Title: Oral translation techniques. Paving the way to a better written translation

Las técnicas orales de traducción. Una vía para perfeccionar la traducción escrita

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Within the syllabuses of the written translation subjects in the English Language Major at the University of Holguín, there is no reference to the usage of oral translation techniques. They only focus on the development of specific techniques and abilities of written translation. Combining oral and written techniques could contribute to a better students’ development of translation abilities. Taking into account the level of difficulty and novelty of the documents proposed and analyzed in classes, the authors suggest doing a deeper oral analysis of the written text to guarantee a better comprehension and the final translation of the material.

Problem to solve: How to combine the techniques of both oral and written translation in the Official Documents Translation lessons of the 4th year of the English Language Major in the University of Holguín, to achieve a better final translation?

Objective: to apply oral translation techniques to favor the translation of official documents in the lessons of the 4th year of the English Language Major in the University of Holguín.

In order to know the present state of the problem, surveys and interviews to teachers and students were carried out. The authors also made a thorough analysis of contents of the syllabuses, books and articles related.

Key words: written translation, oral translation, official documents, syllabus.

INTRODUCTION

People usually think that anyone who knows how to speak a certain language can perform as a teacher or even as a translator or interpreter. Of course, knowing the general elements of a language may give you the tools to communicate but not enough so as to automatically become a translator. Different language functions require different types of language skills, each of which, when used for professional purposes, is best improved through training and practice. Three of the functions that are the purview of language professionals are translating, interpreting, and sight translating. While these three functions require similar skills such as a good memory, the ability to analyze meaning, and knowledge of terminology, each of them also
relies on different skills within the four domains of language – listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Translation is a very broad concept that can be interpreted in different ways. That is, we can speak of translation as a process or as a product. As a complex mental process, it is an operation that is carried out in stages and where linguistic and pragmatic criteria that determine it are taken into account. As a product, it is the result of the application of the previous process with the aim of establishing interlinguistic equivalences.

Translation is a very complicated process and people who work as translators or the ones preparing others to become translators should take into account a lot of factors that may hinder a successful translation, either oral or written, thus affecting the process of communication between the translator and his audience and/or interlocutor. Some of the aspects to be considered are the genre and the style of the original text, the translator's competence, the timeline devoted for the translation as well as many other factors such as the background cultural formation of the translator.

Harris (1981) and Gille (1995) stated that Interpretation and Translation can be defined as performing essentially the same function, namely re-expressing in one language what has been expressed in another.

Throughout history various authors have carried out their researches related to the process of translation and have exposed their models:

Nida (1964) Model of transformation of translation
Neubert (1965) Procedures for translation
Delisle (1980) Interpretative method of translation

One of the first to use the term Translation was Eugene Nida (1964) who considers the science of translation as a counterweight to the tendency to see translation exclusively as art or skill. He considers that translation processes can be subjected to a rigorous description and concludes that the transfer of a message from one language to another is a valid element for the scientific description. According to Nida Translation involves a wide number of procedures such as:

I. Technical procedures:
   A. analysis of the source and target languages;
B. a thorough study of the source language text before making attempts to translate it;
C. making judgments of the semantic and syntactic approximations.

II. Organizational procedures:
constant reevaluation of the attempt made; contrasting it with the existing available translations of the same text done by other translators, and checking the text's communicative effectiveness by asking the target language readers to evaluate its accuracy and effectiveness and studying their reactions.

Other authors like Krings (1986) define translation strategy as "translator's potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task", while Seguinot (1989) believes that there are at least three global strategies used by the translators: translating without interruption for as long as possible; correcting surface errors immediately, and leaving the monitoring for qualitative or stylistic errors in the text to the revision stage.

Newmark (1988) mentions the difference between translation methods and translation procedures. He writes that, "while translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language". He also refers to the following methods of translation:

- Word-for-word translation: in which the SL word order is preserved and the words are translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.
- Literal translation: in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context.
- Faithful translation: it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.
- Semantic translation: which differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text.
- Adaptation: which is the freest form of translation, and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten.
- Free translation: it produces the TL text without the style, form or content of the original.
- Idiomatic translation: it reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.
- Communicative translation: it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.
Written Translation is often referred to only by the term “translation,” and it is the rendering of a written text in one language in a comparable written text in another language. Central to written translation are the following skills: the ability to comprehend written text in one language (reading skills), and the ability to produce a comparable rendition in written form in a second language (writing skills) into another. Most professional translators provide only unidirectional translations, as a rule working into their dominant language. Unlike spoken or signed language interpreters, translators often have the luxury of time and other resources to come up with the best way to capture the nuances of meaning in the original text.

While interpretation and translation tend to occur in different settings and contexts, there is a small but troublesome area of overlap. The overlap occurs when interpreters are asked to express orally what is in a written text (sight translation) or when interpreters are asked to convert into writing a text written or spoken in another language (translation).

As the names suggest, in written translation the source text is in written form, as is the target text. In oral translation or interpretation the interpreter listens to the oral presentation of the original and translates it as an oral message in the target language. As a result, in the first case the receptor of the translation can read it while in the second case he hears it.

These are all, however, modifications of the two main types of translation. The line of demarcation between written and oral translation is drawn not only because of their forms but also because of the sets of conditions in which the process takes place. The first is continuous, the other momentary. In written translation the original can be read and re-read as many times as the translator may need or like. The same goes for the final product. The translator can re-read his translation, compare it to the original, make the necessary corrections or start his work all over again. He can come back to the preceding part of the original or get the information he needs from the subsequent messages. These are most favorable conditions and here we can expect the best performance and the highest level of equivalence. That is why in theoretical discussions there are examples from written translations where the translating process can be observed in all its aspects.

Elena Shurskaya considers translation as the most common yet the most complex and hallowed of human functions. She states that language is what makes us who we are and it can work miracles. Transmitting meaning from one language to another brings people together, helps them share each other’s culture, benefit from each other’s experience, and makes them aware of how much they all have in common; so the authors of this paper consider that in order to achieve a good translation, a large number of steps and procedures should be carried out.

There is a great number of useful translation tips suggested by authors specialized on the subject, though every translator has his own reliable methods and techniques, depending on previous experience and preparation for the text as well as the time available for a given project. The purpose of translation is to reproduce various kinds of texts—including religious,
literary, scientific, official and philosophical texts—in another language and thus making them
understood and available to a wide number of readers.

There are certain things that the translator and the interpreter have in common, such as the
need for a wide knowledge of the foreign and the native language, a vast general culture and a
profound ideological and political consciousness. But, in his work, the translator works with
written, static texts, has time to think, consult dictionaries, glossaries, cards, works of reference,
and even ask advice from expert; he also has the chance to revise what he has done, improve
it, and give it the finishing touches. This is not the case of the interpreter who, on the other
hand, has to translate immediately, under constant pressure, and, therefore, cannot make any
type of consultation or correction whatsoever.

**Sight translation as a basis for achieving a successful written translation**

Sight translation is the oral rendition of a text written in one language into another language
and, it is usually done in the moment. Essential to sight translation are the following skills: the
ability to comprehend written text in one language (reading skills) and the ability to produce an
oral or signed rendition in another language (speaking or speech production skills). Sight
translation is often requested of an interpreter during an interpreting assignment.

While working as a teacher of Translation of Official Documents in the 4th year of the English
Language Major at the University of Holguin we have come across a number of difficulties that
affect the process of written translation such as: comprehension problems while reading the text
in the source language, troubles when reexpressing the sense of the original text into an
equivalent one in the target language, lack of equivalences and vocabulary in the target
language.

Departing from such difficulties we decided to apply a survey to the students so as to have their
considerations in reference to the inclusion of certain oral activities similar to sight translation.

All the students agree that there is a close relationship between written translation and sight
translation based on the fact that the translator should read out loud what he is going to
translate. In the case of the written translation such practice helps them to previously clear out
any doubt or problem they may encounter in the written text in class. They give a general idea
of the text in the target language using the equivalences and terms they think about in the
moment, and though they may not be the most specific ones, the activity helps them express
the meaning of the document. Later on, when they have to come to the final written version,
they already have the idea; it would be their task just to polish it to make it sound more natural
in the target language. By carrying out sight translation activities they also recognize the need to
use the dictionaries. It’s even a profitable practice to integrate other skills and subjects and to
prepare themselves for the State Examination on sight translation.

In order to accomplish a proper final translation, whether written or oral, the usage of written
and sight techniques would be quite useful, so by means of this paper we propose the use of
certain oral activities which could pave the way to a better written translation. They could be
used in any of the translation subjects of the English Language Major but the authors decided to apply them in Translation of Official Documents in the 4th year due to the fact that both subjects, Translation of Official Documents and Sight Translation, use official documents such as speeches and statements to translate them.

Activities:

✓ After taking some time to read silently, students can read the document aloud in the source language. As part of the activity they may stand in front of the classroom so as to prepare themselves to speak in public in front of an audience at the same time. They will have to pay attention to the voice, pitch, tone, hesitations, signs, projection, enunciation, and posture. This could also be practiced at home in front of a mirror and recording themselves to critically analyze it later.

✓ Having read the text aloud the teacher can immediately ask the students to summarize it in the source language, taking care not to change the meaning and without reading it again. They will practice their memory skills and they will begin to analyze the meaning of the text.

✓ Only with some minutes to prepare themselves and think about the correct equivalences of just a few words or phrases, students will do a fluent sight translation of the document to the target language dividing it by paragraphs. They will have to think fast and use the terms they think about at the moment, focusing on the meaning instead of the words, which helps them avoid the literal translation. They will get familiar with the text and give a first draft of it. Once at home they will only have to perfection it because they would already have the general idea of the document.

✓ Afterwards the students can use the dictionaries and even encyclopedias to look for the terms or expressions they found most difficult or just to have more options at the time of translating the final written version.

✓ Another activity could be that, at the beginning of the lesson, students make a sight translation of phrases or sentences related to the topic of the document to translate in class. It will help them get familiar with the vocabulary before translating the whole text. The activity could start by using first phrases, sentences, and then paragraphs of different sizes.

CONCLUSIONS

The study permitted:

- To prove the relevance of the translation subjects for the further development of students of the English Language Major, since it encompasses many of the language skills at the same time.
- To verify that sight translation techniques contribute to improve the student’s success in the process of translating a written text.
Bibliographical references


