

Editorial intervention in translation

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Glossary

Translation workflow is here considered to be the process that happens from starting the translation to its being published (see Table 1).

Abstract

This chapter focusses on editorial intervention, a process defined as the intervention of any agent other than the translator in the language of the published text. During the translation workflow, many such agents intervene and leave linguistic traces on the final text. Notwithstanding this, translation research generally takes for granted that the published version that scholars analyse or gather to construct corpora represents the work solely of the translator. The chapter provides an overview of work that has sought to bring attention to this issue and systematically study which notable traces editorial intervention in translation leaves on the target text.

Keywords

editing; proofreading; revising; intervention; translation workflow; manuscript translations; intermediate stages; translated language; publishing; sentence splitting; editorial guidelines

Key points

- editorial intervention refers to the linguistic influence taken on the text by actors other than the author and the translator
- it questions research on translated language that flatly takes the target text to be the product exclusively of the translator
- editorial intervention has only been studied systematically by few scholars since the mid-2010s and needs more attention
- editorial intervention does not tend to alter the entire lexico-grammatical make-up of a text, but concentrates on particular features that concern readability, such as nominalisations, complex sentences and passive voice constructions

1 Introduction

The term intervention has been used with various meanings in translation studies. There is a source-text specific meaning, used, for instance, by House (2008, 16), who defines intervention in translation as “a manipulation of the source text beyond what is linguistically necessary”. In discourse-specific meaning, it can refer to the intervention of translators or actors involved in the translation process on the discourse they translate (Munday, 2007). For

Table 1 Stages in the translation workflow (Bisiada, 2018b, 291)

<i>Agent</i>	<i>Sub-process</i>	<i>Stage</i>	<i>Product</i>
Translator	Orientation	Translation stage	Draft Manuscript
<i>id.</i>	Drafting		
(Reviser)	Revising	Editing stage	
Editor	Stylistic editing		
<i>id.</i>	Copyediting		
(Editor 2)	Structural editing		
<i>id.</i>	Content editing		
Publisher	Publication		Publication

the purposes of this chapter, I treat intervention not in those senses, but in a target text-specific meaning. Intervention is used here as a concept that disrupts the traditional understanding of the translation process as one mainly involving text and translator, omitting other agents that intervene in the production of the final target text. Those can be editors, proofreaders, layouters, the author of the source text and many others.

Editorial intervention in translation is thus defined as the intervention of any agent other than the translator in the language of the published text. The two main arguments, then, are the following: First, we should not take for granted that the translated text we see and analyse is entirely the product of the translator. Second, the intervention of agents other than the translator throughout the translation workflow is sufficiently significant to warrant being taken into account in the analysis of features of the language of the target text. I prefer to use the term “translation workflow” to “translation process” as the latter is used in a more cognitively oriented way to describe the act of working on the translation on the part of the translator, while “workflow” refers to all the steps and interventions taken from commissioning the translation to delivering the final product. Table 1 shows a simplified visualisation of that workflow.

2 Rising awareness of editorial intervention

An early proponent of analyses of translated documents at several stages in their development was Hartmann (1981, 206) with his concepts of “multiphase comparisons” and the analysis of “successive stages” of “individual attempts” at translations. In a case study, he analysed editorial changes to a passage of the English translation of Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues* through its various stages from manuscript via proof to the pre-print stage (Hartmann, 1980, 1981). In her well-known article on corpora in translation studies, Baker (1993, 247) also mentioned the “question of the intermediate stages of translation, or how the final product evolves over a period of time”, arguing that “access to this type of text in electronic form can be used to explore the process of translation through a retrospective analysis of successive versions of the product” (Baker, 1993, 247).

This idea is put to practice by Utka (2004), who analyses “successive written draft versions” of EU documents translated from English to Lithuanian in what he calls a “phases of translation” (Utka, 2004, 197) corpus. The study is one of the earliest attempts to raise awareness of the fact that a text, especially a translated one, passes through various stages on its way to the final target text. There is no indication, however, that these data involve editorial intervention, and EU documents do not usually undergo significant editing throughout those stages (see Bisiada, 2018c, 26, for a critique of the study), so most probably the study discusses what Hartmann (1981) called “multiphase comparisons”, that is, successive versions kept by the translator.

Filippakopoulou (2008) discusses the use of translation drafts in translation criticism and Munday (2013) proposes the use of manuscripts to investigate decision-making in translation. He argues that “unpublished primary sources preceding and building to the [target text] itself” are a “valuable window into the working practice of a translator” (Munday, 2013, 126). But still those accounts remained largely theoretical while the idea of studying editorial intervention was not put into practice.

Studies of literary translation do occasionally study editorial intervention to investigate a particular linguistic phenomenon. For instance, Sinner (2012) studies fictive dialogue in 26 romance novels published between 2003 and 2009. His corpus includes English source texts and their German manuscript translations, as well as the published translations (Sinner, 2012, 136). Significant editorial changes to the translations concern terms of address and language explicitness (swear words and sexual references). Editors enforce guidelines, at times to the detriment of the correctness of the translation (Sinner, 2012, 126). Similarly, in a study of editorial intervention in the Spanish translation of a French novel, Andújar Moreno (2016) finds that a range of changes can be attributed to the editors’ attempts at increasing the readability of the text. A more recent example of this is Moe et al. (2021), in whose data, however, editors do not exert strong influence as in situations analysed by other scholars.

Readability also plays a role in the analysis of sentence splitting in translation, where Bisiada (2016) argues that the phenomenon of sentence splitting is not restricted to particular translation directions. He shows that sentence splitting is frequent in English-to-German translation of business articles, and that it is attributable to both translators and editors. In an early proposal of “translation editology”, Odrekhivska (2017) argues that editing or appropriation are necessary to make texts serviceable to target audiences, which “clearly stresses the prevalence of acceptability over adequacy in translation and manifest the importance of considering the post-translation stage” (Odrekhivska, 2017, 93).

An early study focussing on the importance of editorial activity was conducted by Kruger (2012), who set out to study “mediation universals”. She analyses a 1.2 million word corpus consisting of translations from Afrikaans to English, originally English texts edited by professional language editors, and those same texts before they underwent editing (Kruger, 2012, 360). Her aim is to investigate whether “the universals of translated language are the consequence of a cognitive mediation effect that is shared among different kinds of mediated language” (Kruger, 2012, 358), focusing on the well-known universals explicitation, normalisation/conservatism and simplification. While the study finds notable changes undertaken by editors, it does not analyse unedited translations.

3 Attempts at systematisation

The above studies are important steps towards calling scholars’ attention to the importance of considering editorial intervention in translation, but in order to do so systematically, larger scale studies that concentrate on the phenomenon of intervention by editors were necessary.

Replicating Kruger’s (2012) study with a German–English corpus, Bisiada (2017) conducts one of the first studies to compare unedited and edited translations in a systematic way. Using the same operationalisations as Kruger does, he finds that there is significant editorial intervention observable in features pertaining to acts of simplification. In later work, Kruger (2017) uses a register-controlled parallel corpus of originally produced (untranslated) edited texts and their unedited counterparts to show that editorial intervention needs to be taken into account in corpus-based studies of the features of translated language, as some of the features of conventionalisation, explicitation and simplification may be attributed to editors’ influence.

The most extensive body of work on editorial intervention in translated language is found in Bisiada’s work. Using a 300,000 word corpus, he conducts a range of studies that investigate several different linguistic features and editors’ influence on them. The corpus consists of 26 texts from the English-language “Harvard Business Review” translated to German for the “Harvard Business Manager”. It includes both the unedited translations the translators sent to the publisher and the final versions published in the magazine (for details on the corpus, see for instance Bisiada, 2018b, 297).

Bisiada’s work has produced a range of findings concerning translations from English to German. They’ve shown, for instance, that contrary to what is often assumed, sentence splitting happens in translation irrespective of the language combination involved. That is to say, even in translation into a language like German, which is known to have a tolerance or even preference for long sentences, sentence splitting occurs regularly, and it is caused by both translators and editors alike (Bisiada, 2016). Findings also show that translators and editors are linguistic actors that are guided by noticeably different purposes: while translators are mainly concerned to convey particular meanings, editors work according to readability concerns (see Bisiada, 2017). Based on that data, editing seems to be an activity largely aiming at simplification and increasing readability, or at least conducting operations on the text that are thought to achieve this (Bisiada, 2017).

On the one hand, one phenomenon where extensive differences between translators’ and editors’ work can be observed is nominalisations: translators nominalise frequently, and editors change a significant amount of these nominalisations back into verbs (Bisiada, 2018a). This was shown in Bisiada (2018c) to happen especially when the nominalisation is considered to occur in a linguistically complex construction such as a postmodification by genitive attributes. This is exemplified in example 1, taken from Bisiada (2018c, 34).

(1)

The beauty of the PWP model is that it offers the potential for **using** operational strengths to *expand* into new areas while at the same time **maintaining** the operational excellence that comes from *focused* expertise. (HBR 9/09,90)

Die Attraktivität des PWP-Modells ist sein Potenzial bei der **Nutzung betrieblicher Stärken** zur *Expansion* in neue Bereiche bei gleichzeitiger **Wahrung der hervorragenden betrieblichen Leistung**, die sich aus der *Fokussierung der einzelnen Einheiten* ergibt. (manuscript)

(‘The beauty of the PWP model is its potential for the use of operational strengths for the expansion into new areas with a concomitant maintenance of the excellent operational performance that comes from the focussing of individual units.’)

Der Charme des PWP-Modells besteht darin, dass es die Möglichkeit bietet, betriebliche Stärken zur *Expansion* in neue Bereiche zu **nutzen** und zugleich die Fähigkeit zu betrieblichen Spitzenleistungen zu **wahren**, die sich aus *Spezialisierung und Arbeitsteilung* ergibt. (HBM 12/09, 78)

(‘The charm of the PWP model lies in the fact that it offers the possibility to use operational strengths for the expansion into new areas and at the same time to maintain the aptitude for operational excellence that comes from specialisation and division of labour.’)

–Bisiada (2018c, 34)

The words *using* and *maintaining*, which are in verbal forms (gerunds) in the source text, are translated as the nominalised forms *Nutzung* (“use”) and *Wahrung* (“maintenance”). Both have genitive attributes and are converted back into verbs by editors (in bold). The verb *expand* is also translated as a nominalisation (*Expansion*, “expansion”). This construction has no genitive attribute, but rather a prepositional one, which is kept (in italics). The nominalisation of the source text adjective *focused*, *Fokussierung* (“enfocation”), is not changed, but the genitive attribute is removed (in italics).

On the other hand, editors also eliminate passive constructions from German translations, especially when the verb is in the past tense (Bisiada, 2019). With respect to a proposed “mediation effect”, it seems from this data that translating and editing are rather different activities: while both actors can roughly be said to mediate meaning in a text, translators are usually concerned with accurate representation of their interpretation of the source text, whereas editors are more interested in target-text style and readability. In my view, those two types of influence are sufficiently different to make the notion of mediation universals too vague to be useful to describe data.

4 Looking at the big picture

A further step ahead has recently been taken by using multivariate analysis of unedited and edited translations. The work summarised so far has looked at specific features in particular, which made it impossible to provide a concise overview of the linguistic properties of the texts in question. A multivariate analysis conducted by Serbina et al. (2021) studies 36 lexico-grammatical features together. The study confirms findings made previously on editorial influence, for instance, on sentence splitting, passive voice and readability concerns. As regards the overall picture, however, they do not find “a profound effect of editorial intervention” and suggest that “translation manuscripts and edited translations have similar linguistic profiles” (Serbina et al., 2021, 6).

While that may be true for the text as seen on an aggregate level, it does not change the fact that individual features are severely affected, as research discussed above has shown. There may also be discursively salient aspects that a multivariate, lexicogrammatical analysis does not capture but where editors’ influence is significant. The effect of editorial intervention on particular features should

thus be analysed further to potentially build a catalogue of features that tend to undergo editorial intervention in particular languages and registers.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, editorial intervention in translation has become an important topic in translation studies and has been studied systematically since the mid-2010s. Ten years later, however, scholars perhaps haven’t generally adopted an awareness of editorial intervention to the extent that the increasingly multi-authored nature of modern text production would deserve. After all, the texts we analyse, be they translated or not, are still generally taken to represent mainly the efforts of the author or translator, while the effects of the many agents that intervene in intermediate stages are not generally taken into account. A desirable step towards a more nuanced picture would be to attempt, where possible, to use unedited texts or to compare unedited manuscripts with published versions. As this is not always easy to achieve, a move towards generally recognising the multi-authored nature of any text is an important step towards recognising the multi-voicedness of texts.

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