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Specificity of intercultural communication and documents translation in aluminium industry

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to studying specificity of technical translation in aluminium industry. It is based on our on-site translation experience at the aluminium plant. The authors analyse the specificity of oral and written communication modes between technical specialists of different cultural backgrounds and languages. The study provides some important patterns of aluminium industry installation peculiarities referring to translating phone negotiations, meetings, reports, official letters, acts and manuals.

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication in the workplace, for any branch of industry as well as for aluminium industry, sets a particular portion of translation restrictions in face-to-face and technology-mediated interaction. “The workplace is a highly meaningful context for intercultural communication where persons who come from different countries, identify with different ethnic groups or speak different languages get to collaborate and develop relationships with one another [1]”. Whenever a translator’s job is conducted within the framework of their delegated duties, it should be done under a number of conditions defined either by the norms of business communication, or by the standards designed for a particular branch of industry, or even for a definite plant or company. There is also some specificity regarding a certain type of communication, i.e. oral speech mode and written speech mode.

Communication modes can vary greatly in aluminium industry. As we were to moderate communication between subcontractors and supervisors, translation was mostly required during the process of supervised installation. In terms of oral speech mode, we would like to consider the following list of situations which the interpreter is sure to face:

- Phone conference/ negotiations
- High-level meetings
- Scheduled/ routine meetings
- On-site communication

In terms of written speech mode, there is a list of documents that are most likely to be translated:

- Manuals
- Official letters
- Acts
- Reports

Nowadays, the biggest amount of aluminium production equipment is supplied by foreign producers, and the supplier’s party delegates their staff responsible for correct assembly and installation of the purchased equipment. In our case, two *Furnace Tending Assemblies as well as two anode handling systems* have been purchased by the aluminium smelter and it is extremely important to provide smooth communication between the two parties – the Buyer and the Seller. While supervisors usually have some experience of working with a translator, it is an absolutely new concept for subcontractors which results in serious challenges for an interpreter working on-site.



2. Discussion

2.1. Oral speech mode

Within the conditions stated above for oral speech mode, the interpreter should provide either simultaneous or consecutive translation.

During phone conferences or negotiations, consecutive interpreting should be provided. The main challenge the interpreter may face, is the official phone conversation protocol. On the one hand, the main function of the interpreter is to convey the idea of a speaker, but on the other hand, in real life, it is the interpreter who makes a call and starts a conversation. The interpreter should know the phone conversation protocol, because in spite of the fact that the top-level managers are supposed to know official courtesies, in most cases it becomes the job of the interpreter to make sure that the communication will go smoothly.

First of all, there is a great difference between the norms and standards in Russia and the norms and standards in Europe. When the Russian party says, "Send us the document", we translate, "We kindly ask you to send us the document". Another difference is that the managers from some European countries feel much more relaxed about the standards. They say, "Hi" and "Bye-bye", while Russians stick to more formal and official equivalents like, "Good afternoon" and "Goodbye".

Another issue we need to take care of is the transfer of names. "Proper names create special problems for translators [2]." In many cases, so much communication takes place, and with so many different countries and companies that the managers forget *who is who* and what is the right way to pronounce names properly. Since nowadays English is the language of official communication, and all the negotiations are conducted in English, the interpreters working with this language have to face the problem of names written in languages they do not know. For example, French names present a considerable difficulty for the Russian-English translator because some letters are not pronounced in the French language, while others are pronounced differently like in such names as *Alois* or *Marceau*. To cope with this challenge, it is highly recommended to know the basic reading rules of the language and culture we communicate with. Another solution is to give a phone-call to your peer specialising in the source language though it is not always possible.

Working for a big company, you inevitably have to talk with representatives of a large number of companies producing equipment for various stages of aluminium production. It means that the translator should be able to get familiar with new products in almost no time, as well as to rely a lot on their proposition when it is necessary to get into technical details. The translator should be able to match the terms pronounced by one party with those pronounced by the other party – in this kind of translation success comes when you understand what is discussed by the parties. However, it is necessary to add that since both sides are interested in conveying their ideas they try to do their best to explain profoundly what they mean. In many cases before the conversation starts, the interpreter is explained which issue will be discussed within the framework of a pre-planned phone-call.

The protocol for high-level meetings differs from the one we use for phone negotiations. First of all, not everything is translated as most of the scheduled high-level meetings are attended by the same managers representing both parties.

Let's consider one more important issue – translation mode. In many cases it is required to combine simultaneous and consecutive translation. When general matters are discussed, it is preferable to translate simultaneously in order to save time, but when it comes to some technical matters the clients prefer to be translated consecutively thus making sure that the meaning is conveyed accurately and precisely. They also make a lot of sketches and drawings which allow the interpreter to clearly see what exactly is being discussed. Time is the main factor. Actually an average meeting is held for an hour or two. It means that non-stop simultaneous translation continues for at least 30-40 minutes exceeding the approved standards for a conference interpreter [3, 4].

Everyday meetings are less formal and continue for 10-20 minutes. They may be held both on the site and in the office, but normally include the discussion of the planned work or the work that was

done the day before. These meetings more resemble face-to-face friendly communication between two people rather than official negotiations. Thus, the language that both communicants use is quite informal and plain. The major type of translation in this case is consecutive [5].

Intercultural communication at the workplace can be various [6, 7]. In most cases we work with the subcontractors and supervisors. While supervisors usually have some experience of working with a translator, for the subcontractors it is an absolutely new skill that some of them cannot master instantly. There are some problems that any interpreter comes across while working on the site as “the workplace is not a mere container for encounters and relations. It is a social space that prescribes a specific orientation to relationships and actions, and suffuses interactions with considerations of professional and organisational identification, and with economic and political implications” [6]

Many subcontractors have problems with expressing their thoughts clearly. They start somewhere in the middle and don't bring their thoughts to any logical conclusion. They also tend to use professional slang instead of choosing proper technical terms for naming processes and objects. For example, in terms of working on assembling the anodes handling systems a subcontractor may come to the supervisor and say, “We have a problem with the hopper”. The real problem is that we have more than two hoppers in the system. But an even bigger problem is that when the supervisor asks to elaborate a little, the subcontractor usually answers, “You know, that one,” while being at the supervisor's container. Another example is when the subcontractor uses a slang word and then cannot explain what that is. Mechanics also like to give proper names or professional slang names to their tools, for instance, a hammer can be called “Masha”, and a water level is just a “blue stick”.

They do not name the objects at all. When you see the equipment sometimes it is easier to just point at the objects and say “this” or “that”, but the problem is that when the clients get inside the equipment there is not always enough space for the interpreter to get in. It means that you have to be outside but keep translating. If you don't see the objects that are pointed at, it is highly probable that translating even simultaneously you wouldn't be able to keep up with the speed of the speaker that means that when they point in the right direction you are still translating about the left.

Supervisors are not native speakers. Since almost all the technical terminology is in English, it is preferable to work with an English interpreter, however, it can also set some minor difficulties like lack of vocabulary or a specific accent of a client.

The translator cannot write anything down. Working on the site means working in a noisy, dirty and hectic environment. The people working there are pressed with time and cannot spend an hour discussing issues at hand. They need fast and efficient communication with foreign specialists. Thus, the translator doesn't have time to make notes, put down numbers and figures. They should translate right away converting every spoken word from one language into another.

2.2. *Written speech mode*

While the translation of technical manuals normally doesn't present any difficulties for the experienced translator, it can be tricky for the one who is new in this job. Manuals very often contain an abundance of specific industry terminology as well as accepted well-known terms used in a particular supplier context. For example, in the context of crane building, *exhauster*, *blower* and *vacuum pump* denote one and the same thing. “Translation of manuals requires not only necessary translation skills, but also certain tools that make such translation consistent and clear to the user. The key ones include computer-assisted translation software. Such software or platforms enable smooth and efficient translation based on previously translated texts. With such software translators can use glossaries. These are specialist thematic dictionaries compiled based on previous translation projects. Such glossaries are particularly useful when it comes to translation of manuals” [8].

Another issue with manuals is that they are supposed to be written either in the language of the country where a company is based, or in the language which is used by this company's employees at the proficiency level high enough to communicate fluently. In many cases the translator has to deal with an English text with another language grammar, structure, some words, and even mistakes. For

instance: *It is used to move the bundle previously and made the two other bundle. The telemeter who is given the absolute position, etc.*

Official letters do not pose much of a problem for the translator, except for specific terms common for technical translation in general. "Professionals, especially those in industry, are busy people... Many disciplines and specialties have a special language all their own. Technical terms are a helpful shorthand when you're communicating within the profession" [9].

Acts, on the other hand, turn out to be quite debatable [10]. One can find a lot of various documents with a wide range of text types nominated *Acts* in the Russian language. That is why the Russian word *Act* can be translated as *act*, *official notification*, and *report*. However, at some enterprises there are their own standards to be followed. At Volgograd Aluminium Smelter, for instance, all the Acts are translated as *certificates*. It is extremely confusing for the recipients of such a document since this title does not reflect its real content. Another peculiarity that should be taken into consideration is the way the company presents itself. For example, everyone knows that the type of a business entity should not be translated with the help of a foreign equivalent. However, some of the companies do that traditionally: *ООО "РУСАЛ ИТЦ"* is translated as "*RUSAL ETC*" LLC", even though LLC is a US-specific form of a private limited company.

Technical reports prepared by supervisors present a completely unique piece of document. There is one common problem in many non-English-speaking countries: "In these Oman based companies, translations are produced by different social agents (e.g. translators, managers, employees, chairpersons) who play a significant role in setting up new domestic laws, such as the Capital Market Authority (CMA), applying international standards and principles (e.g. IFRS), and introducing new terminology to Arab audiences" [11]. In our case, the two main types of reports are daily reports and weekly reports. Daily reports include the amount of work done during the day with some comments, the amount of manpower present on the site, as well as some complaints such as lack of tools or equipment. There is also a separate column for the work planned for the next working day, comments on the required tools, and the amount of manpower to conduct the job. The report is written in two languages, namely English and Russian, and signed by two parties, the client and the contractor. Weekly reports consist mainly of the information already mentioned in daily reports; however, the structure is a little bit different. A weekly report includes such data as average manpower per CW, summary of meetings, executed works, achieved progress plus total progress, quality control, acceptance and miscellaneous. This document is also prepared in two languages and signed by both, the client and the contractor. No matter how simple it may seem, even this kind of documents sometimes rise intercultural conflicts: "the periodic engineering report can become a source of conflict when North American engineers collaborate with colleagues abroad" [12], [13].

Taking into consideration the information stated above we come to the conclusion that the main peculiarities of technical translation (written speech mode) at the aluminium smelter consist of the translation standards approved by the smelter, special terminology that include colloquial and slang words, terminology typical for a particular company as well as the national specificity of the source text prepared by non-native speakers.

3. Conclusion

The terminology of the aluminium industry becomes a prominent feature of the technical translation in terms of this industry. However, the peculiarities of intercultural communication that were discussed in the present paper are characteristic not only of the technical translation in the aluminium industry, but also of technical translation in general. That is why we sum up the most important findings both for interpreting and translating activities.

3.1. For the oral speech mode

They are the following:

- norms and standards of the official phone communication in Russia differ from the norms and standards in Europe;
- ability to read foreign names partially defines the success of the phone communication;
- knowledge of the high-level meeting protocol is essential for the provision of smooth communication;
- lack of appropriate terminology on the job site puts the interpreter in the situation when they should be able to navigate quickly and freely in the framework of the discussed topic.

3.2. For the written speech:

They are the following:

- diversity of terms naming one and the same object or process forces the translator to juggle the multi-variation of terminology;
- translation standards approved by the smelter restrict the translation variation that can be potentially used by the translator;
- terminology typical for a particular company puts the translator into the situation, where they have to get familiar with the words usage in the limited time;
- national specificity of the source text prepared by the non-native speakers requires the adaptation of the structure in the translated text.

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