

# MULTIMEDIAL TRANSLATION

(The future at the present tense)

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Revision is essential for maintaining the quality of translation [...] self-revision – a euphemism for no revision- is both useful and inevitable as a consequence of pressure of work and considerations of cost-effectiveness. However, there has been a drift towards abusing the system and documents that are in principle unsuitable for self-revision are nevertheless self-revised. (Report of IAMLADP Working Group on the improvement of practices in the translation process, IAMLADP/1997R.10/Rev.1).

Quality was a question of what the Organization could afford (IAMLADP Working Group on the Translation process, 10 February 1995).

As we advance cautiously but deliberately in the process of rationalizing and updating our methods of work, we are aware at every step of the fact that the quality of translation should be the ruling

criterion. (Oral report by the Director of the Translation and Editorial Division to (UNNY) to the Committee on Conferences on Quality Improvement).

## O. Introduction

Television is tenaciously invading millions of homes, in all forms, open and fee-paying, conventional and satellite, with an ever-increasing need for film dubbing and subtitling to make it accessible to different peoples of the world. Sophisticated picture sounds system are fully explored and exploited, thanks to the invention of CD-ROMS.

The advent of Internet has given new dimensions to the information superhighways and international communication. These phenomena have an undeniable impact on social life and have engendered a cross-cultural hybridation all over the world intensified by globalization, at the expense of multiculturalism and multilingualism. A universal culture is thus

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taking shape, with a certain imbalance<sup>(1)</sup> created by what some have termed as a cultural assault or cultural imperialism.

The digital and computer technology is opening new horizons for translation in the multimedial environment, which deserve to be studied and assessed. An attempted is here made to depict the situation regarding this significant aspect of multimedial translation.

## 1. Multimedial translation

### 1.1 . Current trends

Multimedial translation covers a wide range of subjects : mainly, dubbling, subtitling, opera, theater and music.<sup>(2)</sup> Computer applications constitue a very important and interested field for the study of multimedial translation. The first stumbling block faced is to define multimedial translation and demonstrate the peculiarity and *raison d'être* of multimedial translation studies as a discipline in its own right. The term "multimedia" may be taken to mean any way of conveying meaning by more than one semiotic system [...]. When speaking of multimedial translation, we usually refer to dealing with 'multimedia texts' meaning products in which one of the semiotic vehicles is language and to the treatment of language in such texts, but usually we do

not touch upon such relations as translating a tune into dancing or linguistic description into a mime<sup>(3)</sup> «It has been also argued that «multimedia is sometimes linked to interactive television and Internet».<sup>(4)</sup>

The idea of multimedial translation seems to be a culmination and a logical consequence of recent translation theories. The discussion elements for such a type of translation are massively concentrated on "dubbing" and "subtitling". Except for documentary films, which most probably contain scientific or specialized terminology concepts and therefore necessitate standardization<sup>(5)</sup>, most of the intended multimedial translations rather belong to the literary genre (theater, opera, filmed novels, etc.)<sup>(6)</sup> It is also asserted that «the easiest and most sensible point of departure would, as in Translation Studies, be the descriptive branch»<sup>(4)</sup> This goes directly in line with the tendency of the manipulation school theory and the polysystem theory.

Besides the artistic and technical knowledge and tools which are required, multimedial translation rely on the following:<sup>(4)</sup>

1.1.1. Culture and the cultural component and translation as an intertranscultural communication exercise

and a cultural reproduction. Therefore, « in translation, the information has to be structured in a way to fit the way reality is constructed in the respective culture ». Translation is viewed as a « communication of culture ». Multimedia translation shows more prominently and concretely the vital importance of cultural transfer as the target user is directly confronted with the end-product.

1.1.2 Skopostheory :multimedia translation is designed to serve specific purposes. It is necessary to resort to domestication, adaptation or localization, i.e. adaptation to local requirements, expansion, explication and substitution and to a « constrained » or «subordinated» translation. Interpretative theory (Paris School) and the notions of accuracy and fidelity in translation are raised.

1.1.3 Discourse analysis and text linguistics (textuality and intertextuality).

1.1.4 The interdisciplinary approach is here re-emphasized. The only difference between Translation Studies, as generally perceived, and multimedial translation studies as presented, is the utilization of extratextual media, mainly digital technology and Internet, and other tools, like music. This may be the main argument behind the statement that "multimedia

translation is more of an art than a technique", although this is arguable as this kind of translation may be of technical or scientific character, i.e. documentary films or demonstration films. The same dichotomy exists in translation Studies.

Although, it is suggested to add multimedial translation to other types (literary, etc.), this kind of translation is a step further in the direction of the manipulation theory, which gives the translator a free hand, to the extent that even the picture may be tempered with in the general context of cultural adaptation.

Finally, it should be noted that norms are still to be determined in order to assess quality also in multimedial translation as conceived until now.

## 1.2 Computer-assisted translation

The UN System is seriously embarking on the utilization of the computer facilities and « the profession of translator is undergoing considerable changes... » At the United Nations, <sup>(7)</sup> translation is standing at the threshold of a new period when traditional methods of work are expected to be fundamentally changed "<sup>(7)</sup>.

One the salient features of the UN situation is that, traditionally, there are no

specific norms and rules to regulate the translation activity within the System and that most of UN translators did not transit through translation schools and have not been academically trained to undertake the demanding and hard job of transferring knowledge and concepts in a plurilingual setting (see Didaoui 1995), although they are recruited after passing a competitive examination and normally must thereafter go through a probationary period leading to permanent appointment, in principle.

"Recently, in some services, a new practice has been instituted, namely assigning to the junior staff; 'mentors' from among the senior staff who follow their individual progress and provide them with guidance as needed".<sup>(7)</sup>

There is a conspicuous need for the UN translators to keep abreast of developments in the sphere of translation theory. It is gratifying, however, that "it was agreed that it would be desirable for organizations to organize a range of training activities to enhance the quality and efficiency".<sup>(8)</sup> to that end, it has been recommended to hold seminars on translation techniques, which «should focus on concrete issues and feature lectures/papers by recognized outside specialists on

translation and revision theory and practice<sup>(9)</sup> and thematic workshops led by experts; including outside experts<sup>(9)</sup>, dealing, for example, with law and legal terminology, economics and economic terminology and administration and administrative terminology, thus putting emphasis on terminology as a major ingredient of translation. In addition, it has recommended to organize a system-wide round table on translation and management training for managers of translation services.<sup>(10)</sup>

But, due to the absence of norms and rules, notably for determining quality standards, to the workshop nature of the whole exercise and to the lack of interest manifested by the great majority of UN translators in the theoretical aspects of translation, the in-house training remains limited in scope.<sup>(11)</sup>

This applies to the classical methods generally followed until now. However, the situation is even compounded in the emerging situation created by the gradual introduction of technological innovations and other modes of translations. Unfortunately, and for financial reasons, quantity seems to be favoured at the detriment of quality and the ground is not fully paved in order to cope with the new

requirements, another factor for a further deterioration of quality.

With the shortage of regular staff, the overlapping of document deadlines and the increase of contractual translation whereby documents are outsourced and self-revised by external translations, quality control through revision has enormously diminished and self-revision has clearly become a dominant trait, although it is recommended that «the expansion of self-revision should not affect the quality of translation».<sup>(12)</sup> In addition, and for quality control purposes, a number of measures has been taken to remedy that situation. Therefore, an alternative revision type is implemented, namely «peer review», «checking» or «mutual revision», as translations are reviewed or checked by other self-revising translators, who mutually revise each other's work. But, this palliative method still needs to be regulated and productivity should be determined in this case. Most of the reviewed are used for contractual translation, as «they represent a very valuable asset», but financial limitations are imposed. Another sine qua non condition for maintaining quality in contractual translation is to have a solid and sufficient core of permanent staff and

strategic vision, in order to ensure training and replacement. Moreover, «contractual translators should be recruited as in-house freelances on a short-term basis so that their skills and their potential for self-revision can be assessed, and to enable them to familiarize themselves with the organization's terminology and methods of work».<sup>(13)</sup>

While there is a consensus on the necessity of ensuring and maintaining quality<sup>(14)</sup>, facts seem to contradict that and some participants in the meeting held on 27 February 1997 by the IAMLADP Working Group on improvement of Practices in the Translation Process had even "discovered substandard translations, of which they had been quite unaware, circulating as official documents of their organizations as a result of divisions making their own arrangements with external translators".(see report of the WG,p.2).

A strict and systematic coordination and combination coordination of different types of translation is therefore absolutely necessary, with adequate resources and fully qualified and trained translators. On the other hand, two main trends have been made possible by the computer applications. They draw upon satellite

technology and Internet facilities and fall within the category of teletranslation :mainly, remote translation, which consists of servicing meetings and conferences from Headquarters and home translation, whereby regular staff are allowed to stay at home and receive documents and send them back electronically to workplace. These modes will be facilitated by the Optical Disks System (ODS) and the utilization of interactive computer system for machine-aided translation purposes.

Teletranslators, as freelancers, will constitute the main bulk of contractual translators in the near future, but a lot of preparation is needed to face new requirements.<sup>(15)</sup>

The utilization of the ODS will also give contractual translators free access to multilingual terminological data bases, at Internet. Permanent translators can already "access electronic versions of terminology bulletins and notes issued at Headquarters, UNOG and UNOV, and a wealth of terminology material made available in electronic form by UN agencies and non-UN organizations such as the European Union, OECD and the Council of Europe under a sharing arrangement agreed to at the 1996 session of the Inter – Agency Meeting on Language

Arrangements, Documentation and Publications".<sup>(7)</sup>

Machine-Assisted Translation (MAT) is not meant to be fully automated translation, as tests have shown that this operation is not-cost-effective, in view of the necessitated heavy post-editing. MAT is «designed to perform a more modest function, which is to automate, through the use of text banks, also called "translation memories" and of terminology databases, part of the preparatory work involved in any translation, namely the identification and retrieval of previously translated material and of relevant terminology"<sup>(7)</sup>. Software packages are under study by a working Group Technological Innovations. Translators, once equipped with up-to-date software and state –of- the art workstations, would be given, through the ODS, not only full texts or official documents but also «suggested translations of segments of text already stored in the "memory " as well as electronic dictionaries"<sup>(7)</sup>.

The importance of terminology and phraseology is here reiterated.

### 3. Conclusion

The future configuration of the translation profession has already began with the advances achieved in the domain

of the computer technology and communication industry. Consequently, the modern workstation is being rapidly developed and may well concretize and become fully operational by the year 2000. This kind of translation will certainly be one of the major fields of multimedial translation as it will revolutionize the traditional translation process.

It should be noted, however, that the technological innovations are introduced by the United Nations in its translations services primarily for financial purposes, and, while much emphasis is put on quality assurance, the measures taken are de facto affecting quality. One of the reasons is that the transnational process, either in the classical way as practised until now or as projected, is not regulated and systematic and is left to individual efforts. Moreover, the majority of the UN translators has never been trained in

translation institutes and can be rather categorized as bilinguals who have acquired the profession as by intuition, after exercising a job in which a transfer between languages is operated under the general principle of translation.

Finally, translation is a very important sector in the multicultural environment of the United Nations and translators are indispensable mediators. While financial considerations are to be duly taken into account and cost-efficiency should be a main goal, the results should not be a totally counter-productive fast-food translation. Meticulous and rational preparations should be made for the future, which is already here. Multimedial translation needs to be governed by well-defined norms and carefully monitored, even more than the traditional translation. It is a big challenge.

## Endnotes

- <sup>(1)</sup> At internet, English at present is used at 70 %, Germanic languages 11 %, Roman languages 9% and Japanese at 7%. Moreover, there is a disproportion in the exchange of audio-visual material between the EU and USA, the 3.2 billion ecus against 6.2 billion ecus (Gambier, 1997)
- <sup>(2)</sup> The first Seminar on Multimedia and Translation was held in Misano Adriatico, Italy, on 26 and 27 September 1997. It was devoted almost exclusively to those subjects and heavily oriented towards literature.
- <sup>(3)</sup> Pre-seeding, Multimedial and Translation, Misano Adriatico, 26-27 September 1997.
- <sup>(4)</sup> IAMLADP/1997/R.2.
- <sup>(5)</sup> The problem of acceptability and standard setting may be persistently raised in the case several versions of a language are used, for Arabic- and Spanish-speaking countries, for exemple.
- <sup>(6)</sup> This is a predominant feature of the pre-seedings.(see note 4)
- <sup>(7)</sup> Oral Report by the Director of the Translation and Editorial Division (UNNY) to the Committee on conferences on quality improvement (25 August 1997).
- <sup>(8)</sup> IAMLADP/1997/R.10/Rev.1, p6-7.
- <sup>(9)</sup> Ibid, p7.
- <sup>(10)</sup> Ibid. p.8
- <sup>(11)</sup> Chinese and Russian translators were normally trained in Russia and china at specialized institutes and were assigned to the United Nations for practice. At present, programmes seem to be limited to the improvement of language skills. For examples, special courses were organized at the King Fahd School of Translation (19), the University of St.Petersbourg in Russia and the University of Amman (Summer 1997)
- <sup>(12)</sup> IAMLADP/1997/R.10/Rev.1, p.4
- <sup>(13)</sup> Ibid p.6
- <sup>(14)</sup> The question of quality was raised on many occasions in the Committee of conferences, and has been the subject of general Assembly resolutions (49-221 B and 50/206E), the highest standards of quality established by the UN charter are generally not attained, although the committee noted in its report (A/51/32 para.100), that "the progress achieved in improving the quality of translation in general and of Arabic in particular was praiseworthy".
- <sup>(15)</sup> A two-semester joint University of Vienna-UNOV course on computer-Assisted Translation and Terminology Management is launched in conjunction of the Fifth Seminar on Translation Theory and Applications.