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Translating the Language of Diplomacy: Procedures, Challenges and Errors

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THE ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

The present work aims at identifying some of the **procedures used and difficulties encountered in translating diplomatic language, as well as the types of errors that may arise in the translation process**. Diplomacy is one of the oldest fields of activity that requires the services of translators and interpreters. Nowadays, although English is, to a large extent the lingua franca of diplomacy, translations are still required, or, according to some sources, even more and more required, especially because the frequency of diplomatic exchanged has been increasing tremendously. Given the complexity and the high degree of difficulty characteristic of the field, translators working in this field may encounter a series of challenges which may sometimes prove difficult to overcome.

Moreover, perhaps unlike other fields, errors made by translators and interpreters in this field may result in dramatic and/or long-term consequences (if one thinks of the famous *mokusatsu*, which may have had triggered the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, or of the Waitangi treaty), or may make the object of extensive media coverage (such as the translators of the now famous reset button offered by Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State of America to her Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov). It was this problem, of errors made in translating the language of diplomacy, which prompted the initial question: what are the causes that lead to diplomatic translation errors? And, further on, a series of other questions: can they be prevented? If yes, what are the best methods to do so? The manner in which this paper aims to find the answers to these questions relies on the study of difficulties and errors in the translation of more than 50 documents of public diplomacy (in particular speeches and press releases), translated from and into English and Romanian; the samples cover a variety of topics from missile defence to economic cooperation and from culinary diplomacy to cooperation with and within international organizations, such as NATO, UN, BSEC and others.

As it has been shown, the main that this research stems from concerns related to errors made in translating diplomatic documents. Further on, during the research, a series of **research questions** have arisen:

1. What are the characteristics of the language used in diplomacy?
2. Being considered a sub-category of LSP (language for specific purposes), can it be looked upon as a major branch of ESP (English for specific purposes)?
3. Does diplomatic communication rely only on verbal language, or does non-verbal language play a role as well?

4. What are procedures, methods and strategies that are prevalent in translating the language used in diplomacy?
5. Are there any differences in terms of the procedures used in translating English for diplomacy into Romanian and, respectively, Romanian for diplomacy into English, respectively?
6. What are the difficulties encountered in translating the language of diplomacy?
7. Are there any differences between difficulties encountered in translating from English into Romanian and from Romanian into English, respectively?
8. What are the most frequent errors made in translating the diplomatic language?
9. How could they best be prevented?
10. Are there any differences between errors made in translating from English into Romanian and, respectively, from Romanian into English?

For the purpose of analysing the translations from and Romanian and, respectively, English, a **corpus** of various documents of public diplomacy (speeches and press releases) was selected. The corpus was limited to public diplomacy for a number of reasons. Firstly, the typology of texts encountered in diplomacy is extremely diverse, ranging from speeches, press releases, to various types of correspondence, treaties etc. Considering such a variety, to cover all type of texts seemed unfeasible, and the only reasonable solution was to narrow the scope of the analysis. Secondly, many of the other types of text are not accessible in both Romanian and English. Much of the correspondence is, at present, monolingual (since English is the *lingua franca* of diplomacy, as it has been shown), while treaties are often signed in only one or two languages, and very often Romanian is not one of the respective languages. By contrast, speeches and press releases, due to their public nature, are very often translated from and into English and Romanian. The English to Romanian Corpus includes a total of 26 documents (speeches given by British and American Ambassadors, the American President and Vice President, the British Prime Minister Heads of Mission and other representatives, as well as press releases), published between 2008 and 2015, with a total of 51159 words. The Romanian to English corpus consists in a total of 26 documents (speeches given by Romanian Presidents, Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors etc., as well as press releases) published between 2005 and 2015, with a total of 82 941 words. Therefore, the corpus includes 52 samples (or a total of 104 documents, if the target texts are to be considered separately) with a total number of 134 100 words, from which more than 400 examples have been extracted and analysed. Further on, in order to adopt tone as neutral as possible, the samples have been renamed Sample 1-51, so as to render them anonymous. The full list of the samples and of the sources they are taken from is provided at the end of the work.

The **first chapter** consists in preliminary remarks, focusing on the definitions of the concepts of translation and diplomacy, and on a brief review of the importance of translators and interpreters in the field of diplomacy.

The **second chapter**, focusing on the analysis of the texts included in our corpus followed the structure put forward by Christiane Nord (1992/2005), who puts forward a set of 16 factors, which she divides into two equal categories - intratextual and extratextual ones. Certainly, there are limitations to our analysis, in that it does not aim at covering all aspects of grammar, morphology, lexis or syntax, as it was our initial intention. However, following careful consideration, the decision was taken to focus the text analysis on those aspects that could be of importance for the further analysis of procedures, difficulties and errors in translation, rather than to try to cover all linguistics aspects that could be addressed – which could have made, in itself, the object of an entire thesis.

As such, in terms of the first factor mentioned by Nord, the **Sende**r, we have seen that there is a difference between Sender, text producer and initiatior. In the case of press releases, the producer is a person or a team that works in the respective institution; for speeches, it is normally a speechwriter, or a “ghost writer” who normally is a person who works for the respective diplomat, politician etc. (Schlesinger 2008; Crawford 2010), although some modern political and diplomatic figures are known to be involved in the drafting of reviewing of their own speeches (Bury 2000; Dreazen 2006; Parker 2008). There is, as it can be seen, a certain overlapping of the two roles, as the sender is also involved in the work of the text producer, Furthermore we could say that there is a double sender: on the one hand, we have the primary sender (the diplomat or official who utters the speech), and a secondary one – the institution that publishes the speech on the webpage.

The second factor, **Intention**, can be, to a certain extent, inferred based on certain sub-factors, from the study of the intratextual factors and extratextual factors or even the author’s life and background to the intentions associated with similar texts, as well as facial expressions, body language in general, and even clothing choices, can also be a good indicator of emotions and intentions. However, as some authors point out, it can be difficult to assess intentions, in particular another country’s intentions, “which are difficult to determine with a high degree of confidence” (Mearsheimer 2011: 29).

When we speak about Audience, which Nord sees as the most often overlooked factor source text audience vs. target text audience (Nord 2005: 57) and addressee vs. chance receiver (*ibid:* 58). In the case of speeches, we can speak of a dual audience: the primary audience (persons who listen to the speech first-hand) and secondary audience (those who read, or hear the speech after it is published on the internet and, respectively, broadcast on television later on). Speeches, also have what is called “chance receiver” (Nord 2005: 57-58) - persons who happen to turn on the television set or the radio the moment when the speech is broadcast.

As far as the fourth factor, the **Medium,** is concerned, press releases rely on a written one, as they are published on the webpage of the respective institution and quoted in newspapers, while speeches are part of the category where there is an overlapping between written and spoken media (Crystal and Davy 1969: 68; Nord 2005: 62-63) - as they are initially drafted in writing, then rendered verbally and subsequently published in writing on the internet.

In terms of **Place**, distinction should be made between the place of production and the place of reception. Speeches have several moments of production: the moment the text was produced, or written, when the speech is uttered, when it is published on the internet. There is a certain duality of the place of reception: one that can be easily defined and assess, namely the room where each of the speeches was uttered, which is located, depending on the case, in Bucharest, Brussels or New York, and one that is virtually impossible to assess, as it can potentially include any person with an internet connection and a good level of English or Romanian.

In terms of **Time**, we have the time of production, the time of reception. The reception time has, for speeches, a two-fold nature: the time when the speech is uttered can be very well defined in time; further on, the recorded speech and the written transcript have a much larger audience, via the press and the internet. For our samples, the time of production is between 2008 and 2015, whereas the time of reception is extended into 2016 and beyond, as the transcripts of the speeches are still available on the internet.

The dimension of **Motive**, according to Nord, applies to the reason and to the occasion for which a text is produced (Nord 2005: 75). Certain occasions and motives are traditionally associated with a specific type of text (Nord 2005: 75) – for example, a meeting between two diplomats may result in a press statement or press conference and, very likely, a press release.

The analysis of the **Lexis** of the sample is a significant part of the general analysis. Thus, the analysis of the morphological characteristics has focused on verbs, nouns and personal pronouns. The frequency of both phrasal and prepositional verbs and modal verbs, respectively, is considerably higher in English source texts that in English target texts. Nominalization tends to be present in all sections of the corpus. As far as personal pronouns are concerned, there is a high variation in the distribution in the four sub-sections of the corpus; one of the factors contributing to this variation is the difference btween Romanian and English in terms of politeness distinction. The analysis of the lexical characteristics has focused on collocations, idioms, titles, ranks and forma of address and, respectively, terminology. The collocations that can be found in the corpus can be defined into two large categories, namel collocations that belong to the field of international relations, and, respectively, to other fields, such as defense, economics, law, environment and others. With some exceptions, idioms seem to rather infrequent in both categories of the corpus, which might be explained by their informal nature. The diplomatic titles, ranks and formes of address present in the corpus are typical for this genre of texts, without posing any special translation problem. The analysis of the terminology employed in the corpus has revealed a frequency of specialised terms that is considerably higher than in the two reference corpora, British National Corpus and the Corpus of Historical American English. Many of these terms are acronyms and names of institutions, structures and organizations. The analysis of the sematic characteristics has focused on conceptual, or cognitive metaphors, vagueness and ambiguity. Conceptual metaphors tend to be rather frequent in our corpus; the major metaphors represented in this corpus are *State is a person* metaphors, Construction metaphors, War metaphors, Sports metaphors. Ambiguity is not very frequent in our corpus, which could be explained by the fact that recent conference diplomacy, which involves constant exposure to legal texts (both those containing rules governing the conduct of the conference and those contain its results) focuses a great deal on avoiding ambiguity (Scott 2001: 156). Vagueness, on the other hand, is rather well represented, both in terms of flexible adjectives, weasel words, nominalisations, passives, as well as adjectives, adverbs and quantifiers and the use of the first person plural. From a pragmatic point of view, both categories of the corpus employ both deixis and hedges.

In terms of **Sentence structure**, sentences in the Romanian source-texts are, indeed, considerably longer than the ones in the English source texts (28.6 vs. 21.14 words/sentence). Moreover, when translating into Romanian, sentences become longer (21.14 vs. 23.16). Furthermore, target texts are, on average, longer than source texts, which seems to confirm Chesterman's hypothesis concerning lengthening as one of the *translation universals* (Chesterman 2011: 176). The analysis of the sentence structure has also revealed a frequent use of various rhetoric devices such as the rule of three, matching clauses, and repetitions.

The analysis also tried to demonstrate the importance of **non-verbal language**, understood in its wider meaning, of a series of aspects that cover all non-verbal modes of expression from body language as such to series other of non-verbal communication devices, such as gifts level of representation and clothing, which can all be used in other to send certain signals. Non-verbal communication gaffes, which are not infrequent, may stem from a certain lack of knowledge of rules, tradition or protocol concerning the dress code, gestures, personal space or body language, gifts or simply from negligence and haste or they may be simply unfortunate accidents. However, if and when they do occur, they are generally not seen as intended -"It should be noted that signalling does not necessarily imply intentionality", underline Jonsson and Hall (2002).

The possibility of considering the language of public diplomacy as **LSP** was also examined. In order to avoid redundancy, this line of analysis relied on previous aspects of grammar and syntax analysed in the section 2.2. of this chapter. The conclusion was that, although the language of public diplomacy does have elements of LSP, it is not representative for the concept of LSP; due to its very public nature, as it can be, at best, including in the sub-categories that cover expert to nonexpert communication.

The **<u>third chapter</u>** focuses on the analysis of the procedures used for translating the samples in our corpus. Apart from the lack of borrowing and the lack of calques in translations from Romanian into English, there is no major difference concerning the procedures used into, and, respectively, from Romanian. Borrowing and calque, in the form of using already existing Anglicisms, and are to a certain extent normal in translations from English into Romanian, as political and diplomatic language is replete with such Anglicisms; they are not present in translations from Romanian into English. With very few exceptions, the examples of borrowings and calques found were rather infelicitous, as they seem to be rather the result of failure to look for the correct SL equivalent, than justified by an authentic need to introduce such terms into the TL by means of using the two procedures.

The most widely employed procedures seem to be **transposition**, **modulation**, **equivalence** and, to a certain extent, **literal translation**. Literal translation can be used for shorter sentences, but it is hardly ever advisable on longer sentences, in particular when the syntax of the SL and the TL differs so much. Some examples of literal translation seem to reflect what Newmark, amongst others, calls interference, defined as "cases when sentence length, punctuation, proper names, neologisms, or cultural words are evidently transferred in the translation" (Newmark 1991: 78). **Transposition** (in its both forms - obligatory and optional) and **modulation**, respectively, seem to be justified and required precisely due to this syntactic difference between the source language and the target language. Furthermore, the findings in our corpus seem to support Vazquez-Ayora's statement that many more translators are inclined to using transposition, and do so successfully, than modulation, which requires a more thorough knowledge of the target language (Vazquez-Ayora 1977: 293). Moreover, one of the reasons for which they tend to be more frequently employed than the other procedures has to do with their diversity and heterogeneity. **Equivalence** covers mostly equivalence of terms, names of institutions, structures, organizations, specific documents, working groups etc. The examples identified in our corpus are what Newmark calls *recognized translation* – "You should normally use the official or the generally accepted translation of any institutional term" (Newmark 1988: 89) – a statement that could be safely expanded, we believe, so as to include names of institutions. The last procedure mentioned by the two Canadian authors, **adaptation** tends to be more frequently used in literary translation, film subtitles and titles; therefore, it was no surprise that it was not identified in the corpus analysed.

Generally speaking, we can say that indirect or oblique translation procedures tend to be prevalent in the corpus analysed. In terms of the translation methods used, in the words of Vinay and Darbelnet, we could say that indirect methods tend to prevail, while in many cases, finding an appropriate solution requires the use of two or more procedures at the same time – this type of situation is identified by the two Canadian authors as well (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995: 42). Using Newmark's classification, it can be said that the method of faithful translation is employed, although semantic, and, respectively, communicative methods can be attempted in translating diplomatic language.

Moreover, the corpus also contains less frequent methods, such as amplification, economy, explicitation, and so on. Although not as frequent as the main indirect methods, they are noteworthy, in particular due to the changes in the TT that they entail.

Furthermore, the examples identified in our corpus seem to confirm Nord's statement that, usually, procedures are not arbitrarily used, but "in the most successful cases, following a consistent global strategy which, in turn, is guided by the overall purpose the translation is intended to fulfil" (Nord 2007: 111). Jääskeläinen also states that translators have to develop, from the training stage, criteria in order to determine when to take a more literal approach and when to rewrite the text (Jääskeläinen 1994 in Fraser 2000: 55); although we can hardly speak, in the case of diplomatic translation, of situations when the text should be rewritten, the examples identified show that translators need to employ indirect translation procedures and strategies quite frequently.

The **fourth chapter** of the thesis focuses on the difficulties identified in the corpus reflect. Our findings reflect for the most part, Croitoru's statement that "even within the Indo-European group, a word for word translation is often impossible, in the sense that it does not work in terms of grammar" (Croitoru 1996: 36). Neither does it work in terms of lexis, semantics, or cultural aspect, we might add.

Morphological difficulties tend to be more numerous in translation from Romanian into English, where they are mostly related to differences in terms of verbal tenses and aspects between Romanian and English verbs and with the difference in terms of frequency of nominalization. The frequency of the nominalizations employed in translations from Romanian into English seems to confirm Newmark's warning against nominalisation-loaded jargon (Newmark 1988: 158). Morphological difficulties are not entirely absent from translations into Romanian, where they have to do mostly with noun phrases and phrasal verbs.

Syntactic difficulties are present in both categories of translation. Given the considerable syntactic difference between English and Romanian, it is not surprising that this is one of the most prevalent types of difficulties in translations between the two types of languages. Syntactic difficulties that have to do with the length of sentences tend to be more frequent in translations from Romanian into English that viceversa. Passive constructions seem to be more frequent in translations from English into Romanian, as well as those difficulties related to the word order.

Lexical difficulties have to do with collocations and idioms. Which "even when translating into their L1, LSP collocations may prove problematic since collocational patterns are often not transferable across languages" (Rogers 1996: 79). Another potential source of challenges in translation are idioms; approaches to idioms found in our corpus seem to confirm Baker's words that "a person's competence in actively using the idioms and fixed expressions of a foreign language hardly ever matches that of a native speaker" (Baker 2001: 64).

Terminological difficulties tend to be present in both categories. Translating diplomatic language requires a thorough knowledge of the specialised terminology employed in SL and TL. A special subcategory of terminological difficulties, well-represented in in our corpus consists in acronyms and abbreviations. Most attempts at tackling the terminological difficulties encountered in our corpus are successful, with certain exceptions.

Semantic difficulties are, for the most part, related metaphors,. The translatability of metaphors has been long discussed. As it can be expected, examples in our corpus confirm the idea that, when translating from one's mother tongue, the challenge of dealing with metaphors is at least equally difficult than when translating into one's mother tongue, if not even more difficult.

Moreover, **cultural difficulties**, although not very numerous in our corpus, are relevant and present in both categories – the examples identified show that this category of challenges deserves, on its own, a special attention.

The **fifth chapter** of our thesis focuses on the analysis of translation errors, the decision was taken to follow, for both translation directions, Hatim and Mason's classification of errors into (1) significant (unmotivated) mismatches between source and target text (omissions, additions etc.) and (2) breaches of the target-language system (e.g. orthography, grammar, etc.. The category of significant mismatches has been further divided into three sub-categories, namely omissions, additions and substitutions (Hatim and Mason 1997: 169). The second category, breaches of the target language, is further divided into 5 categories of errors: morphological; syntactic; lexical and terminological; register, punctuation and formatting.

In terms of errors encountered in the corpus, there are some notable differences between the two corpus categories.

In the translations done from English into Romanian, in the category of **significant mismatches**, **changes of meaning** – other than those caused by unjustified additions of omissions - represent as it has been shown, more than half of this category. Most **omissions** and **additions** encountered in our corpus are not major ones, and would not entail serious consequences, nevertheless, given the sensitive nature of diplomatic language, translators should be as careful as possible to render the full and adequate meaning in the ST. Moving on to branches of the target language system, morphological errors are mostly represented by errors related to the translation of verbs and nouns. Many of the verb-related errors in this section of our corpus have to do rendering the gerund and verb into Romanian. Noun-related errors have to do mainly with the challenges entailed by the translation of countable and non-countable nouns and of nominal groups. Other errors are related to prepositions. Syntactic errors result, for the most part, corpus (more than half of the total identified) result from the word for word translation of the source text, which is seldom an advisable approach, and often makes the TTs in our corpus unnecessarily long and more difficult to read. Such large prevalence of word for word translations might indicate a certain lack of experience, given that experienced translators learn that assumptions on languages being rather similar in terms of structure and syntax are wrong (Robinson 2003: 209). **Lexical errors** in translations from English into Romanian consist mostly in borrowings, false friends and infelicitous lexical choices. The sub-category of unnecessary borrowings, (i.e.: for which Romanian has an equivalent) is quite well-represented. **Terminological errors**, although not very numerous, are important, given the importance of terminology in diplomatic speeches. Style and register errors seem to stem mostly from lack of attention. They generally do not have a significant impact over the meaning of the TT, but they do contribute to the ease, of lack thereof, of reading and understanding the TT. Most punctuation errors identified in translations from English into Romanian consist in maintaining the English punctuation in Romanian or are, most likely, the outcome of negligence and haste.

In **translations from Romanian into English**, **morphological** and **syntactic** errors are the best represented categories in this corpus section; moreover, they are more frequently encountered than in translations from English into Romanian. In the first large category, **significant mismatches**, **substitutions** are slightly less represented in translations from Romanian into English, which does not mean that they are not well represented and that they could not lead to meaning distortions in the TT. **Omissions** in translations from Romanian into English range from omissions of verbs to omissions of entire sentences. Just as in translations from English into Romanian, **additions** are a less represented subcategory. In terms of **breaches of the target language system**, **morphological errors** tend to be more numerous in translations from Romanian into English; many of them originate in the differences in terms of tenses and aspects between Romanian and English verbs, and, respectively, in the use of nominalization, which tends to be considerably more frequent in Romanian than in English. Verb-related errors are the most numerous sub-category (approximately half) of morphological errors identified. Most of them have to do with verbal tenses, a type of error underlined by various authors, such as Mauriello (1992) and Sainz Bello (1993), voice and aspects. Noun-related errors are also quite frequent (around a third of total morphological errors). Many noun-related errors are, indeed, related to excessive nominalizations. Other morphological errors are related to the misuse of prepositions, adjectives and adverbs. **Syntactic errors** identified in translations from Romanian into English were more frequent than in translations from English into Romanian, which is not surprising. Just as in the case of errors identified the English to Romanian translations, the **syntactic errors** identified in Romanian to English translations in the corpus stem, mostly, from the failure to understand that the two languages require a different word order, and the majority of them are caused by literal translations (or syntactic calques). The others are infelicitous word order choices. **Terminological and lexical errors** make up almost a quarter of this category. This type of errors stem, most likely, from a lack of familiarity with the vocabulary used in the field. As such, some choices might seem correct, at a first glance, but they are not the best lexical choice for this specific field. Most **lexical errors** identified in this section of the corpus can be divided into two categories; the majority of them consist in using a lexeme that is not the best solution, (which could arguably be considered infelicitous choices, rather than errors per se), and very few of them consist in using a lexeme that is very close in form, but very different in meaning, to the appropriate solution. Furthermore, **style and register errors** have been quite frequent in the translations from Romanian into English.

Many errors identified in the **translations from Romanian into English** seem to stem from a certain lack of familiarity with both grammar rules of the target language and the specific language employed in the field. There are various recommendations for improving the result of translations done from one's mother tongue – they have been detailed in the sub-chapter concerning the prevention of translation errors.

This work can be useful for translation students who intend to specialize in the field of diplomacy, for translators who are already working in this field, for the staff of diplomatic institutions and for researchers who focus on the field of translation in the field of diplomacy. Furthermore, it can be of assistance for other, more specific research directions, such as avoiding errors when translating diplomatic texts, the importance of being a native speaker of the target language when working in this field as well as specific difficulties associated to various sub-genres of the language of diplomacy.

Key words: translation, diplomacy, translation procedures, translation challenges, translation errors

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