Translation Problems in Polish Language Versions of EU Directives Regulating Medicine and Biology Related Issues

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the most often occurring problems in English-Polish translation of European Union directives regulating medicine and biology-related matters. The following documents have been subject to the analysis: Directive 2000/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 September

The texts of those directives in Polish and English language versions are available on the Eur-lex website http://eur-lex.europa.eu.

2. Typology of translation problems

Translation problems may result from many factors e.g. (i) the lack of professional knowledge of the field, (ii) the lack of the knowledge of LSP translation, (iii) the application of incorrect translation method or strategy, (iv) the insufficient knowledge of the foreign language, (v) the insufficient knowledge of the mother tongue, etc. Dzierżanowska (1990), distinguishes the following types of translation problems: (i) spelling and punctuation problems; (ii) grammatical problems (morphological, syntactic and phraseological ones); (iii) word order problems and problems with parts of sentence; (iv) lexical problems (words and phrases); (v) lack of stylistic, semantic and situational adequacy and equivalence. Many translation problems result from difficulties in finding best equivalents. This issue has been discusses by Smith (1995: 187) who states that ‘recognizing a case of absent terminology requires constant comparison between the legal systems of the source and the target languages, as well as being familiar with up-to-date legal literature. (...) «equivalency» refers to equal value between source and target text, and «adequacy» concerns partial dimensions of the text. In the global legal world, where legal traditions and cultures differ so much that one system uses a legal concept completely unknown or even alien to another system, equivalency must also include cultural equivalency. From a linguistic point of view, the ideal translation is one that does not resemble one. Applied to legal texts, a successful translation should communicate the content of a document, all the while employing equivalent accurate syntax, semantics and pragmatics. This is particularly true for legal texts.’ Although Smith refers to legal translation, his remarks are applicable also to translation of other LSPs.

Having analyzed the EU directives the authors have distinguished only some of the problems mentioned above. Therefore, for the purpose of this article the following typology of most often occurring problems has been developed: (i) terminological problems, (ii) phraseological problems (problems with collocations), (iii) change of the meaning, (iv) opposite meaning, (v) non-sense, (vi) improper register, (vii) information omission, and (viii) grammatical problems.
3. Translation of Texts Formulated in Languages for Special Purposes

There are many theories of translation which may be applied to the LSP translation. However, one of the most practice-oriented is the skopos theory of Vermeer. Vermeer (2001: 221) states that ‘the aim of any translational action, and the mode in which it is to be realized, are negotiated with the client who commissions the action. A precise specification of aim and mode is essential for the translator. – This is of course analogously true of translation proper: skopos and mode of realization must be adequately defined if the text-translator is to fulfill his task successfully.’ Moreover, ‘the skopos theory thus in no way claims that a translated text should ipso facto conform to the target culture behaviour or expectations, that a translation must always «adapt» to the target culture. This is just one possibility: the theory equally well accommodates the opposite type of translation, deliberately marked, with the intention of expressing source-culture features by target-culture means. Everything between these two extremes is likewise possible, including hybrid cases. To know what the point of a translation is, to be conscious of the action – that is the goal of the skopos theory. The theory campaigns against the belief that there is no aim (in any sense whatever), that translation is a purposeless activity’ (Vermeer 2001: 231). Thus, according to the skopos theory there are always some recipients of the translated text and the translator should adapt the translation to their needs and expectations, should make the text understandable for them.

4. Selected translation problems

4.1. Terminological problems

Terminological errors usually result from the fact that translators do not know the terminology of a given LSP. In such a situation they chose terms at random while using available dictionaries or they coin new terms. Among the most often coined new words are descriptive equivalents. However, one-word neologisms may also be found in EU translations. What is more some of the terminological errors are a consequence of homonymy and polysemy of words.

Example 1.
• The term soybean has been translated into Polish as nasiona soi instead of soja. The descriptive equivalent has been used instead of a one-word term. The meaning has not been changed.

Example 2.
• The term tree nuts has been translated into Polish as owoce drzew orzechowych instead of orzechy. The descriptive equivalent has been used instead of a one-word term. The meaning has not been changed.
Example 3.
- The term *spelt* has been translated into Polish as *pszenica oplewiona* instead of *orkisz*. The descriptive equivalent has been used instead of a one-word term. The meaning has not been changed.

Example 4.
- The term *decontamination* has been translated into Polish as *unieszkodliwianie* instead of *odkażanie*. As a result of the terminological error the meaning has been changed.

**4.2. Problems with collocations**

One of the most serious problems results from mistranslating terms and phraseological units (including collocations, word combinations or syntagms). ‘The change of the lexical composition of phraseological units may lead to numerous translation errors resulting in the change of meaning. Although it is generally assumed that “creating collocations is an instinctive act in a native language” (Dzierżanowska 1988: 32), it does not seem to work that way in languages for special purposes (LSP).’ (Matulewska, Nowak 2006: 125)

Example 5.
- The phrase *latent infection* has been translated into Polish as *zakażenie ukryte* instead of *zakażenie utajone*. The meaning has not been changed. However, the translator failed to use the existing equivalent and coined a neologism.

Example 6.
- The phrase *culture collection* has been translated into Polish as *kolekcja hodowli* instead of *kolekcja kultur*. The meaning has not been changed as the phrase is understandable and the correct meaning may be deduced from the context. However, the translator failed to use the existing equivalent and coined a neologism.

Example 7.
- The phrase *statistically significant* has been translated into Polish as *statystycznie znaczny* instead of *statystycznie istotny*. It is a phraseological problem which probably results from the fact that the translator made a calqued translation instead of using a collocation typical of the Polish language of statistics.

Example 8.
- The phrase *statistically non-significant* has been translated into Polish as *statystycznie nieznaczny* instead of *statystycznie nieistotny*. It is a phraseological problem which probably results from the fact that the translator made a calqued translation instead of using a phraseological unit characteristic of the Polish language of statistics.

Example 9.
- The phrase *respiratory organs* has been translated into Polish as *układ oddechowy* instead of *narządy oddechowe*. The meaning has been changed as the phraseological unit *układ oddechowy* means respiratory system.

Example 10.
- The phrase *starting cultures* has been translated into Polish as *kultury wyjściowe* instead of *kultury starterowe*. The meaning has not been changed as the phrase is understandable and the correct me-
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The meaning may be deduced from the context. However, the translator failed to use the existing equivalent and coined a neologism.

Example 11.
- The phrase target organs has been translated into Polish as organy zwalczane instead of organy atakowane. The meaning has been changed.

Example 12.
- The phrase derma sensitisation has been translated into Polish as uczulenia dermalne instead of uczulenia skórne. The meaning has not been changed as the phrase is understandable and the correct meaning may be deduced from the context. However, the translator failed to use the existing equivalent and coined a neologism.

Example 13.
- The phrase sensitisation by inhalation has been translated into Polish as uczulenie inhalacyjne instead of uczulenie wziewne. The meaning has not been changed as the phrase is understandable and the correct meaning may be deduced from the context but the translator failed to use the existing equivalent and coined a neologism.

Example 14.
- The phrase culture medium has been translated into Polish as pożywka hodowli instead of pożywka hodowlana or pożywka do hodowli (komórkowych). The meaning has not been changed as the meaning may be deduced from the context. However, such a phraseological unit does not exist in the Polish languages of medicine and biology.

4.3. Change of the meaning

Among the most serious translation problems there are the following: (i) the change of the meaning; (ii) opposite meaning; (iii) non-sense and (iv) information omission. Actually all those four categories of errors result in some sort of the distortion of meaning. However, as the opposite meaning, non-sense and omission are very specific and are of particular importance they will be discussed here as separate categories of errors. The errors not falling into those three categories which lead to the distortion of meaning will be discussed under the heading: the change of meaning.

According to Pisarska and Tomaszkiewicz (1996: 146), the change of meaning usually results from the phenomenon of interference. The translator influenced by the similarity of forms in two languages considers them equivalent without checking their real meaning. The problem occurs when the meanings of such two forms in source and target languages differ. Moreover, the change of the meaning maybe the consequence of polysemy or homonymy. What is more, terms are not 100 per cent synonyms. Jospeh (1995: 23) states that 'translation is generally possible because in everyday language words, their component parts, their order, and most importantly their meanings are not like fixed points, but fuzzy blots at best. While the blots of L1 may rarely correspond exactly to those of L2, chances are that their fuzz will overlap enough for most translation purposes. Literary translation, especially the translation
of poetry, exploits those fuzzy areas to the fullest. But law, or at least some areas of it, requires those blots to shed their fuzz and become point-like; and indeterminacy resides in the difficulty we have in making language do this with any consistency.’ The same applies to medical, biological and biotechnological texts.

Example 15.
- The syntagm mast cells (...) were triggered has been translated into Polish as komórki tuczne aktywizowały się instead of komórki tuczne (...) zostały pobudzone. The meaning has been changed as the verb to trigger in passive suggests the existence of a factor which led to the reaction whereas the Polish verb aktywizować się means to become active and excludes the existence of a factor causing the reaction.

Example 16.
- The syntagm in the form of as-yet-unactivated B cells has been translated into Polish as w formie nieaktywnych do tej pory komórek B instead of w postaci jeszcze nieaktywowanych komórek B. The meaning has been changed. Instead of inactivated there is inactive.

4.4. Opposite meaning

Opposite meaning is a very serious error as it totally distorts author’s intentions. What is more, it may be very difficult to detect such a problem without comparing the original with the translated text.

Example 17.
- The term invertebrates has been translated into Polish as kręgowce [vertebrates] instead of bezkręgowce. The problem results from the fact that the term with the opposite meaning has been used.

4.5. Non-sense

Nonsense is a result of the translation which changes the meaning in such a way that the final result is simply absurd. It is considered one of the most serious translation errors as it often makes the text impossible to understand and/or ridiculous.

Example 18.
- The phrase acute percutaneous toxicity has been translated into Polish as ostra toksyczność dotrzewnowa instead of ostra przeszkórnna toksoza/ostra przeszkórnna toksyczność. Not only has the meaning been changed, but also a neologism was coined. The problem probably results from the fact that the translator did not know the language of medicine and biology.

Example 19.
- The phrase innocuous substance has been translated into Polish as niewinne substancje instead of substancja nieszkodliwa. The non-sense has been created. The absurd phrase has been created as the Polish adjective niewinny pre-modifies nouns referring to humans and human activities (its closest English equivalent is innocent).
4.6. Other language than LSP

Some errors result in using an inappropriate style (stylistic inadequacy). The translation of EU directives is difficult due to the fact that at least two types of LSP are used in them. First of all as directives and regulations are statutory instruments they are written in EU statutory language. If the translator does not know the legal language (and to be more precise its specific genre called statutory language) they are prone to apply colloquial or literary language instead of the proper LSP. Moreover, different statutory instruments are devoted to various professional problems. Thus, for example, in the analyzed corpus the language of medicine and the language of biology have been used. Dzierzanowska (1990: 100) classifies such errors as ‘stylistic inadequacy’ and she adds that ‘Nieadekwatność stylistyczna przejawia się wtedy, gdy w przetłumaczonym tekście występują cechy specyficzne dla stylu języka oryginału, a obce dla języka przekładu. (...) Jednolitość stylu jest bardzo ważną zasadą w tłumaczeniu. Tekst pisany mieszaniną stylów czyta się źle’ [Stylistic inadequacy manifests itself when the features characteristic of the style of the original text and alien for the target language occur in a translated text.’]. However, stylistic inadequacy may also be perceived as the situation in which the translator uses (i) colloquial language instead of the LSP, (ii) literary language instead of the LSP, (iii) descriptive equivalents instead of the specific terms, etc. As a result of such a translation the translated text is not adjusted to the communicative situation. Furthermore, the ambiguity may be introduced.

The stylistic errors appearing in the analyzed EU directives have been divided into the following categories:

– using colloquial language instead of the language of medicine or biology;
– using literary language instead of the language of medicine or biology.

Example 20.

• The phrase *classical alergic disorders* (...) *tend to run in the family* has been translated into Polish as *klasyczne choroby alergiczne* (...) *mają tendencje do grasowania w rodzinie* instead of *klasyczne choroby alergiczne* (...) *zwykle są cechą rodzinną* / *zwykle są dziedziczną*. The literary flowery language which is pejoratively marked has been used. The verb *grasować* refers to criminal activities or destruction caused by animals (English equivalent would be *to prowl or to be at large*).

Example 21.

• The phrase *skin rashes* has been translated into Polish as *pokrzywka* instead of *wysypki skórne*. The meaning has been partially changed because instead of the hyperonym the hyponym has been used. In other words the meaning has been restricted only to one type of the skin rash.

Example 22.

• The phrase *pistachio nut* has been translated into Polish as *fistaszek* instead of *orzech pistacjowy*. The improper equivalent characteristic of the colloquial language has been used instead of a one-word term. Moreover, the meaning has been changed as the term *fistaszek* refers only to *peanuts* [orzeszek ziemny] that is: *Arachis hypogaea* and not to *pistachio nuts* that is: *Pistachia vera*. 
4.7. Omission

Omission is sometimes classified as translation by deletion. However, it is necessary to stress here that translation by deletion is a method of translation which is justified and serves the translation skopos and does not affect the meaning, whereas omission leads to the change of meaning. Omission, on the other hand, usually results from the fact that some translators not knowing how to translate some part of the text simply decide not to translate it. The second reason is that some translators fail to proofread the original with the translation and thus they are unaware that they failed to translate some parts of the original. There are also situations when translators consider some parts of the text irrelevant due to the fact that they do not know the field which the text refers to.

Example 23.
- The phrase *packets of mediators* has been translated into Polish as *mediatory* instead of *pakiety mediatorów*. The translator failed to translated the phrase referring to quantity that is to say *packets of*. The meaning has been changed.

Example 24.
- The syntagm *the body’s vulnerable entrance points* has been translated into Polish as *słabo zabezpieczone punkty organizmu* instead of *czułe miejsca „wejściowe” organizmu*. The translator failed to translate the premodification *entrance*.

Example 25.
- The phrase *spontaneous bruising* has been translated into Polish as *wylewy podskórne* instead of *samooistne wylewy podskórne*. The pre-modifying adjective *spontaneous* has been omitted by the translator.

4.8. Grammatical problems

Grammatical errors which occur in EU directives include mainly inflexion errors (e.g. incorrect stem or desinence) and incorrect syntax (e.g. government, concord, prepositions, or word order).

Example 26.
- The Polish version is: *... pracownik cierpi z powodu zakażenia i/lub choroby, która może być skutkiem narażenia ...* instead of: *... pracownik cierpi z powodu zakażenia i/lub choroby, które mogą być skutkiem narażenia ...* . In the sentence above the subordinate clause of cause does not agree in number with the main clause’s object.

Example 27.
- The Polish version is: *... lekarz lub władz odpowiedzialna za kontrolę zdrowotną proponuje...* instead of: *... lekarz lub władz odpowiedzialna za kontrolę zdrowotną proponują...* . In the example above there is the problem with the agreement between the subject and the verb. The verb is in singular instead of plural.

Example 28.
- The Polish version is: *Pracodawcy dostarczają pracownikom (...) informacje ...* instead of: *Pracodawcy dostarczają pracownikom (...) informacji ...* . In the example above there is the problem with the government between the verb and object. The verb *dostarczać* requires the object in genitive.
5. Conclusions

To sum up, the majority of terminological and collocation-related problems result from the fact that translators do not know medicine and biology. Grammatical problems are usually the consequence of insufficient knowledge of the native language grammar. It is a direct consequence of the fact that most of the people who are translators graduated from language studies where they mastered their knowledge of a foreign language not paying attention to developing the native language. Consequently, their command of foreign grammatical system is better than the native one. Next, the omissions, non-sense, opposite meaning and change of the meaning may result from two factors that is to say (i) lack of the knowledge of the field the text refers to, (ii) not applying the tricks of the trade (not proofreading the translated text in a proper way). Lastly, if translators do not know a given LSP sufficiently they are prone to make stylistic errors. The insufficient professional training results in the low quality translations into Polish. Polish society will have to cope with a number of translation scandals as long as the process of hiring incompetent people continues.

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