Precision or readability? On the influence of editors in English-German business translation

Mario Bisiada
Departament de Traducció i Ciències del Llenguatge
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Meaning in Translation: Illusion of Precision
Riga Technical University
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Translated text
Editorial influence in translation

Translated text

Manuscript translation

Published translation
Editorial influence in translation

Translated text

Manuscript translation

Published translation
# Stages in translated document production

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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Sub-process</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Product</th>
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<td>Writing¹</td>
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<td>Source text</td>
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<td>Editor</td>
<td>Target text</td>
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¹ adopted from Hayes et al. (1987)
² adopted from Jakobsen (1999)
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Manuscript-based corpus research

Proposals in the literature

▶ “successive stages of individual attempts” (Hartmann 1981: 206)
Manuscript-based corpus research

Proposals in the literature

- “successive stages of individual attempts” (Hartmann 1981: 206)
- “intermediate stages of translation, or how the final product evolves over time” → “explore the process of translation through a retrospective analysis of successive versions of the product” (Baker 1993: 247)
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→ process-based research, revision studies
Product-based research

empirical strength: “authentic data attested in texts” (Kenny 2009) → published sources
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→ published sources

⇝ neglects linguistic interventions made at editing stage
Product-based research

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Main argument

Editors may have significant influence on translated language
→ corpus studies should draw on manuscripts
Applications

Corpus studies of editing

- Utka (2004): “phases of translation corpus”
- UPF research on editing
  - in literary texts: Sinner (2012)
  - on sentence splitting: Bisiada (2014)
  - in French–Spanish translation: Andújar Moreno (Forthcoming)
  - on mediation universals: Bisiada (Forthcoming)
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Research on editing has so far focussed on

1. readability studies
2. “mediated discourse”
Research line: Editing and readability

"Strategy of anticipation" (Bisaillon 2007)
Editors search for certain anticipated problems, e.g. "overlong sentences", "irrelevant use of impersonal pronouns"

Automatisms in copyediting (Bisaillon 2007; Robert 2014)
▶ minimise reflection time for grammar/syntax problems
▶ 50%–75% of recorded editing: immediate solutions
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pursuing readability with little reflection for discourse matters?
Does editing improve readability?

Editing in *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Roberts et al. 1994)

- 101 original research manuscripts
- Before and after peer review/editing process
- 17.16 before, 16.85 after editing
- Published texts longer by 2.6%

Does this reflect peer review or editing?

→ No evidence in favour – more studies are needed!

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Edited language as mediated discourse

Research line: Translating, editing…: → mediation?

“Constrained communication” (Chesterman 2004: 10f)

“communicating in a non-native language [. . .] or any form of communication that involves relaying messages, such as reporting discourse, even journalism” (emphasis mine)

“Mediated discourse” (Ulrych & Murphy 2008)

translation, criticism, editing. . . = rewriting (“mediated discourse”) 

↪

“processed, or rewritten, for particular audiences and thus mediated for a purpose”

→

“mediation universals”

⇝

Which communication is not constrained/mediated?
Research line: Translating, editing…: → mediation?

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~~ Which communication is not constrained/mediated?
Current study

Research assumptions

Several agents participate in the (holistic) translation process

▶ published translations may differ significantly from manuscripts
Research assumptions

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» published translations may differ significantly from manuscripts

← how reliable are they to study features of translated language?
Current study

Research assumptions

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↪ how reliable are they to study features of translated language?

Three items of study

► sentence splitting (see Bisiada 2014)
► grammatical metaphor (nominalisations)
► passive constructions
ModevigTrad

Title  Evidencialidad y epistemicidad en textos de géneros discursivos evaluativos. Análisis contrastivo y traducción (FFI2014-57313-P)

PI  Montserrat González Condom

Genre  Discourse genres that show a high degree of metaphorical language and modalisation

Funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad
Corpus architecture

Sources: *Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business Manager*
Corpus & research aims

Corpus details

Corpus architecture

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- Genre: Business studies, approaches to management, opinion articles
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- **Tripartite corpus (315,955 words)**
Corpus details

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- Tripartite corpus (315,955 words)
  - Source texts (English) – 104,678 words
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  - Source texts (English) – 104,678 words
  - Manuscript translations (German) – 106,829 words
Corpus details

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- Dates: 2006–2011
- Tripartite corpus (315,955 words)
  - Source texts (English) – 104,678 words
  - Manuscript translations (German) – 106,829 words
  - Published translations (German) – 104,448 words
How do HBM editors work?

Do editors consult the source text?

**Yes**—“...legen wir uns in der Regel den Originaltext aus der Harvard Business Review daneben und vergleichen beides Satz für Satz.”

[‘...we usually have the source text from the HBR next to us and compare both texts sentence by sentence.’]
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[‘…we usually have the source text from the HBR next to us and compare both texts sentence by sentence.’]

**What do they look for?**

“…formulieren [wir] Substantivierungen und Passivkonstruktionen um…”

[‘…we reword nominalisations and passive constructions…’]
German passives

Passive forms in English & German

English
- form of *to be*

German
- form of *werden* or *sein*
- 3 passive alternatives
  - impersonalisation *man*
  - modal passives *lassen* (‘to let’) + reflexive verb
  - modal infinitives *sein* + infinitive phrase
Passive alternatives

*man*

Diese Tür kann *man* nicht öffnen. – (*One cannot open this door.*)
Passive alternatives

*man*

Diese Tür kann man nicht öffnen. – (One cannot open this door.)

**Modal passive**

Der Text liest sich leicht. – (El texto se lee fácilmente.)

▶ The text reads easily.
▶ The bunkhouse sleeps ten. / The surface cleans easily.
Passive alternatives

*man*

Diese Tür kann man nicht öffnen. – (One cannot open this door.)

**Modal passive**

Der Text liest sich leicht. – (El texto se lee fácilmente.)

- ?The text reads easily.
- The bunkhouse sleeps ten. / The surface cleans easily.

**Modal infinitive**

Die Aufgabe ist bis 3 Uhr zu lösen. – (The task is to be solved by 3)

- Hay que resolver la tarea antes de las 3.
- ?“El futuro es para ser vivido, nada está preestablecido” —Luke
Example of editor’s passivisation

During their initial training, employees are given the freedom to make judgment calls. (Text 9)

**Manuscript:**

*In den Einführungskursen wird Mitarbeitern gestattet, nach eigenem Gutdünken zu entscheiden.*

[‘In the introductory courses, employees are permitted to decide at their discretion.’]

**Published version:**

*Schon in der Einarbeitungsphase dürfen Mitarbeiter selbstständig entscheiden.*

[‘As early as the initial training, employees may decide autonomously.’]
## Findings

### Mean normalised frequency

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<th>Editor’s action</th>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total instances</strong></td>
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Findings

Passive constructions

- More utterances are passivised than activised
Findings

Passive constructions

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- Translators and editors activise to a similar extent
Findings

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- Editors re-activise to a significant extent
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Passive constructions

- More utterances are passivised than activised
- Translators and editors activise to a similar extent
- Translators passivise much more than editors
- Editors re-activise to a significant extent

⇒ Translated German (in this genre) contains more passive voice than we conventionally see
Further research

Current questions

- how to treat nominal forms?
Further research

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- difference between present and past tense?
  present utterances are more likely to be passivised
Current questions

- how to treat nominal forms?
- difference between present and past tense?
  - present utterances are more likely to be passivised
- semantic restriction of Agents acting as subjects to “animate and conscious participants” in German (Kunz 2010: 166; Teich 2003: 97)
  - does this encourage passive use?
Thank you for your attention!
References I


References II


References III


