

■ Gained in translation

Science at the multilingual crossroads

Einem Text in einer fremden Sprache Gehör verschaffen, wird oft genug einen neuen Text eher als eine Übersetzung im landläufigen Sinne verlangen.

Jürgen Habermas (*1929)

According to Habermas, making a text heard in a foreign language will often require a new text rather than a translation in the ordinary sense [1]. Among translation theorists, there has been debate about when a text is still a translation and when it is the result of a different textual operation. While this question may be of academic interest, it has little merit for modern translation practice—where translation comes in many shapes and forms and covers a wide range of diverse activities, including adapting or rewriting a text in the target language to reach a specific audience.

How the translator goes about transposing a text will depend on which purpose the text is to fulfil in the target culture. Should the translation be recognised as such (something which has been referred to as ‘overt’ translation [2]), or should the translation not read like one, effacing any differences between the source and target cultures (analogously referred to as ‘covert’ translation [2])? This will either be explicitly specified by the client—or it will be implicit from the type of text to be translated.

The feature article in this issue’s translation section is a good example of a text calling for a ‘covert’ translation, one which is specifically tailored to the target reader’s situation. The article shows translation to be a complex of decisions rather than mere linguistic recoding. Language is not the goal of translation, it is only a necessary instrument. Language competence, such as knowledge of

grammar, correct usage, and appropriate terminology, is important, but it is not what translation is about.

The purpose of an informed consent document (ICD) is to enable potential study participants to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. To achieve this, the text will have to be adapted to whatever it is a German, Spanish, Dutch, or Polish patient should know about studies performed in their specific countries, which may differ substantially in their cultural and social backgrounds, legal requirements, health care systems, infrastructures, beliefs, religions, and value systems.

The English-language ICD, therefore, basically serves as raw material for the translation. We read that the target-culture recipient has to be addressed differently than his source-language counterpart, units of measurement have to be converted and country-specific legal provisions added. Icons, images, or even entire graphical layouts may have to be adapted to the conventions prevailing in the target culture to facilitate understanding.

Consisting of a series of decisions to be taken, then, translation ideally includes all parties involved in either producing or receiving a text, e.g., the author (or the party commissioning the translation), the translator, and the reader. The translation process will be most successful if based on teamwork—the magic behind many a successful project. In this, translation is no exception.

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References:

1. Habermas J. Zur Problematik des Sinnverstehens in den empirisch-analytischen Handlungswissenschaften. In: Habermas J (author). *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*; 1985.
2. House J. *Translation Quality Assessment. A Model Revisited*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag; 1997.

METM—An abbreviation translators should know

Mediterranean Editors and Translators, or MET for short, is an association of language service providers (LSPs) who work mainly into or with English. So far, there have been 5 MET meetings, or METMs: METM05 and METM06 in Barcelona, METM07 in Madrid, METM08 in Split, and METM09 in Barcelona. In addition to plenary and poster sessions, METMs offer a wide range of workshops relevant to LSPs. Although not specifically directed to medical language professionals, many of the MET workshops do have a medical spin.

Last year’s METM was entitled *Translation, Editing, Writing: Broadening the Scope and Setting Limits*, reflecting the wide variety of services provided by language experts. In this, as the conference title aptly suggested, we are constantly challenged to not only expand our thinking, knowledge, and skills but also to define our personal limits. A number of reports on METM09 have been published, each

providing a personal, insightful, and entertaining account of the meeting and giving it broad coverage [1-4].

METM10 in Tarragona, Spain

METM10, which will take place from **28–30 October 2010** in Tarragona, Spain, bears the title *Facilitating knowledge transfer—through editing, translation, coaching*, with workshops covering topics as diverse as practical statistics (regression and multivariate analyses), editing and revising, correct referencing, plagiarism, effective paraphrasing, or genre analysis of research articles.

MET—a knowledge-sharing and peer-teaching network. METM—an abbreviation to remember.

For more information, go to <http://www.metmeetings.org>.

References:

1. Griffin-Mason S. Meeting up with MET. *ITI Bulletin* 2010;32-3.
2. Eddy K. The right balance. *The Linguist* 2010;49:25-6.
3. Patten I. Mediterranean Editors and Translators Meeting (METM) 2009: Broadening the Scope and Setting Limits. *Science Editor* 2010;33:84-6.
4. de Jager M. Translation, editing, writing: broadening the scope and setting limits. *European Science Editing* 2010;36:15-6.