

International Conference; Meaning in Translation: Illusion of Precision, MTIP2016, 11-13 May
2016, Riga, Latvia

Aspects of military-related text translation from English into Latvian

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Abstract

The paper aims to highlight some aspects of special text translation in English-Latvian language pair, to discuss some misconceptions associated with translation of military and military-related texts, to analyze specific competences a translator of these texts should possess as well as to illustrate potential translation challenges faced by student translators.

Translating military and military-related texts, translators should develop not only advanced linguistic, but also comprehensive thematic competence to be able to deal with translation problems. Competence in translation of military-related texts may become a competitive advantage for student translators specializing in various fields of language for special purposes.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of MTIP2016

Keywords: Military-related texts; military terms; false friends; borrowing; calque.

1. Introduction

Military texts have been traditionally seen as a very special type of texts composed, translated and disseminated by professionals among professionals. Nowadays, in view of the current geopolitical situation, there is a growing public concern about the issues of national and transnational security. Publicity ensured to military events, military education and training and to military missions by mass media, as well as awareness and interest policymakers take in the matters of funding, support, authority sharing and consequences of military operations have conditioned the growth of the volume of military-related discourse. It has led to dissemination of military terms and the elements of professional

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military jargon into the publicist and news media as well as everyday communication, thus influencing the very nature of civil-military relations. One of the challenges associated with the influx of military terms into the public information space is potential misinterpretation and misuse of these lexical items by non-professionals, which may lead to ambiguity and communication failure.

Global security challenges and closer integration of pan-European and pan-Atlantic military structures have determined the growing need for semantically precise and pragmatically accurate translation of military documents, technical manuals, and regulations, as content precision and fidelity are the key concerns in translating military texts. Thus, there is an increasing demand for translators specializing in rendition of military texts, who not only have advanced thematic, terminological and intercultural competences, but also are aware of the current issues and trends on the global security scene. The main challenge translators have to face rendering the texts from a language with a well-established terminological practice into a language with developing terminological resources, as it is the case in the English-Latvian language pair, is the lack of equivalent terminology in the target language.

The paper aims to highlight some aspects of LSP (language for special purposes) text translation in English-Latvian language pair, to discuss some misconceptions associated with translation of non-classified military and military-related texts, to analyze specific competences a translator of military and military-related texts should possess as well as to illustrate potential translation challenges faced by student translators. The basis for the study consists of translation extracts from Infantry Platoon Tactics of the National Armed Forces and articles from the news media: *delfi.lv*, *apollo.lv*, newspaper “*Diena*”, magazine “*Ilustrētā Pasaules Vēsture*”. The analysis presented in the paper is based on the empirical observations and the experience of the authors in LSP translator training and the subject matter.

2. Military and military-related texts: On the interface between military community and general public

2.1. Military texts as a form of LSP texts

LSP texts are composed for a definite communicative purpose, which “is situated in a particular socio-cultural context, often closely linked to a particular professional discourse community” (Rogers, 2015, p. 28-32). These communicative purposes are closely related to functions performed by the text, the functions determine the form the texts take. These forms, according to Rogers, are known as genres. She further maintains, “LSP texts [...] are multidimensional artifacts, the relevant dimensions being communicative function (related to purpose), *conventionalized form* (genre), *domain* (sometimes hybrid) and *language* (or language variety)” (ibid, emphasis added). Military texts as a type of LSP texts are composed following relatively rigid genre conventions and they are envisaged for a specific audience, or professional discourse community, limited to military professionals. These texts are characterized by clarity and precision, they are also intentionally devoid of any expressiveness. Single, precise interpretation of a military text is of vital importance, that is why military texts are normally produced based on the univocity principle, i.e. in a way to avoid ambiguity and possibility for various interpretations.

Discussing the texts dedicated to military issues it is necessary to draw a line between military and military-related texts. Although military-related texts can be classified as a form of LSP text, they essentially differ from military texts with regard to genre dimension, sharing some features of domain and language dimensions. They can belong to a variety of genres, and can make use of a wider range of linguistic resources.

Military texts are written by professionals for professionals, who have sufficient level of thematic competence to interpret these texts according to the intentions of the sender of the message. At the same time, military-related texts aim at wider audiences with various levels of prior knowledge, thus they often provide additional information to facilitate processing of the encoded data. These texts published in mass media are sometimes produced by non-professionals, who are only superficially familiar with the subject matter, and who have no first-hand experience in dealing with military vocabulary.

These challenges demand addressing the issues of expertise and background knowledge of the readers as another important features distinguishing the types of texts in question. Bauman maintains (2013, p. 9), “LSP text reception is [...] a complex activity, in which the recipient can go far beyond the reception of the information contained in the LSP text. However, this requires an ability on their part to appropriately complement potentially incomplete information structures in the LSP text at hand with the help of their own background knowledge.” The users with

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