Welcome to our webinar

Translation Techniques

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Welcome to our webinar on “Negotiation Skills for Freelance Translators”. The broadcast will start shortly.

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Why does Moses have horns?

Exodus 34:29 stated that when Moses descended from Mt. Sinai, he had “rays of light” coming from his head. The Hebrew word can also mean “horns,” and Jerome chose the latter meaning. This error has been perpetuated to the present in many ways.
and poor old St. Jerome is the patron saint of translators!
The process of translating

Translation is a process in which the translator:

a) makes a number of decisions on how to interpret the source text (ST)

b) uses resources and applies technical skills to

c) re-expresses the message in the target text (TT)

Therefore, translation is a problem-solving process.
Are translators text interpreters!?! 

1\textsuperscript{st} scenario: You have access to the author. \textit{If you are lucky!}

2\textsuperscript{nd} scenario: You can interpret the text easily.

“The warmth of the afternoon lingers in the meadow in front of you, but behind you a cool fragrant breeze stirs the darkening woods. \textit{The sun, riding low in the sky}, floods the landscape \textit{with gold}. Soon it will paint a masterpiece over the western hills.”

The sun, riding low in the sky = the sun is setting → \textit{El sol poniente} innunda el paisaje de luz dorada. [\textit{Back-translation: the setting sun floods the landscape with golden light.}]
Are translators text interpreters!?!?

3rd scenario: Grunt work!

“The key policy challenge is to chart a risk-managed way through the changing future by taking a multi-pronged and phased approach.”

I think this means: “Policymakers should plan for the future.”
Skills needed in translation

In popular belief, to translate a person only needs:

- Reasonable knowledge of a foreign language
- And a few good dictionaries
- Excellent intuition

Other believe that only specialists like lawyers or scientists can translate.

Those who make these assertions fail to make a distinction between factual knowledge and procedural knowledge.
Factual and Procedural Knowledge

Factual knowledge is the knowledge of special fields.

- Special terminology
- Resources available
- Foreign languages

Factual knowledge is essential but not enough.

Procedural knowledge relates to methods or procedures to help the translator seize the meaning of the ST and re-express that meaning in the TT.
Procedural Knowledge

Basically, a translator has two options for translating:

1. Direct or literal translation
2. Oblique translation

There are several translation techniques available under each of these two options.
Procedural Knowledge

**Direct** translation techniques

1. Borrowing
2. Calque
3. Literal translation

**Oblique** translation techniques

4. Transposition
5. Modulation
6. Equivalence
7. Adaptation
DIRECT TRANSLATION

Possible because of parallel categories

1. Structural parallelism → grammatical categories

   *Are you there?* → ¿*Está usted ahí?* → Êtes-vous là?

2. Meta-linguistic parallelism → parallel concepts

   *The book* → *el libro* → *le livre*

   *The judge* → *el juez/la jueza* → *le juge/la juge*
DIRECT TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Borrowing

Borrowing is used:

1. To overcome a gap or lacuna (a new technical process, a new concept)

   *e.g.* dumping (*trade law*): There is no equivalent in Spanish or French

2. To create stylistic effect

   *e.g.* chic, déjà vu

3. To recreate the flavor of the source language (SL)

   *e.g.* margarita, tortillas, Pisco sour, sushi, sauerkraut, spaghetti

In the legal field, **Latin expressions** (*prima facie*, *nolo contendere*, *pro se*) are an excellent example of borrowing that has been made through time.
DIRECT TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Calque

(From the French verb "calquer") calques are a special kind of borrowing where a language borrows a word or an expression from another language and translates literally each of its elements.

Lexical (paranonyc) calque

Football → Fútbol → Balmier

4 X 4 (four wheel-drive car → cuatro por cuatro (4 X 4 = 16)
Should be: doble tracción [i.e. two sets of wheels are driven : front and back]

Structural calque

You are intelligent enough to realize that... →
Usted es suficientemente inteligente como para darse cuenta de que...
Usted es inteligente y puede darse de cuenta de que...
[Back-translation: You are intelligent and can realize that...]
DIRECT TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Calque

Lexical (paranonyc) calque

Problematic lexical calques for the novice translator:

Complexion/complexión
assault/asalto
drug/droga
facilities/facilidades
find guilty/encontrar culpable
grade/grado; misery/miseria
DIRECT TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Literal translation

Literal translation can be used when the languages share parallel structures and concepts. It is NOT a translation made word for word: literal translation carries the imprint of the original.

This technique is used when it is possible to transpose the source language (SL) message element by element into the target language (TL) and obtain a text that is idiomatic.

*The girl is sick* → *La niña está enferma* → *La fille est malade*

*How are you?* → *¿Cómo está usted?* → *Comment allez-vous?*

*Good morning* → *Buenos días* → *Bonjour*

Spanish syntax requires that we add “s” to both words, but this continues to be literal translation. It is just a case of syntax normalization.
When direct translation isn’t enough: Introduction to oblique translation
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION

There comes a time when direct translation techniques do not work because:

1. They are structurally impossible
2. The target language does not have a corresponding expression

Consequently, the generated text would have:

1. a different meaning
2. no meaning
3. a foreign structure
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION

Compare:

*I found a wallet* → *Yo encontré una billetera* → *J’ai trouvé un porte-monnaie.*

*I found a wallet containing $100* →
*Yo encontré una cartera conteniendo $100* →
*J’ai trouvé un porte-monnaie contenant $100*

To convey this message all three languages use a subject, verb, gerund, and an object, but...

The structure of the sentence is different in the three languages.

Direct translation is no longer possible.
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Transposition is the first technique or step towards oblique translation.

- Operates at the grammatical level
- Consists of the replacement of a word class by another word class without changing the meaning
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Transposition within the same language:

Reconstruction of the city is very important
Reconstructing the city is very important
To reconstruct the city is very important

From a stylistic view point the transposed expression does not have the same value, but the meaning is the same.

Transposed expressions are generally more literary in character. It is important to choose the form that best fits the context.
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

[Image of a sign with "CAUTION | ATTENTION" and "Walkway ends Fin du trottoir"]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

**Transposition** can be:

**Free**: When the transposition used depends mostly on context and desired effect.

*The course is of interest to all of us.* → *El curso nos interesa a todos (nosotros).*
[Back-translation: The course interests all of us.]

**Compulsory**: When only a transposition is acceptable.

Keep your voice up. → *Hable en voz alta*
[Back-translation: speak in a high voice]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Types of transposition

1. Adverb → verb
   *I only defended myself.* → *No hice sino defenderme.*
   [Back-translation: I did nothing but defend myself.]

2. Adverb → noun
   *I wrote to you early this year.* → *Le escribí a principios de año.*
   [Back-translation: I wrote to you at the beginning of the year.]

3. Adjective → noun
   *To achieve a stellar education system...* → *Para alcanzar la excelencia en el sistema educativo...*
   [Back-translation: To reach excellence in the education system...]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Types of transposition

4. **Possessive adjective → definite article**
   *Thoroughly enraged at this treatment, the creature [a scorpion] sped towards Leslie, her sting quivering with emotion.*

   → *Ciega de ira ante semejante trato, la criatura se lanzó hacia Leslie, con el aguijón temblando de furia.*

   [Back-translation: Blinded by rage at such treatment, the creature, bolted towards Leslie, the sting shaking of fury.]

5. **Verb or past participle → noun**
   *I intended to tell you the whole truth.*

   → *Mi intención fue (era) decirle toda la verdad.*

   [Back-translation: My intention was to tell you the whole truth.]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Types of transposition

6. **Adverb → noun**
   
   I wrote to you early this year. → Le escribí a principios de año.
   
   [Back-translation: I wrote to you at the beginning of the year.]

7. **General → Concrete**
   
   Teacher’s terms and conditions → Condiciones contractuales de los profesores.
   
   [Back-translation: Teachers contract conditions]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Types of transposition:

8. Interchange (permutación or transposición cruzada - Vásquez Ayora)

Swap of two lexical items with respect to form and function so that they switch their respective parts of the speech.

The burglars forced their way into the house → Los ladrones entraron a la casa por la fuerza.
[Back-translation: The burglars entered the house by the force]

She leapt to her feet → Se puso de pie de un salto.
[Back-translation: She got on her feet in one leap]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Transposition

Types of transposition:

8. **Interchange** (permutación or transposición cruzada - Vásquez Ayora)

For practice:

When he was locked up in jail he filed off his handcuffs.  
A woman friend of his smuggled him out.  
The gas bubbles through a graying black scum. 
The dolphin bobbed across the pool. 
As Mariner IV hurtles past Mars it will take some 20 pictures.
What is modulation?

A variation of the form of the message obtained by a change in the point of view.

Although the main characteristic of modulation is a change of point of view, it may involve also a change of grammatical categories.

It is used when the other techniques would generate a text that is grammatically correct, but unsuitable, not idiomatic, or awkward.
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

Modulation can be:

Free

*It is not difficult to show → Es fácil demostrar*
[Back-translation: it is easy to show]

*Remember → Recuerda, or → No olvides* (if it fits the context better) [Back-translation: Remember; do not forget]

Compulsory (fixed by use, listed in dictionaries: lexicalized)

Dress rehearsal → Ensayo general
[Back-translation: General rehearsal]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

Modulation is a technique that experienced translators use to produce an accurate and idiomatic text. It requires an excellent knowledge of both languages involved in the translation. This includes knowing the mechanics of the language. For example:

1. The manner in which negative and positive formulations are used in the two languages. *Do not enter.* → *Se prohibe entrar.* → *Défense d’entrer.*
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

2. The general register of the language. For example French and Spanish tend to use more “intellectual” terms than English.

   *Eye doctor* → *oftamólogo*; *bird watching* → *ornitología*; *dog show* → *exposición canina*

3. Use of the passive voice

4. The greater the structural difference between the two languages, the greater the challenges for the translator
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

There are many types of **modulation**

1. **Abstract** → **Concrete** or vice-versa

   *I haven’t heard a word from him* → *No he tenido noticias suyas*
   [Back-translation: I have not had news from him.]

2. **Means** → **Result** or vice-versa

   *I’ll drive you home* → *Te llevo a casa en [mi] auto*
   [Back-translation: I’ll take you to your house in [my] car]

3. **Substance** → **Object**

   *brain drain* → *éxodo de especialistas (double modulation)*
   [Back-translation: the exodus of experts]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

4. Term reversal

*This cage cannot hold an animal this size.* → *Un animal de ese tamaño no cabrá en esta jaula.*
[Back-translation: An animal this size will not fit in this cage.]

5. Negative contrast

*Make sure you call us every week.* → *No olvides llamarnos todas las semanas.*
[Back-translation: Don’t forget to call us all of the weeks.]

6. Active voice → passive voice (and vice-versa)

*The votes (in an election) were counted.* → *Se contaron los votos.* (impersonal form)
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

7. A part → the whole

The cathedral’s ceiling draws the eye as soon as one enters. → El techo de la catedral atrae la vista al entrar.
[Back-translation: The cathedral’s ceiling draws the view.]

8. A part → another part

I know the city like the back of my hand. → Conozco la ciudad como la palma de la mano.
[Back-translation: I know the city like the palm of my hand.]

Hand to hand combat → Combate cuerpo a cuerpo
[Back-translation: body to body combat.]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Modulation

9. **Space → Time**
   
   In grammar school I was very shy. → Cuando asistía a la primaria era muy tímido.
   
   [Back-translation: When I attended elementary school I was very shy.]

10. **Intervals and boundaries** (in time and space)
   
   In time: See you in a week → Nos vemos de hoy en ocho.
   [Back-translation: We’ll see each other in eight days from today.]

11. **Change of symbol**
   
   He earns an honest dollar. → Se gana la vida honradamente.
   [Back-translation: He earns an honest living.]
12. **Explanatory modulation**

like a *deer in headlights* → *Quedarse paralizado* [Back translation: remain paralyzed]

Statistics confirm that by the age of 14, fewer than six in ten students are in *age-appropriate* classes. → Las estadísticas confirman que a la edad de 14 años, menos de seis de cada diez estudiantes están en las clases *correspondientes a su edad*.

[Back-translation: Statistics confirm that by the age of 14, fewer than six in ten students are in classes in corresponding to their age.]
12. Explanatory modulation
In short, modulation is the technique that leads to a solution that makes the reader - or the translator – exclaim, “Yes, that’s exactly what you would say.”
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Equivalence

Used to render expressions using different stylistic and structural methods.

Most equivalences are fixed, and include idioms, clichés, proverbs, nominal or adjectival phrases, onomatopoeia, etc.

Stop splitting hairs → Deja de buscarle cinco patas al gato
[Back-translation: Stop looking for five legs in a cat]

Challenge: To recognize that the expression to be translated is an idiom / proverb; to know the equivalent expression in the T.L.

Equivalence also refers to fixed (lexicalized) terms, such as terminology of a field of knowledge.
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Adaptation

Used when the limit to translation is been reached, i.e. when a simple translation would not work or it would produce a result that is shocking in the target language and culture.

Titles of books, movies, and characters often fit into this category

*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* → *Dos hombres y un destino.* [Back-translation: Two men and a destiny]

*The Sound of Music* → *Sonrisas y lágrimas*  
[Back-translation: Smiles and tears]

*C3PO and R2D2* [androids in Star Wars] → *C3PO y Arturito* (phonetic adaptation)  
[Back-translation of Arturito = Little Arthur]
OBLIQUE TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES: Adaptation
REFERENCES


• Meta : Journal des traducteurs, deals with all aspects of translation and interpretation: translation studies (theories of translation), teaching translation, interpretation research, stylistics, comparative terminological studies, computer-assisted translation (machine translation), documentation. Full-text articles, free of charge in many cases, are featured in the following link: 
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Questions?

Thank you!

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