HANDOUT 5. TRANSLATION ERRORS

Key points:
- Definitions & classification of “errors”
- “Translation errors”
- Common models of error analysis in translation
- ATA error marking frame

Required background reading:

1. ERROR ANALYSIS

1.1. What Is Meant by ‘Error’

- Before the 1960s, when the behaviouristic viewpoint of language was the dominant one, learner errors were considered as something undesirable, and making an error could be undesirable to proper language learning processes. According to this school of thought, *errors* are due to the inadequacy in teaching methods. With a ‘perfect’ teaching method, errors would never be committed.

- Corder (1967) was the first to advocate the importance of errors in the language learning process. He suggested that by classifying the errors that learners made, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language acquisition process by inferring the strategies that second language learners were using.

- According to Corder’s definition (1967), which is partially traced back to the Chomskian dichotomy between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’, mistakes are adventitious, random errors in performance due to memory lapses or physical state; but errors, on the other hand, are systematic and reflect a defect in knowledge (i.e., linguistic competence). According to this definition, while a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip, errors refer to idiosyncrasies in the interlanguage of the learner, which are direct manifestations of a system within which a learner is operating at the time.
Another definition of errors is suggested by Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) who claimed that the term ‘error’ can be used to ‘refer to any deviation from a selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or causes of the deviation might be’.

1.2. The classification of errors

Besides the problems of definition, the classification of errors also draws a lot of attention from researchers. Burt and Kiparsky (1974:73) distinguish between global errors and local errors. A global error is one which involves ‘the overall structure of a sentence’ and a local error is one which affects ‘a particular constituent’. On the global level, errors are classified by Corder (1973:277) into four main categories: omission of some required element, addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element, selection of an incorrect element, and misordering of elements. Levels of language can be considered within each category: phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax and discourse.

Using the source as the standard for categorising, errors can be categorised into interlingual errors and intralingual errors (Richards, 1971). Errors found to be traceable to first language interference are termed interlingual. A large number of similar errors, however, are found to be committed by second language learners regardless of their first language. These are termed intralingual errors. They are often analysed to see what sorts of strategies are being used by the learners. Intralingual errors include: overgeneralisation, simplification, communication-based and induced errors.

**ERROR ANALYSIS IN TRANSLATION**

1.3. Translation Errors

Neubert (1995) describes a translation error as:

> What rightly appears to be linguistically equivalent may very frequently qualify as ‘translationally’ nonequivalent. And this is so because the complex demands on adequacy in translation involve subject factors and transfer conventions that typically run counter to considerations about ‘surface’ linguistic equivalence.

(1995:415)
This statement partially describes the complication and difficulty in defining and identifying translation errors. In the case of second language learners, identifying translation errors is harder, as translation errors may be mixed up with linguistic errors.

- Sager (1983) agrees that the most serious errors are those resulting from the incompetence in a second language. He also claims that in the field of written translation, errors resulting from misinterpretation of the text are one of the two major concerns of quality assessment.


1. Inappropriate renderings, which affect the understanding of the source text. These are divided into eight categories: countersense, faux sense, nonsense, addition, omission, unresolved extralinguistic references, loss of meaning and inappropriate linguistic variation (register, style, dialect, etc.).

2. Inappropriate renderings, which affect expression in the target language. These are divided into five categories: spelling, grammar, lexical items, text and style.

3. Inadequate renderings, which affect the transmission of either the main function or secondary function of the source text.

- Errors in translation influence the quality of the final product and the degree of miscomprehension from the reader. Accordingly, translation errors are often judged based on their importance and frequency.

1.4. Models of Error Analysis in Translation

- There is no unified framework to classify translation errors. One list suggested by the American Translation Association (ATA), is intended for standard error marking and explanation of work done by professional translators. In this framework, there are 22 types of errors which should be used as criteria for error marking and grading:

  1) Incomplete passage, 2) Illegible handwriting, 3) Misunderstanding of the original text, 4) Mistranslation into target language, 5) Addition or omission, 6) Terminology, word

- Although this list tries to include all different types of possible errors coming up from error corpus of translators, the problem of using this list for error marking is that it seems to focus more on the linguistic aspect of the translation tasks. It focuses more on sentence-level errors, rather than text-level errors. This list, therefore, should be used only in the context where translators are language learners, who tend to focus more on the linguistic aspect of the task. As for professional translators or translators who receive professional training, this list fails to reflect a certain level of their skill, as it does not take other kinds of errors, i.e., discoursal and text-level, into discount.

- Another marking system which also deals with translation errors is the one used by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters in Australia (NAATI). The NAATI marking system is based on the following criteria

1. Mistranslation
2. Inappropriate vocabulary
3. Incorrect punctuation
4. Incorrect grammar
5. Incorrect spelling
6. Distortion of meaning
7. Unidiomatic usage
8. Stylistic infelicities

- Gentile (1997) claims that evaluation criteria are usually vague and the specific meanings are often left to the interpretation of each individual. He also comments further on the difficulty of achieving standardisation across language pairs.
ATA frame for standard error marking

(Criteria and description of each error)

1. **Incomplete Passage**: an unfinished passage is not graded. Missing titles, headings, or sentences within a passage may be marked as one or more errors of omission.

2. **Illegible**: Candidates are instructed to use pen or dark pencil and to write firmly enough to produce legible photocopies.

3. **Misunderstanding of Original Text**: This category applies when the grader can see - usually by back-translating the target-language text that the error arises from misreading a word, for example, or misinterpreting the syntax of a sentence.

4. **Mistranslation into Target Language**: The meaning of the original text is not conveyed properly in the target language. Mistranslations can also involve the choice of verb tense and mood.

5. **Addition or Omission**: Something is inserted that is not clearly expressed in the original text, or something essential to the meaning is left out.

6. **Terminology, Word Choice**: This error often involves terms used in various technical, legal, and financial contexts.

7. **Register**: Language level, degree of formality should be preserved in the translation; examples of errors include using everyday words instead of medical terms (spit instead of saliva), making a legal document sound journalistic, tu/usted, anachronisms, and culturally inappropriate expressions.

8. **Too Freely Translated**: Candidates are asked to translate the meaning and intent of the source text, not to rewrite or improve upon it. The grader will carefully compare the translation to the source text. If a "creative" rendition changes the meaning, an error will be marked. If recasting a sentence -i.e., altering the order of its major elements-destroys the flow, changes the emphasis, or obscures the author’s intent, an error may be marked.

9. **Too Literal, Word-for-word**: Translations that follow the source text exactly may
result in awkward, often incorrect renditions. Translate literally when it works, but not at the expense of clarity and natural syntax.

10. **False Cognate**: In some language pairs, this is the most common type of error. Examples from English and Spanish: officials (funcionarios) translated as oficiales; application [form] (solicitud) translated as aplicacion; actualmente (presently, currently, nowadays) translated as actually.

11. **Indecision, Giving More than One Option**: Graders will not choose the right word for you. Even if both options are correct, an error will be marked. More points are deducted if one or both options are incorrect.

12. **Inconsistency, Same Term Translated Differently**: In general, a term that is used consistently in the source text should be translated consistently into the target language. Conversely, if the source text uses different words for the same idea interchangeably, the candidate should try to come up with a similar variety in the target language.

13. **Ambiguity**: If the meaning is clear in the source text but ambiguous in the translation, an error may be marked.

14. **Grammar**: Grammatical errors include lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect verb forms, incorrect case of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives, and use of an adjective where an adverb is needed.

15. **Syntax** (Phrase/ Clause/ Sentence/ Structure): Errors in this categories include sentence fragments, improper modification, lack of parallelism, and unnatural word order. If incorrect syntax changes or obscures the meaning, the error is more serious.

16. **Punctuation**: The conventions of the target language regarding punctuation should be followed, including those governing the use of quotation marks, commas, semicolons, and colons. Incorrect or unclear paragraphing is counted as an error.

17. **Spelling**: In all languages, a spelling error that causes confusion about the intended meaning is more serious (e.g., principle/ principal, systemic/ systematic, peddle/ pedal,
dear/ deer, bear/ bare, sight/ site, tasa/ taza, vasto/ basto). Context is a factor as well.

18. **Accents and other Diacritical Marks**: If incorrect or missing diacritical marks obscure the meaning, the error is more serious.

19. **Case (Upper/ Lower)**: The convention of the TL should be followed. Example: One Hundred Years of Solitude (correct English title).

20. **Word form**: The root of the word is correct, but the wrong form is used. Example in English: *The product has been tampered with and is no longer safety.*

21. **Usage**: Errors include the use of the wrong preposition or misuse of a grammatical form. Examples: take vs. make a walk, married to vs. married with, etc.

22. **Style**: If the source text is characterized by a distinctive manner of expression - flowery, staccato, conversational, instructional - this should be reflected in the translation.
APPLICATION OF THE ATA FRAME

- Linguistic errors
- Comprehension errors
- Translation errors
- Formatting errors

Based on the description of the ATA Frame above, find the errors in the following pairs of sentences and/or texts and then correct them. Explain your answers.

LINGUISTIC ERRORS

1. WORD FORM

ST: Trẻ suy dinh dưỡng có nguy cơ mắc bệnh sốt cao hơn trẻ bình thường.

TT: Malnourished children have higher risk of catching measles than others.

2. GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

=> Lack of S-V agreement, incorrect verb form, incorrect case of N, Pron, Adj, Adv, etc

ST1: Trông cô này có vẻ nghiêm khắc.

TT1: She looks seriously.

ST2: Hôm qua trời mưa to quá nên không chỉ sinh viên mà cả giáo viên cũng đến muộn.

TT2: It rained dogs and cats yesterday so not only the students but also the teacher were late.

3. SYNTACTIC ERRORS (Phrase, clause, sentence structure)

- Fragments, improper modification, lack of parallelism, unnatural word order.

- If the incorrect syntax changes the meaning => more serious

ST: Hà Nội còn bao nhiêu vấn đề nóng bỏng: từ giao thông cò tắc, điện nước pháp phụ, cơ sở hạ tầng yếu kém, can có chỉ lải ưu tiên đất chuyển “nói ngọng” lên bàn nghị sự?
(Vietnamnet)

TL: Hanoi remains burning issues from high traffic, power is not fixed, weak infrastructure. Why do we put the “lisp disease” on the table?

4. USAGE

- Wrong preposition, collocations

ST1: Đồ谤 báo ở vùng lũ lụt đang hết sức cần sự giúp đỡ của chúng ta.

TT1: People in the flood-stricken areas seriously need our help.

ST2: Cô ta mới cuối ông chủ của mình cách đây 2 ngày.

TT2: She got married with her boss 2 weeks ago.

5. STYLE – REGISTER

- Formal, informal, flowery, staccato, etc.

ST: Ông có muốn dùng gì không? (Restaurant)

TT: Do you want to eat anything?

COMPREHENSION ERRORS

1. MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE TEXT

ST1: “Như khôn gắn một xúc động lớn lao.”

TT1: “Wisdom blocks strong emotions.”

ST2: “The Temple Church survived eight centuries of political turmoil, the Great Fire of London...”

TT2: “Nhà thờ đã tồn tại qua tâm thế kì họi loan về chính trị, cuộc khởi nghĩa Ngọn lửa vị đại ở London...”

2. AMBIGUITY

ST: The lack of brains hindered recent research about human’s psychology.

TT: Việc thiếu não gây cản trở cho những nghiên cứu gần đây về tâm lý con người.
TRANSLATION ERRORS

1. Mistranslation into the TL – Addition and/or Omission

ST: The works of literature engraved on each stele in ancient Chinese praise the merits of the King and cite the reason for holding Royals exams. Also included on the stele were the number of candidates and the functions of the mandarins whose task it was to organize the exams and engrave the names and birthplaces of successful candidates.

TT: The works of literature engraved on each stele in ancient Chinese praise the merits of the King and cite the reason for holding Royals exams. Also included on the stele were the number of candidates and the functions of the mandarins whose task it was to organize the exams and engrave the names and birthplaces of successful candidates.

2. Terminology – Inconsistency

ST: “South Korea enacts ‘chemical castration’ law to punish paedophiles.”

TT: Hàn Quốc ban hành luật ‘thần hóa học’ để trừng trị tội phạm ấu dâm.”

3. Too freely translated vs Too literal

ST1: “Black Fiber: - Strong hold; - Smooth finish. I really like it – awesome hold, a lot of fibers, so I have a lot of extra volume.” (An example of job on gengo.com)


ST2: Your Distressed Jeans May Be Harboring A Dirty Secret (The Huffington Post)

TT2: Mắc Quản Bố Trung Quốc Để Nhiễm Bệnh Nan Y – Dân Trí

4. Indecision

ST: I booked a room in Hanoi Hibiscus Hotel, it instantly became my “home away from home” place to stay. (Huffington Post)

TT: Tôi đã đặt một phòng tại khách sạn Hanoi Hibiscus, và nơi đây nhanh chóng trở thành “mái nhà xa xứ”/ “ngôi nhà thứ hai” của tôi.
1. Incomplete Passage

2. Illegible

3. Punctuation – diacritical marks
   - Quotation marks, commas, semicolons, colons
   - Incorrect or unclear paragraphing

ST: Nồng độ khí tài vượt quá mức cho phép nhiều lần vi nhiều nhà máy còn sử dụng công nghệ lạc hậu.
TT: The concentration of dust has far exceeded the acceptable limit; because out-dated technology is still in use.

4. Spelling

SL1: Giết thịt trâu, bò ai nói gì đâu, tại sao cử mùi cảm với việc thịt chó? (Vietnamnet)
TL1: Why do people have no comment on buffalo-butchery but give fierce opposition to dog-slaughter?

SL2: When the tree is fallen, everyone run to it with his axe.
TL2: Đầu đổ bò leo. (wikicite)

5. Case (upper/lower)
   - The convention of the TL should be followed

ST1: Chi phí của đám cưới Hoàng gia cũng là một trong những chủ đề được quan tâm và nhắc tới nhiều. (Vnexpress)
TT1: The expenditure for the royal wedding is one of the biggest concerns.

ST2: In this challenge you have 24 hours on Thursday, October 20, 2016 to park farther away.
TT2: Trong thử thách này bạn có 24 giờ vào Thứ Năm, ngày 20 Tháng 10, 2016 để đỗ xe xa hơn