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Learning by Translating: A Contrastive Methodology for ESP Learning and Translation

Abstract

Over the last few years applied linguists have explored the possibility of integrating the insights of second language acquisition theories, contrastive analysis, foreign language teaching methodologies, and translation studies with a view to enhancing current communicative models and techniques for L2 teaching and translator training (see for example Sewell and Higgins 1996; Laviosa-Braithwaite 1997; Campbell 1998; Malmkjær 1998; Laviosa 2000; Colina 2002). We intend to make a contribution to this interdisciplinary orientation by putting forward a translation-based methodology for learning ESP vocabulary and grammar through real life mediating communicative activities. With particular reference to the translation task itself, we endeavour to provide teachers of English for special purposes and translator trainers with a methodology for guiding their students in producing, to the best of their abilities, a target text which meets the quality criteria of terminological accuracy and stylistic fluency, and is also effective in terms of the communicative situation it is intended for. After outlining the rationale and main theoretical approaches underpinning our work, we will illustrate our methodology for learning ESP vocabulary and translation skills from a contrastive perspective, as in our book Learning by Translating (Laviosa and Cleverton 2003).

Introduction

Following the university reform approved in the year 2000, Italian Universities have set up three year degree courses offering a variety of curricula aimed at attracting a new kind of student with more vocational, rather than pure academic interests. One of these curricula, Lingue e Culture per il Turismo, is directed towards tourism and its ramifications, given the interest now being shown in a growing tourist industry in southern Italy, in particular in Apulia which is the region we come from and which is now opening up on the market.

The other curriculum, Intermediazione Linguistica per la Comunita` Europea, has a more entrepreneurial slant, aiming at enabling graduates to find work in international companies or organisations. Both curricula put emphasis heavily on translation competence in ESP, both from and into the foreign language.

This new orientation has implied a search for texts and a teaching methodology which could meet this demand satisfactorily, and this proved a fairly difficult task as most textbooks in translation were either too theoretical or too difficult, at least for first year students. Given these premises we decided to draw up a compendium of English and Italian passages of graded lexical and syntactic difficulty and concerning diverse subject-specific communicative settings, which would enable the students to acquire and develop language and translation skills, from the first to the final year, particularly in the specialized domains of tourism, business and economics, and science. Our approach draws on:

> a) contrastive pedagogic grammars (Adorni and Primorac 1999; Vince and Pallini 1999; Maiden and Robustelli 2000);

> b) linguistic approaches to translation studies (Baker 1992; Ulrych 1992; Nord 1997; Taylor 1999; Scarpa 2001);

> c) foreign language pedagogic techniques conceived within the context provided by Balboni's operational model built around the so called unita` didattica (teaching unit), of which more later (Balboni 1994, 1998).

Steps in drawing up our translation manual

1 Establishing the criteria for selecting suitable texts

Our first step was to collect mainly tourist, business and scientific texts that had already been translated into one or more languages so that we would be working with authentically commissioned translations. This meant writing to a number of sources both in Italy and in England in order to get permission to be able to use the selected texts for publication. Another criterion that came into play here was whether they were free or not, as our financial resources were considerably limited (and permission given free in England is quite difficult to find).

2 Sorting out the texts

Having once collected a fair-sized amount of material we sorted out which could be applicable to which areas and registers, since we wanted to cover as many as possible particularly in the tourist field as this course attracts the greatest number of students in our university. Business English is also important in so far as the new curriculum Intermediazione Linguistica per la Comunita` Europea is concerned with trade and its contingent activities (advertising, marketing etc.). We also decided to include areas of specialisation such as scientific and medical texts since there is a demand for translators in these fields too.

3 Grading the texts

The third step was to grade the passages according to difficulty and in doing so we examined the potential exploitation of our selected texts for teaching specialised vocabulary and grammar from a contrastive perspective, thus paying particular attention to areas of lexico-grammar which are notoriously difficult for Italian learners of English and translation trainees working into and out of English. In order to explain and illustrate a particular area of specialised lexis and syntax (e.g. culture-bound words, subject-specific and non subject-specific terms, collocations, noun phrases) we collected and then analysed additional parallel texts (originals and their translations) and comparable texts (English and Italian originals). These comparative and contrastive analyses formed the basis of short synopses which highlighted for each source text some important contrastive elements between English and Italian. Given that "specialized discourse is usually distinguishable for its specific lexis, which diverges from the standard vocabulary employed in general discourse, and for the higher frequency of certain rules and items occurring in standard language" (Gotti, 2003: 307), we concentrated on the use of discipline-specific vocabulary when grading our texts. Thus the grading of the first source texts is based on a comparative study of English and Italian culture-bound (or culture-specific) words, which are often encountered in tourist texts and translated with a variety of procedures, such as borrowing, translation couplets, amplification, or substitution. In later texts questions of syntax are tackled, especially the lexically dense noun phrases used in specialised English texts where the head noun is premodified by strings containing adjectives, nouns, and participles, which in Italian need to be unpacked and explicated with noun phrases where the head noun is postmodified by non-finite or finite clauses, and/or prepositional phrases, adjectives and adverbs. Examples of complex noun phrases can be found in many specialised registers as for example in the language of tourism (e.g. unusual whitewashed limestone dwellings), economics (e.g. the continuing post-industrial transformation), medicine (e.g. a severe hepatic artery stricture), and computing (e.g. an HTML editing program).

4 Macroanalysis of the source text

Before moving onto the next phase of actual translation, the ST was analysed for its communicative and rhetorical functions which would be introduced in the description of the passage immediately after the discussion on the contrastive lexical and grammatical points.

5 Translating the source text

The last stages of our work involved translating the STs ourselves and in doing so annotating the main difficulties the passages offered from a lexical/terminological, grammatical, conceptual, cultural, or textual point of view. The difficulties encountered formed the basis for devising a series of questions which would guide the students' analysis of the source text prior to the translation task itself. Our annotated translations can be found in the Translation Guide, the 9th chapter of our manual.

6 Writing up a complete teaching unit for each text

Thus, after an introduction outlining some of the lexical, grammatical or textual features of the source text and sometimes suggesting potential translation strategies to overcome the differences between source and target language, each ST is preceded first by authentic text samples of English and Italian illustrating the main contrastive points in question, then by the communicative situation that gives rise to the translation assignment together with the translation brief which specifies the commissioner, the target readership, and the main communicative function of the source and target text. Finally the source text is followed by a series of questions for the students to render the lexico-grammatical analysis of the text more accessible. Their task is to read the passage through first in order to have a global idea of the subject, and the main communicative and rhetorical functions involved, and then to read and answer the questions that are intended to isolate various moments in the translation and to arouse their awareness of certain difficulties that they may need to tackle at the lexical/terminological and morpho-syntactic level.

Perhaps it needs to be said that our students who often come directly from high school with little or no knowledge of parsing and discourse analysis in general, have already done a preliminary course on some elements of English linguistics, and are introduced to the communicative and rhetorical functions of a text at the beginning of the translation module. Terminology used is consistent with Nord's (1997) text-analysis model in which she emphasises three aspects of the translation process: the importance of the translation brief, which is the set of instructions that accompany a given assignment, the role of the source text analysis, and the functional hierarchy of translation problems. As the translation proceeds so the students come into contact with the nine translation strategies proposed by Malone (1988), that is: equation, substitution, divergence, convergence, condensation, diffusion, amplification, reduction, and re-ordering, and thus they learn how to cope with problems of non-equivalence as they arise at different levels of language analysis, particularly at the level of specialised vocabulary.

Sample material and teaching methodology

In this section we will illustrate how we teach ESP vocabulary and translation from a contrastive perspective drawing on the pedagogical model proposed by Paolo Balboni (1994, 1998). Each chapter of our book is organised in such a way as to constitute one teaching unit, which in turn consists of six interrelated phases, i.e. motivation, global comprehension, analysis, reflection, synthesis and control. Each phase is characterised by specific teaching techniques. In Balboni's model, the teaching unit begins with motivation aimed at stimulating students' interest by arousing their curiosity and meeting their communicative needs. Global comprehension is guided through reading activities such as multiple-choice questions or grids. Analysis focuses on identifying the specific lexico-grammatical and textual features of a given text. Reflection consists in examining in greater depth the norms governing language use in specific text types. Synthesis consists in applying these norms in task-based activities which involve the simulation of real-life communicative situations. Control aims to assess the acquisition of monolingual as well as cross- and inter-linguistic competences. In our application of

Balboni's model each teaching unit is used to achieve a variety of learning objectives identified in the areas of specialised lexis and translation competence. In the following teaching unit, for example, which involves the analysis and translation of a promotional brochure advertising the tourist facilities provided by a camping site, the pedagogic objectives are: a) the propositional and expressive meaning of words typically used in this particular text type; b) culture-bound words and translation procedures to deal with the lack of one-to-one equivalents across source and target language; c) the correct order of premodifiers in English noun phrases.

Motivation

In the motivation phase the lexical features of the source text are introduced. Potential strategies to overcome the lexico-grammatical differences between source and target language are suggested and illustrated with examples, as in the following extract adapted from Chapter 2.1 in Learning by Translating (Laviosa and Cleverton 2003: 35-36):

PROMOTIONAL BROCHURE

Introduction

Multilingual brochures which advertise the facilities offered by private enterprises in local beauty spots, such as hotels, campsites, or farmhouses, generally contain many colourful photographs and short texts. They are on display in locations such as Tourist Information Offices and Travel Agencies, where local and foreign tourists are likely to stop or pass by. Their communicative functions are appellative and informative. The vocabulary is rich in words that convey not only a propositional meaning (i.e. the meaning of a word that relates to what a word refers to in a concrete or abstract world), but also an expressive meaning (i.e. the meaning of a word that relates to the speaker's feelings and attitudes) (Baker 1992). Examples of such words in English are fantastic, wonderful, breathtaking, magnificent. The expressive meaning of words has the function of arousing and maintaining the reader's interest as well as creating a pleasurable atmosphere that stimulated and fires the audience's imagination (in this regard see Dann 1996 for a full account of the varied functions of the language of tourism).

In this text type English nouns are often premodified by two adjectives (Table 1), while in Italian the lexis often consists of noun phrases where the head noun is premodified and/or postmodified by one or more adjectives (Table 2). When translating Italian noun phrases into English it is often difficult to place the premodifiers in the correct order since it is still not entirely clear what makes one sequence acceptable rather than others. Current rules suggest that, when the head noun is premodified by a multivariate string comprising 'opinion' adjectives, 'fact' adjectives, and nouns used as adjectives, they normally take the following order: opinion + size + other qualities + age + shape + temperature + colour + pattern + origin/nationality + material + purpose/type + head noun. The examples below taken from a sample of promotional brochures confirm the order suggested by current rules:

- *a simple 4 star hotel* (opinion + type)

- *pleasant landscaped gardens* (opinion + type)

- *dazzling white sand* (quality + colour)

- *magnificent Greek temples* (opinion + origin)

- *a small private garden* (size + type);

- *tranquil rock pools* (opinion + material)

- *the impressive modern entrance hall* (opinion + quality + type)

- *the large heated swimming pool* (size + quality + purpose)

- *lush, green semi-tropical vegetation* (quality + colour + origin)

- *unusual whitewashed limestone dwellings* (opinion + colour + material).

Santa Maria di Leuca is a <u>pretty coastal</u> **resort** (…) and the oldest part of town has treasures such as a byzantine castle, an <u>intricate baroque</u> **cathedral** and an <u>ancient Greek</u> **fountain**.

(…) the Costa Smeralda stretches for about 30 miles across the north-east corner of Sardinia where <u>idyllic sandy</u> **coves** fringe a <u>crystal clear</u> **sea**.

Relax on the <u>dazzling white</u> **sand** (…).

This fashionable and well established resort is backed by the <u>lush, green semi-tropical</u> **vegetation** of the surrounding hills.

Table 1. Examples of English noun phrases where the head noun (in bold) is premodified by two or more adjectives (from Citalia's Italy Croydon 1999).

I nostri cuochi ti offriranno ogni giorno **piatti** <u>diversi e prelibati</u> (…).

L'ospitalita` e` anche nel sapore della <u>tipica, generosa</u> **cucina** <u>regionale</u> (…).

Table 2. Examples of Italian noun phrases where the head noun (in bold) is modified by two or more adjectives (from Vivi la tua vacanza a colori Silvi (TE) 1998).

Another lexical feature of promotional brochures of tourist resorts is the use of culture-bound words, that is to say words or expressions which convey an idea, custom, tradition, or phenomenon linked to a cultural situation that may be unfamiliar to a non-native language speaker. Culture-bound words do not normally have one-to-one equivalents in the target language, so they may need explaining to the target readership through paraphrasing, an example of the translation strategy known as "amplification" (Malone 1988 in Taylor 1998: 55-56). For example the Italian salami (plural of salame, a type of pork sausage containing pepper, cut thin and served cold) can be translated as salted (pork) meats, as found in the tourist guide entitled Chianciano Terme: tra la Val di Chiana e la Val d'Orcia (1997: 78-79). Alternatively one may use the so-called "translation couplets" (Newmark 1981: 31), which consist of a combination of borrowing and a target language explanation or a literal translation (Table 3).

Sardinia

Local cuisine

Delicious <u>prosciutto (cured ham)</u> and <u>salsicce (sausages)</u> are similar to those eaten in Corsica.

Sardinian pasta specialities include <u>malloreddus (small dumplings)</u> or <u>culingionis (a version of ravioli)</u> and are often accompanied by robust red wines.

Resorts

Alberobello

The '<u>trulli</u>' capital of Puglia, Alberobello has over a thousand of these unusual whitewashed limestone dwellings (…).

Table 3. Examples of Italian culture-bound words in original English tourist guides (from Citalia's Italy Croydon 1999).

Global comprehension and analysis

In the global and analysis phases combined, we first of all provide the translation brief and background information about the communicative situation that has given rise to the translation assignment. Secondly the ST is read and analysed through a series of questions focusing on the most salient lexical and grammatical features to be considered and examined in order to decide on translation strategies and solutions. This is exemplified by sample material adapted from Chapter 2.1 of Learning by Translating (Laviosa and Cleverton 2003: 37-38):

Translation task

Communicative situation and translation brief: the Centro Vacanze Europe Garden, situated in Silvi (TE), a seaside resort on the Adriatic Riviera in Abruzzo, commissions you to translate their multilingual brochure Vivi la tua vacanza a colori which describes and illustrates the facilities offered by their Camping-Village. The brochure consists of large and small photographs illustrating the village and the surrounding area. At the bottom of each page there are two descriptive paragraphs of equal length and in the following languages: Italian and German on the left hand page; French and English on the right hand page. After reading and analysing the source text, produce a draft translation, then revise and edit it by checking for accuracy, completeness, consistency, fluency, and acceptability for the communicative situation it is intended for.

Source Text

1) Il Camping-Village Europe Garden e` sito all'ombra di 300 ulivi secolari, tra il verde della collina e l'azzurro del mare, su un'area di 40.000 mq da cui si gode un panorama stupendo. Comode piazzole erbose, bungalows in muratura, 2 piscine, tennis, spiaggia privata, animazione, giochi: tutti gli ingredienti per vivere una indimenticabile vacanza a colori.

2) Un relax ideale a contatto con la natura, da maggio a settembre. Confortevoli villini in muratura completamente arredati, immersi in un mare di verde: un'oasi di pace distante dai rumori della citta`, ma vicina alle assolate e incantevoli spiagge di Silvi, facilmente raggiungibili grazie al continuo e gratuito servizio navetta.

3) Il Camping-Village Europe Garden dispone di un'ampia spiaggia privata, dotata di tutti i servizi e di finissima sabbia dorata. Tanto sole, il clima mite del centro-Adriatico, un lunghissimo arenile per distensive passeggiate, tra il limpido mare azzurro e il fresco della pineta alle spalle: una combinazione ideale che solo il Camping-Village Europe Garden puo` offrirti.

4) Tra l'abbronzatura e un bagno, il Camping-Village Europe Garden offre la possibilita` di dedicarsi al benessere del proprio corpo, di ritrovare la forma smagliante praticando gli sport preferiti, in splendidi scenari naturali: nuoto, tennis, ginnastica, aerobica, tiro con l'arco, ping-pong, bocce, percorso vita e, per i piu` esigenti, pesca subacquea e avvincenti escursioni a cavallo nelle vicinanze.

5) Una vacanza indimenticabile e` anche divertimento e spensieratezza. Una simpatica équipe di animatori e` a tua disposizione per allietare le tue giornate con giochi, tornei, spassosi siparietti, nel Camping e in spiaggia. E se vuoi trascorrere in allegria anche la serata: attrazioni, cabaret, spettacoli, dancing, Folklore, grigliate e spaghettate, ti attendono in uno stupendo scenario notturno.

Analysis of the Source Text

1) Identify the words that convey at the same time an expressive (i.e. the speaker's feelings or attitude) and a propositional meaning (i.e. what a word refers to in the speaker's real or abstract world). Suggest appropriate English equivalents for these words.

2) Identify all noun phrases where the head noun is modified by two or more adjectives and suggest suitable English equivalents.

3) Are there any culture-bound words which may present problems of understanding? Which translation strategy would you adopt to convey their meaning to an English audience?

Reflection and synthesis

In carrying out the translation task itself, normally in pairs or small groups, students reflect on translation problems concerning specialised lexis and grammar and suggest possible solutions with the help of the teacher who acts both as informant and facilitator. The outcome of these activities is a draft translation.

Control

In the final stage the students' draft translations are compared and evaluated in terms of accuracy, completeness, consistency, fluency and acceptability for the communicative situation the translation assignment is intended for. During the control phase students revise and edit their target texts. Finally, the translation suggested by the authors in the Translation Guide may be the object of further comparisons and discussions. Below is the suggested translation adapted from Chapter 9, Learning by Translating (Laviosa and Cleverton 2003: 187-188):

Suggested translation

1) The Europe Garden Camping-Village is situated in the shade of 300 centuries-old olive trees between green hills and the blue sea and extends over an area of 40,000 sq.m. from where you can enjoy a magnificent view. Comfortable grassy tent sites1, brick bungalows, 2 swimming-pools, tennis courts, a private beach, animation, games: all the ingredients you need to experience an unforgettable holiday full of colour.

2) The perfect setting for relaxing in the peace and quiet of the countryside from May to September. Comfortable little brick homes2, fully furnished, nestling in a sea of green: an oasis of peace far from the noise of the city but close to the enchanting sunny beaches of Silvi, easily reached by a regular free shuttle service.

3) The Europe Garden Camping-Village has a large private beach of fine3 golden sand offering all the necessary facilities. Lots of sun, the mild Central-Adriatic climate, a long stretch of sandy shore for relaxing walks between the clear blue sea and the cool pine woods behind: an ideal combination which only the Europe Garden Camping-Village can offer you.

4) In between sunbathing and swimming, the Europe Garden Camping-Village offers you the opportunity to dedicate yourself to the well-being of your body and to regain your sparkling shape by playing your favourite sports in beautiful natural settings: swimming, tennis, gymnastics, aerobics, archery, table-tennis, bowling, nature trails, and for those who require more demanding sports4, underwater fishing and exciting excursions on horseback in the surrounding areas.

5) An unforgettable holiday also means fun and time free from worry5. A pleasant team of animators are there for you to enliven your days with games, tournaments, amusing shows, both on the camp site and on the beach. And if you wish to carry on having a good time in the evening too: attractions, cabarets, shows, dancing, folklore, barbecues and spaghetti suppers6 – all these are waiting for you in a breath-taking night-time setting.

Conclusion

On the basis of feedback from students and the lively classroom discussions arising from the evaluation of the most appealing and effective translation solutions, particularly in the area of specialised vocabulary and culture-bound words, we can say that our teaching approach has stimulated a great deal of interest among our students, who, on the basis of guided comparative and contrastive analyses involving translated and comparable original texts, have been able to reflect on lexico-grammatical mismatches between the source and target language and propose well reasoned translation solutions in the specialised area of promotional language in the variegated field of tourism.

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