping inflation* > *галопирачка инфлација; economic tigers* > *економски тигри; daughter company* > *фирма-ќерка;*

[1] National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations.

- for translation of some cases of calques and phraseological calques that are an example of word-for-word translation because the primary meaning of the words from the source language is suitably conveyed in economic context, for example: *in-the-name-of-higher-profits* > *во-име-на-повисоки-профити;*
- for translation of certain collocations and phraseological expressions that are an example of one-to-one translation because every word from the source language has a direct equivalent in the target language (but outside of the collocation they are not semantic equivalents), for example: *credit crunch* > *кредитна криза*;
- for translation of culture-specific terms in the relevant economic field that cannot be substituted because they would lose their specialised meaning in the target language, such as: *NASDAQ* > *НАСДАК*.

The results of the research conducted in the paper lead to another important conclusion – that the most applicable translation procedures in the corpus are those that provide semantic equivalence or equivalence in meaning. This was mainly achieved in the translation of Text 1 (which is characterised by higher quality) by applying the free translation procedures. This was mainly achieved by providing a descriptive equivalent or a functional equivalent**,** thus providing a description that is connected with the function of the economic term. Specifically, a ***descriptive equivalent*** provides a description that is connected with the function of the specialised term (Newmark 1988: 84). The economic terms that are often confusing and unintelligible to non-experts or the general public are much better explained in that way and thereby much better understood by the readers, whereas their literal translation would lead to loss of the specialised meaning. An adequate example to demonstrate this is the following term which does not even have a standardised translation in many languages:

(vi) swap
размена на готовински текови.

Even though economists are well familiar with swaps and their function, a simple conversion of the letters of the word from Latin to Cyrillic alphabet is not sufficient if we want the term to be understood by non-experts. Furthermore, apart from descriptive equivalents, a ***functional equivalent*** is frequently used when an equivalent word or concept does not exist in the target language or culture and a more general term is therefore used instead (Newmark 1988: 83). To be more precise, in this case it is best to use a term which has a similar function and already exists in the target language, as in the case with *limited partnership,* as a form of company that only exists in certain countries. It’s direct translation as *ограничено партнерство* is inadequate because it leads to loss of meaning, whereas *командитно друштво* is a form of company that has a similar function in certain European countries and it conveys the correct meaning:

(vii) limited partnership
командитно друштво.

The degree of equivalency in terms of function differs, which means that certain terms are not always full equivalents but they can be partial or approximate equivalents because they only have a similar function (Šarčević, 1997: 236). Cultural equivalents, on the other hand, can rarely be found in the translations of both texts of the corpus because this is seldom possible in technical translations, especially in economic context. An attempt was often made by the translators to use the procedure of ***equivalence and adaptation*** in order to achieve a so-called situational equivalence and cultural equivalence with the original, which is especially suitable for translation of idioms, fixed noun phrases, etc. (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 38), such as:

(viii) To be penniless
Нема ниту скршена пара.

This translation procedure is much more suitable than using calques or literal translation of the meaning of idioms or phraseological expressions because by providing a phrase that originally exists and is used in the target language the translators succeeds in providing equivalency in meaning, not equivalency with the form of the original. In terms of the other translation procedures applied in the corpus, the grammatical structure and the word order have usually undergone changes in the target text (in both translations of the corpus) with the procedure called ***transposition***. Thus, the exact same structure or form of the source text was avoided in the translation of Text 1, for example the English gerund was often avoided by using the following grammatical structure: adjective + noun + verb, because gerund is not typically used in Macedonian:

(ix) making foreign goods cheaper on the market
странските добра поефтинија на пазарот.

Furthermore, the procedure of ***recognised translation*** has been favoured in the translation of Text 1 instead of resorting to literal translation, which implies using the official translation or the generally accepted name (Newmark 1988: 90) instead of providing a direct translation or a solution that is not yet accepted and recognised by the readers and the target audience. A recognised or an accepted translation solution is always the best choice in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity that is typical for technical translations with standardised meaning, for instance:

(x) Pay-as-you-go social security
Пензиско осигурување на генерациска солидарност.

The procedure of ***paraphrase*** is similar with the descriptive and functional equivalent, however its advantage is that it involves a more detailed clarification or explanation of the meaning of a certain term or segment of the text and thus it provides a much more precise explanation than the descriptive equivalent (Newmark 1988: 90). For example, we can paraphrase with our own words that meaning of the term *outsourcing*, even though it can be quite longer than the original term:

(xi) Outsourcing
Користење надворешни соработници.

This procedure (and the previously analysed procedures) was mainly used in the translation of Text 1, especially when the translators were not able to find a descriptive equivalent that shortly describes the function of the term or when no similar terms or concept exist in the target language as in the previous examples.

To sum up in a few general conclusions, the analysed examples excerpted from the corpus show that free translation is mostly suitable for translation of the following:

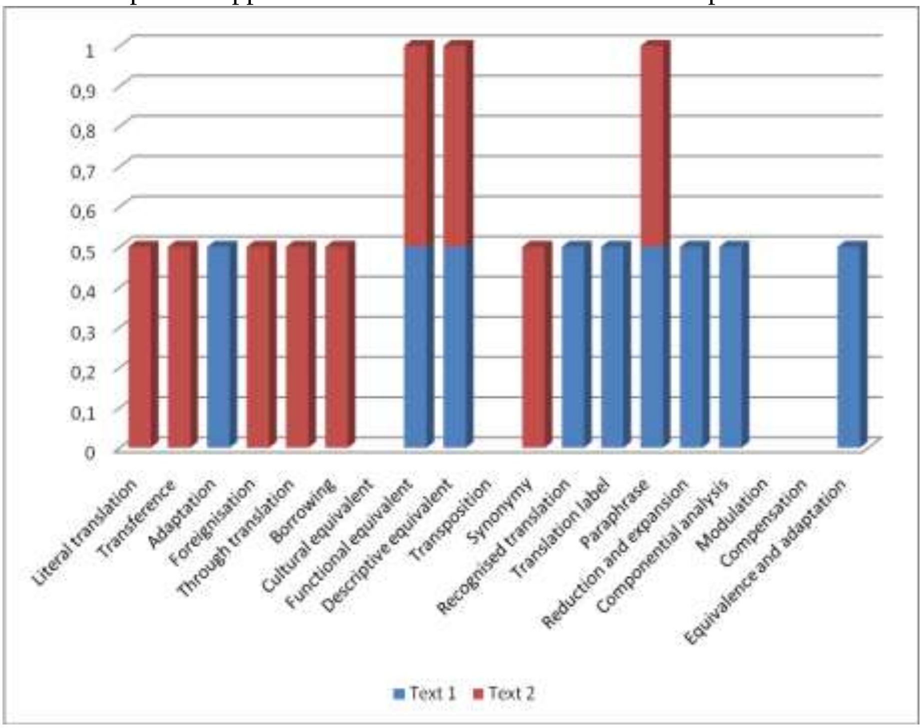
- informative texts, such as specialised literature of this type indented for both experts (economists, economic and financial analysts, etc.) and non-experts (students), where it is of crucial importance to convey the precise specialised meaning of the economic terms and professional phrases in a manner that is understandable and acceptable for the readers and that will not change the original meaning in economic context: for example: *business-to-business arena* > *тргување меѓу различни дејности* (incorrect: бизнис-до-бизнис арена)*;*
- terms that signify specific economic concepts which exist or may not exist in the target language or culture having in mind the novelties in the propulsive and evolving sectors of economy and finance, especially under the influence of the global developments, for instance: *publically held corporation* > *корпорација во јавна сопственост* (incorrect: корпорација достапна за сите);

- technical translations abundant in metaphorical terms and expressions, for instance: *stock-price bubble* > *надувување на цената на акциите* (incorrect: меур во цената на акциите);
- new terminology without standardised or recognised terms in the target language, such as: *anti-dumping policies* > *политика на ценовна дискриминација* (incorrect: антидампинг политики); etc.

4. Results of the Quantitative Analysis

In the quantitative analysis an estimation is made whether a certain translation procedure is mainly applied in the translation of Text 1 or Text 2 or whether it is applied in both texts comprising the corpus. For a precise estimation, the results of the quantitative analysis are based on the previous qualitative analysis supported with indicative examples. For that purpose a graphic presentation of the predominantly applied translation procedures in the corpus is provided bellow.

Graph 1 – Applied Translation Procedures in the Corpus



As it is visible from the graphic presentation, the results of the quantitative analysis suggest which procedures prevail in the translation of Text 1 and Text 2. The previously mentioned literal translation procedures prevail in Text 2, mainly those which primary purpose is to preserve the form of the original, such as borrowing the foreign term, using a calque as literal translation of a part or of all constituent parts of the term or phrase, as well as direct transcription of the term into Cyrillic. Contrary to this, the free translation procedures are mainly applied in Text 1, whereas three of these procedures are applied in the translations of both texts. This shows that the most applicable procedures for translation of the informative texts comprising the corpus are those that provide equivalence in meaning (not equivalence with the form of the original), such as describing the function of the term, a detailed paraphrase of the meaning or using a different term that already exists in the target language but has a similar function with the original economic concept.

The previously analysed examples indicate that literal translation of the specific lexis and idioms has often changed the meaning of the source text in such a way that it has led to loss of the specialised meaning or to completely wrong meaning. In this manner, the translators of Text 2 have often failed to achieve semantic equivalence with the original and have thus produced wrong meaning and low-quality translation. This on the other hand clearly demonstrates that the application of specific translation procedures significantly affects how the meaning of the message is conveyed when it is re-created in the target text, in this case in the technical translations from English to Macedonian language.

5. Conclusions

On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative results of the research, it is possible to draw conclusions that will confirm or discard the initial thesis on which the research in this paper is grounded. Primarily, one of the main conclusions in this paper is that the application of literal (direct) translation procedures is more adequate when the main focus in the translation process is put on the aesthetic dimension of the language, i.e. on the form of the message that is conveyed. The most commonly used literal translation procedures in the corpus of the paper include the following: borrowing, through translation (calque translation) and transference, and they have been mainly applied in the translation of Text 2 (which is characterised by lower quality). The analysis shows that literal translation of the lexis and the grammatical structure has often led to literal conveying of the meaning.

However, many translators often have the wrong impression that literal translation is adequate for technical translation due to the standardised and narrow meaning of the technical terms, thereby disregarding the numerous so-called scientific metaphors and other lexical categories. But as the previous examples have demonstrated, the free (oblique) translation procedures are suitable when the main focus in the translation process is put on achieving equivalence in meaning (rather than equivalence in terms of the form of the message that is conveyed). In this way it is possible to provide an answer to the main question of the paper – that the free translation procedures are more applicable for technical translations because they provide equivalence in meaning and do not imply strict compliance to the form of the original. Furthermore, the initial thesis on which the research in the paper is grounded is hereby confirmed, that the free translation procedures are more applicable for this type of technical translation than the literal translation procedures.

The lexis or professional terminology and idioms play a very important role in technical translations and if they are inadequately translated they be inadequately accepted by the expert and general public, especially in dynamic and evolving sectors, such as those of economy and finance. Furthermore, the numerous changes and developments in these sectors are also reflected in the terminology in terms of creation of new terms and expressions, whereas the existing ones often acquire new technical meaning. Therefore, conveying their correct and precise meaning is of crucial importance in such a manner that they are understandable for the readers, whereas literal translation of the meaning is only seldom applicable in limited cases.

To sum up, the results of the research confirm the initial thesis that the free translation procedures are more applicable for this type of technical translation than the literal translation procedures because free translation does not imply strict compliance to the form of the original, but it rather aims towards achieving equivalence in meaning. Therefore, the suitable translation procedures are the descriptive and functional equivalents, paraphrase, adaption and others, whereas borrowing and transference have proven to be useful only in limited cases.

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