Group translation – exploiting synergy

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Resumen

Las herramientas de TAO, en particular las memorias de traducción, están adquiriendo gran popularidad en el ámbito de enseñanza de la traducción. Al mismo tiempo, muchos traductores consideran que las memorias de traducción son un elemento fundamental para cualquier tipo de traducción, ya se realice de manera individual o en grupo. No obstante, la traducción en grupo requiere de ciertas habilidades específicas de cooperación, que pueden mejorarse mediante la comprensión de los principios subyacentes al trabajo en grupo y mediante la capacidad de pensar como un miembro más del proceso de traducción: jefe o gestor de proyectos, terminólogo, traductor, revisor, editor o incluso receptor. Para formar a traductores que sean capaces de enfrentarse a cualquier tipo de proyecto, es necesario hacerles ver que el proceso de traducción no comienza cuando reciben el documento, posiblemente junto con un glosario, ni termina cuando entregan el texto en la lengua meta. Esto es algo que los traductores que trabajan en grupo tienen muy presente durante el desarrollo de su actividad. En el curso que enseña a trabajar en grupo, los estudiantes han de enfrentarse a tareas difíciles y establecer dependencias entre distintas actividades. Asimismo, tienen que comparar sus traducciones (tanto del mismo texto como de otro fragmento extraído de un texto más largo) e identificar las características que pueden hacer pensar a los receptores que dicho texto no se tradujo (o creó) por una sola persona. Además, en este curso se analiza el software informático existente para trabajar con grandes volúmenes de traducción y se estudia cuáles son las ventajas y limitaciones que presenta. Si se les enseña a los traductores cuáles son los principios que rigen la traducción en grupo y los factores que hay que cuidar para no caer en la falta de coherencia (terminología, estilo, antecedentes, receptores, etc.), se consigue reducir la carga de trabajo y también los costes y, en consecuencia, se explota la sinergia.

1. Introduction

Although most translators have to work in teams from time to time, the literature dealing with group or team translation is insufficient. In this paper, I want to outline the importance of efficient group translation, introduce an indicative measurement for efficiency, and provide a sample curriculum for teaching group

translation.

As regards terminology, group translation in this context means any translation rendered by a group of people, whereas team translation means a translation rendered by a group, which is able to exploit the synergy of the group, and make the reader believe that the long translation (which was actually done within a short period of time) was created by a single person. Thus, team translation is the ideal state, however, to provide team translations, all members of the group have to understand the working of the group and the individuals.

2. Translation as part of the business infrastructure

Most translators fail to realise that they are just actors in the translation process, even if translation quality mostly depends on them. Therefore, a typical 'good' translator does everything to come up with original solutions that prove to the employer their being good enough. However, from the point of view of a business entity, a translation company is part of the business infrastructure. As a public utilities company provides for the conversion of high voltage power into low voltage domestic power, or a telephone provider ensures that physical distances are eliminated, so does a translation company override linguistic and cultural barriers. Good infrastructure is indispensable for the efficiency of businesses, and the most important feature of good infrastructure is that it's just there to serve you.

Linguistic infrastructure is provided by translation companies, who are also market-driven business entities. As for every business entity, their main objective is efficiency, too. Efficiency is – after all – measured in money. Their market worthiness is reflected by their revenues, their operational efficiency is reflected by their expenses. Their expenses are related to projects. All translations involve a project workflow. The simplest workflow is when the company's representative gets a job and hands it over to a single translator for translation, then gets it back and sends it out to the

client, performing all related administrative tasks (invoicing, archiving, etc.). However, a more typical workflow also involves the preparation of the document, translation briefing (Fraser), and proofreading (post-editing). Several actors participate in the project, and the more they work on the project, the more expenses they incur. Therefore, there is a significant correlation between time and money – and it's not just the translators' time.

What are the objectives of the employer then?

- to minimise the overall cost of a translation project,
- to provide a quick and consistent translation,
- and to make the customer believe that the text was translated (written) by a single person, i.e. to provide a translation which the customer perceives as good quality (with the quality tailored to the sensitivity of the job) within the smallest possible time and cost frame.

3. Introducing Total Workflow Cost

For a translation company, there is a total cost of every project consisting of two types of costs: administrative costs (giving a quotation, concluding the contract, finding the translators, proofreaders, DTP specialists, etc., invoicing and accounting, overheads, depreciation of the equipment and so on) and translation costs (pre-translation, in-translation and post-translation costs). The total workflow cost (TWC) is the sum of administrative costs (AC) and translation costs (TC).

Administrative costs usually mean a substantial fixed cost for the maintenance of the business and a lower variable cost that can be unambiguously attributed to projects. To get a good estimate on administrative costs, fixed costs have to be divided between projects along one factor, e.g. time.

If a company wants to decrease the total workflow cost, and increase profitability of translations, it can either decrease administrative costs or decrease translation costs. Decreasing

administrative costs needs business skills. Translator training, however, can help decrease translation costs, without having to decrease translation fees. A well-prepared translator, even with a higher rate for a translation unit, can be cheaper than an apparently cheap translator, when it comes to working in teams.

To reduce translation costs, a translation company has three options:

1. employing cheap translators – usually this does not pay off,
2. introducing computer-aided translation tools,
3. dramatically decreasing post-production costs by re-allocating resources to the preparation of the text and the translators' group.

CAT tools increase productivity and ensure consistency. However, if a bad translation gets into the translation memory, unless the company prepares a memory for every project, it's likely that the computer will ensure bad consistency, and translators will not make the effort to communicate the mistake to every interested person.

All actors in the translation process have to cooperate to achieve the lowest total expenditure, and to be able to cooperate, translators also have to become team players.

There are two dimensions of being a team player. First, translators have to know where they fit in the translation workflow, what input they get from the previous steps and what output they have to create – they have to be able to think like another actor in the chain. This is the *vertical dimension* of being a team player. However, translators also have to know what others are doing while they are working, and how their work affects other people's work. They have to be aware of the impact they have on the whole translation. Sometimes it's an intentional decision that influences consistency, sometimes it's an implicit factor, not having agreed in something that can lead to inconsistency. This is

the *horizontal dimension* of being a team player.

A good team player translator:

- always bears in mind the consistency of the text,
- knows that consistency means more than just the consistent use of terminology (e.g. proper and consistent register, consistent style, consistent perception of the target audience's cultural and professional background, etc.),
- knows that terminology does not only mean technical terms,
- communicates efficiently with fellow translators,
- is able to identify which factors can contribute to inconsistency,
- is willing to elicit information and warn others throughout the translation, as soon as a consistency problem arises – a good team player is always aware of the fact that her work has to conform to the fellow translator's work.

Consistency, however, is not an objective measure, as it is a matter of perception. Experience shows that most people can't tell whether one document is more consistent than the other: they usually only have an impression of a document being consistent or not. However, after thorough examination of the factors that contribute to consistency, an – albeit subjective – quantification could be introduced. On this scale, every person has a different threshold of perceiving consistency.

4. A course proposal

Daniel Gouadec (ITIT Symposium, 2000) pointed out that "team work is also something that students must practice, and for two reasons:
- team work improves learning conditions (peer-teaching, confrontation of ideas, and everything that has been better said by others); and
- the job of a translator tends to become more and more of

a team job."

How can a translator become a team player? I suggest a series of exercises, which can be best undertaken during a course consisting of 12 classes. I chose this number because in Hungary an academic semester lasts 12 weeks.

By the end of the course:

- Translators should be able to judge how their translations differ from other people's translations.
- Translators (who will later eventually become project managers) should be able to compile a briefing – translation guidelines – which provides for all the factors that contribute to consistency.
- Translators should be able to compile a terminology glossary.

During the course, the primary methods of achieving this goal are introspection and communication. The evaluation of the different exercises is more important than their performance. Students have to take the time to examine their translation character and the reflection of their personality in the translations, they have to become aware of how they translate. They also have to compare their translations with those of other people, and identify the differences without making judgments. The objective of this course is to make students completely aware and conscious of the factors that can spoil consistency – factors that they would otherwise never have the time to contemplate. We don't want to teach them a style guide or give them a comprehensive briefing; they have to become able to lead teams or work in teams, and prepare briefings for all the jobs they get. Although this sounds commonplace, they have to realize that everybody's different, everybody has different implicit patterns, which they think the whole world does the same way they do.

Also, many translators only have a vague idea about what terminology means. During the course, they have to adopt a

different approach to terminology – terminology is there in every aspect of life. From my point of view, terminology is everything the inconsistent translation of which spoils the comprehensibility of the text. Translators usually know about legal and technical terminology, but often fail to realize that e.g. public signs like 'Beware the dog!' or messages appearing on the computer screen like 'Please insert disc into drive A:' fall within the category of terminology. And what's more, if a book demonstrates a concept on an example where there are three actors, A, B and C, and instead of using letters, it uses the names of people starting with the same letter, like Andy, Ben and Cecil, that becomes terminology too. If one translator translates these names, while the other does not, it can lead to confusion.

During the course, we apply a gradual method. Instead of examining texts created under the same circumstances, we gradually change the circumstances that are:

- whether the text to be translated is the same for everyone in the class or individually different,
- whether they perform the translation alone or in a group,
- whether consultation before translating anything is possible,
- whether the group has learnt to work together or not,
- whether continuous communication is possible or not,
- whether the group is led by a project manager or not.

One could also learn about consistency from the study of parallel corpora. However, there are a couple of advantages of this method over that. First, translators really experience that the same text can be always translated in several ways, and all are good. Also, they always have somebody to turn to with their problems. And what's most important, they experience that careful planning of the work is vital to consistency and good quality.

All groups have a learning curve, if feedback is possible. Therefore, it's beneficial when the same group works together

again and again. However, during this course, we want to make translators being able to work virtually with any group, therefore we put them into a new environment often.

Restricted communication is also an important factor that leads to inconsistency. When oral communication is allowed, even minor consistency problems are communicated, but when communication is restricted to e-mail and perhaps telephone calls, translators perceive that some consistency problems are not worth communicating – and the threshold of 'minor' increases constantly.

After all exercises, there is an open debate and evaluation, where the emphasis is on identifying the factors that contribute to consistency.

5. 12 exercises to improve collaboration

Exercise #1: The whole group translates the same short text individually.

> Translators will see that they use different terminology, different style, different register, different sources of information, different addressing (imperative or impersonal subject), and so on. They will also see that all different translations can be good and can reflect the translator's taste. For example, when translating psychology into Hungarian, one can use the connotative Hungarian words or stick with the neutral Latin and English words.

Exercise #2:   Everyone in the class translates a section of the same long text, without prior consultation.

> Translators will see that the use of inconsistent terminology, inconsistent style, or different register is inevitable without prior consultation. Also, they

will be able to see that – if it's a book that they translate – the table of contents is also to be translated in a consistent way, otherwise section headings will differ from the table of contents, resulting in a striking inconsistency.

Exercise #3:   The class is split into two groups. The same text is translated by everyone. Continuous consultation with group members is possible.

Translators will see in which aspects do their translation styles diverge.

Exercise #4:   The two groups translate the same longer text[i], but group members translate a different section. Continuous consultation with group members is possible.

Translators will be able to identify factors which can contribute to (or spoil) the consistency of the text, and later they'll be aware of them. They will see that it's important to agree e.g. on the way references in a scientific book are translated, and if there are excerpts from other translated literature, they must agree on which translation to use.

Exercise #5   is the same as exercise #4, but with a different text.

This exercise helps the translators in gaining expertise in translation with the same group and in harmonizing translation style within a group.

Exercise #6:   We exchange one person between the two groups. The two groups translate the same text again, and group members translate a different section. Continuous consultation with group members is possible.

This is the first exercise where we intentionally change the composition of the groups. The result will be worse than in exercise #4, because the exchange person still follows the spirit of his/her previous group, but this is a necessary step to point out that during the collaboration (with communication), implicit agreements are made, and these agreements are not based on 'the common sense' or 'human nature'.

Exercise #7: We exchange one more translator and repeat exercise #6.

Now there are debates in both groups as the former stance of the group starts losing priority, and implicit agreements have to be made explicit. However, the consistency is likely to improve.

Exercise #8: We repeat the previous exercise but appoint one translator to be project leader, who – after examination of the text and consultation with the group – has to write a briefing. Continuous communication is allowed.

By now, the briefing is likely to cover a wide range of important issues and factors, thus translators know what to be careful about, however, the briefing still reflects the personal and perceptive limitations of the project leader.

Exercise #9: The group is the same, the task is similar, but only written communication (e-mail) is allowed.

This is the first exercise in which we start restricting communication. Translators and project managers realize during this exercise that being lazy or ignorant does not pay off.

Exercise #10: We exchange one more person between the two groups and repeat exercise #9. Only written communication (e-mail) is allowed.

In this exercise, we check whether the project managers know what those implicit factors are (what the others perceive as natural after reaching a consensus within the group) that have to be addressed.

Exercise #11: We form two completely different groups, and ask them to translate a long text together. The groups can choose a project manager and oral communication is allowed.

In this exercise, we ensure that members and leaders of the groups know what kind of consistency problems they might have to tackle.

Exercise #12: We repeat exercise #11 but only written communication (e-mail) is allowed.

At this point, the group is likely to be able to render a translation that appears to come from one person, however long it may be.

We can see that exercise #1 is a strictly classroom situation, and by gradually introducing difficulties, in exercise #12 we are already dealing with a very likely real-life scenario. As a result of good teamwork, the cost of post-editing (including proofreading) dramatically decreases. In most cases, it's likely that the re-allocation of resources for careful text preparation results in overall savings. Thus employers realize a bigger profit that they can share with translators too, and the time pressure on translators and translation companies decreases.

6. Conclusion

Translators still regard translation quality an individual skill, and only few of them are able to work efficiently in teams and ensure consistency not only within their own work but with the work of other people. There is a clear business need for translators proficient in text preparation and collaborative work. To work in teams, however, a translator has to take the time to conduct introspection and learn about the translations of fellow translators. Translation courses could provide a good opportunity and a friendly atmosphere to master these skills.

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[i] The threshold of a text being long depends on the time frame available. If this is a classroom exercise of 90 minutes, for a group of five people, a ten-page document can be considered long.