



THE 15TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
**EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES**

Academic and Professional Discourse in Translation

Ana-Maria Mangher (Chitac)¹

Abstract: The translation of specialized texts, represents a challenging process, due to the terminological complexity as well as the necessity to relate the translation to a certain textual typology. The study will be divided into two main parts. Firstly, we will comment on the most relevant peculiarities of specialized texts, defining some basic concepts in order to identify a few useful aspects in their translation. On the second part, we will concentrate on the interdisciplinary character of the translation of Medical Discourse as a branch of Academic and Professional Discourse, which implies to the same extent, a deep understanding of the field terminology and the apprehension of the cultural and contextual background of the target reader. In addition to investigating terminology and appropriately rendering the informative content, the translator has to attempt not only to make the message intelligible but also to render the meaning for the target public.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; Academic and Professional English; terminology; specialized translation; genre conventions

Introduction

English specialized discourse represents a significant part of worldwide communication and its analysis is very significant for Translation Studies. But, before examining some of the most relevant studies about the particularities of the specialized discourse, we will mention the multitude of discursive types which are covered by this term. Hutchinson and Waters (*The Tree of ELT*, 1987, pp. 17) identify the following branches: English for Science and Technology, English for Business and Economics and English for Social Studies, English for Academic Purposes (eg. English for Medical Studies) and English for Occupational Purposes. (eg. English for Technicians).

Characteristics of Specialized Texts

In order to translate a specialized discourse which is submitted to strict crafting regulations and norms, we must understand which the linguistic particularities of this type of discourse are. Even if there is no standard definition of the term 'specialized discourse', we will introduce a synthesis of the most relevant positions in the field. In Sager's opinion "specialised languages are semi-autonomous, complex semiotic systems based on, and derived from general language, their use presupposes special education and is restricted to communication among specialists in the same or, related fields" (Sager et al., 1980, p. 230). While analysing the specialized discourse, Gotti adopts a pragmatic approach which focuses on both extra - linguistic and linguistic parameters. He uses the term specialized

¹ PhD in progress, Doctoral School of Philological Studies, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Address: 11 Carol I Bvd., 700506, Iasi, Romania, Corresponding author: anamariamangher@yahoo.com.

discourse rather than specialised language, underlying the importance of situational context, because he sees the language element as part of a discursive universe in which, the participants, their roles and the purpose of communication are at play.

The most salient feature of specialized discourse that makes it stand out from other discursive types relies in the specific use of language. The particularities of the specialized discourse have been investigated from different perspectives: lexical, morpho-syntactic and of the textual structure but the attention of the field literature has focused more on the lexical level which was considered the most significant. According to Gotti, the primary features of specialized lexis are monoreferentiality, precision, transparency, lack of emotive connotations, conciseness and conservatism. He asserts that, "in a given context, only one meaning is allowed and the meaning of specific terms may be inferred without reference to their context." Because the main function of specialized lexis is referential, the synonyms and the connotative words which are specific to literary language are usually avoided.

Monoreferentiality implies that each term has only one referent and its significance can be deduced without analyzing the context. *Transparency* relies in the fact that within specialized languages "it should be always possible to access the meaning of a term through its surface form and translators should be able to apply literal translation procedures." Another feature is the *lack of emotive connotations*. Traditionally, scientific language has been regarded as neutral, unambiguous logic, its main function being to transmit information. Gotti notes that "the informative purpose prevails over after traits typical to general language, lending professional communication a cold and artificial tone." *Conciseness* relies in the fact that "the concepts are expressed in the shortest possible form," affixation is generally omitted and instead of using extremely long terms which would prevent efficient communication, SL frequently makes use of abbreviations and acronyms. *Conservatism* is a feature that is particular especially to legal field, where for fear that new terms might lead to ambiguity "old formulae are preferred to the new-coined words because of their universally accepted interpretations". To put in a nutshell Gotti's remarks about the features of specialized discourse, we assert that this type of discourse is characterized lack of ambiguity, lack of emotion, precision in the use of terminology, scientific objectivity and impartiality in transmitting information. (Gotti, 2006, pp. 33-41)

Referring to the morpho - syntax and the textual patterns of ST, Marcin Crygiel notes that, because the primary function of specialized texts is to transmit knowledge, they are characterized by a greater repetition of terms, phrases, sentences and even full paragraphs. Among the typical linguistic features of academic prose are the frequent use of nouns, adjectives and prepositions - as well as a comparatively infrequent use of verbs, pronouns and adverbs. (2017, pp. 5)

After briefly introducing some of the most distinctive features of specialized language, our attention will focus on the Medical Discourse as a branch of Academic and Professional Discourse.

Medical Discourse that is nevertheless related to specialized discourse displays a particular textual organization, having a conventionalized structure which is typically imposed by the requirements of the genre. It is characterized by terminological complexity and has a preponderant referential function. Medical articles are pragmatic texts distinguished by specific terminology, metadiscursive patterns, impersonal constructions and lexical features like precision, clarity and conciseness.

Various scholars have introduced their perspectives in order to classify the specialized discourse genres (Weise 1993, Glaser, 1995) but our interest will focus on the medical/ pharmaceutical genre and its sub-genres, which, according to Montalt and Davies, are classified as follows: *research genres* (are the genres used by researchers in research centers and universities to communicate their findings and arguments. Most of them are highly standardized: research papers, review articles, clinical trial

protocols, case reports, scientific editorials, book reviews, conference proceedings, doctoral theses), *professional genres* (are used by health professionals in the course of their work in the health industry: clinical guidelines, standard operating procedures, summary of product characteristics, informed consents, lab tests, medical questionnaires, medical terminology glossaries, manuals, maintenance guides, annual reports, expert reports, medical histories, diseases classifications, nomenclatures, medical dictionaries), *educational genres* (are used to teach and learn in a wide range of contexts, from university courses to institutional campaigns to domestic life: fact sheet for patients, patient information leaflets, course books, training courses, presentations, popularizing articles, medical encyclopedias, summaries for patients), *commercial genres* (are used to sell and buy products and services of all kinds in the health sectors: drug advertisements, contracts, product information leaflets, catalogues, new drug applications, packaging inserts, press releases). (Montalt & Davies, 2006, pp. 30-31)

Therefore, classification of text-types is controversial and translation practice proved that real texts usually display features of more than one type, thus being multifunctional. In the case of medical texts, even if their communicative function might seem to be the referential one, many texts would display other functions such as: instructional, operative. For instance, the main purpose of a drug advertisement is to inform the potential users about the issue on the market of a certain medicine or its curative proprieties, but it also has an operative function, trying in the same time to influence the patients' behaviour and to determine them to buy the product. Understanding of both, dominant and secondary function of a text is seen to be an important part of the translator's work.

Medical Texts in Translation

The translation of medical texts represents a difficult process, due to the complexity of language that comprises terms from various scientific fields (medicine, chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics), the necessity to relate the translation to a certain text typology and to respect the norms imposed by specific textual genres .We will introduce some of the most relevant approaches to translation, in order identify some important aspects in the translation of medical texts.

Newbert who proposes a textual -contextual approach to translation considers that "translation is always tied up with how other similar texts have been translated, the kind of problems encountered in a given *text* being normally characteristic of a particular text-type or genre." (Neubert, 1992, p. 91). Text ypologies are used to establish a correlation between the text- type and the translation method and it has been claimed that the type of text corresponds to the demands made on the translator. Consiquently, text typologies, represent valuable tools in the translator's work, helping him\her to choose the most important trategies in order to convey the aim, the function and the intention of the source text.

The proponents of functionalist aproaches (HansVermeer, Christiane Nord, Katharina Reiss), observe that translation does not imply only linguistic correspondence between the target and the source texts and bring into limelight the idea according to which the function of the text in the target culture determines the method of translation. They start from the assumption that a text-type allows the translator to recognize the function and the purpose of the text as well as the author's intention. Thus, he or she will inevitably resort to different techniques and strategies in order to successfully render the source text into the target language.

Translating across genres doesn't imply the focus on their linguistic features but on the pragmatic situation in which the discourse is produced and received. Thus, while analysing the discourse in the process of translation, the translator needs to establish the context of the linguistic communication, the roles of participants and the way in which they manifest their presence. It requires an understanding of the socio-cultural context of the discourse community and its activities, the communicative purposes of the genre, the conventionalized structure, and the linguistic resources typically employed in the genre. We consider appropriate to comment on the distinction between text-type and genre in order to avoid terminological confusion between these terms. For Hatim and Mason (1990, p. 69; 1997, p. 18), texts realize users' rhetorical purposes, while genres are, 'conventionalized forms of texts' adjusted to the goals of social occasions. In a simplistic way, we could say genres are socially oriented and text-types are linguistically marked. (Yves Gambier, 1984, p. 63).

Medical translation is implemented through well established genres. Analysing medical genres and understanding their particularities, such as their textual organization, their communicative function, the situations where they are used and the roles of participants, represent important steps to achieving a qualitative medical translation. The translator should be aware of the function or purpose of the source text instead of resorting to literal translation.

Among the many genres a medical translator is likely to work, two of the most common used are *Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC)* and *Patient Information Leaflets (PILs)*. If we analyze these genres, we will notice that there is a recognizable pattern in them. For instance, *the SPC (Summary of Product Characteristics)* is a complex document addressed to medical experts which summarizes the main characteristics of a medicinal product from different points of view: pharmacological, chemical, toxicological and so forth. As stated by the European Commission (1999), the SPC is the basis of information for health professionals on how to use the medicinal product safely and effectively. Their structure and content is governed by several regulations and standards according to the European legislation. From a linguistic point of view, SPCs are characterized by highly specialized terms specific to pharmaceutical domain, nominalizations, heavy pre- and post - modification, complex sentences, use of passives, acronyms, abbreviations, derivatives of Greek and Latin words and trade names. With regard to their content and structure, the information is organized in a linear way by means of headings which are usually formed by nominal phrases (e.g. *Special warnings and special precautions for use*), each of them providing a particular type of information, enabling the users to understand the text in a structured way.

PILs (Patient Information Leaflets) are summarized and simplified versions of SPCs, they are also distinguished by a conventionalized structure, and are standardized by law (the PIL became a legal requirement in 1995 with the Council Directive 92/97/EEC requiring all medication packages to be accompanied by a PIL). Being one of the most common medical genres, and containing information for the lay - receivers, PILs are subjected to structural and lexical simplification, their technical terms being often accompanied by explanations in order to make them accessible to the target readers.

The following extracts, taken from the SPC and respectively from the PIL of the medicine *Prevenar13 suspension for injection*, illustrate some typical differences regarding the vocabulary and the syntactic structure of the investigated genres.

1) *Summary of Product Characteristics:*

"This vaccine should not be given as an intramuscular injection to individuals with trombocitopaenia or any coagulation disorder that would contraindicate intramuscular injection, but may be given subcutaneously if the potential benefit clearly outweighs the risks."

2) Patient Information Leaflets:

“Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse before the vaccination if you or your child - has any present or past medical problems after any dose of Prevenar or Prevenar 13, such an allergic reaction or problems with breathing. - has any bleeding problems or bruises easily. - has a weakened immune system (such as due to HIV infection), you /she /he may not get the full benefit from Prevenar 13.”

As we can notice the first extract is composed of an extremely complex sentence containing strictly specialized terms (e.g. trombocitopaenia, coagulation disorder), passive voice verbs (should not be given, may be given), the tone is artificial and cold, characteristic to highly specialized discourse. On the other hand, in the second extract, the information is presented in a user -friendly manner by means of ordinary discourse. The example highlights some particular features of PIL such as: the omission of strictly specialized terms which have been replaced by commonly-used terms (e.g.the use of the construction *bleeding problems* instead of *tombocitopaenia*), explanations (e.g. *such as due to HIV infection*), use of second person pronouns (*you, your child*) and of imperative verbs (e.g.*Talk to your doctor*), that engage the reader into the communicative process.

In professional practice, translators are required to translate SPCs into PILs. This type of assignment is called *genre shift* (moving from one genre to another in the process of translation) and normally occurs from more to less specialized genres. In this situation, the source text becomes only the source of factual information and “communicative purpose, reader profile, length, structure, tenor, terminological approach and other key aspects of the target text no longer depend on the source text but rather on the target genre” (Montalt & Davies, 2012, p. 163). In our case, the target text is addressed to less specialized readers, potential patients and general public. In order to carry out this shift of genre, the following procedures are frequently used: synthesis of information, terminological simplification, and paraphrasing and common sense explanations of difficult concepts (Montalt & Davies, 2012, p. 163). Choices in translation are dictated by the translation situation and translators have to choose the most appropriate strategies in order to convey the intended function and meaning into the target text. The translation of medical texts as a distinct genre that is, nevertheless, affiliated to the specialized translation, represents a challenging process, due to the terminological complexity as well as the necessity to understand the socio-cultural context of the target reader and to relate the translation to a certain text typology. Medical translation is a field of utmost importance since, the quality a medical act relies on the accuracy of translation and a mistake in translation can have devastating consequences on patients’ health.

References

- Flowerdew, J. & Gotti, M. (2006). *Studies in Specialized Discourse*. Peter Lang, Bern.
- Gambier, Y. & Doorslaer, L.V. (1984). *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Volume 4. Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company Amsterdam.
- Grygiel, M. (2017). *Cognitive Approaches to Specialist Languages*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. London and New York: Longman.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Montalt Ressoreccio, V. & Gonzales Davies, M. (2007). *Medical Translation Step by Step*. New York: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Newbert, A. (1996). *Textlinguistics of Translation: The Textual Approach to Translation*. Translation Horizons beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum. State University of New York at Binghamton.
- Sager, J., C.; Dungworth, D. & Mc. Donald, P. F. (1980). *English Special Languages*. Brandstetter: Wiesbaden.