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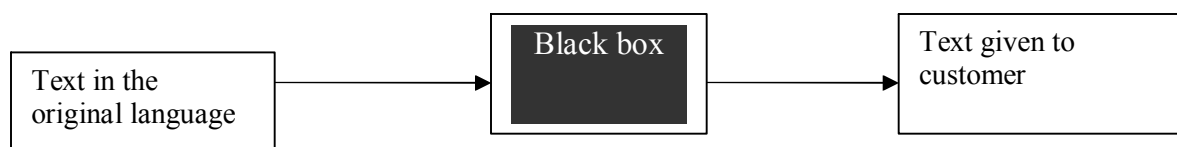
Technical Translation in Context, Or System Integration of Translation Services

Physicists and lyricists of translation: Whose degree is better?

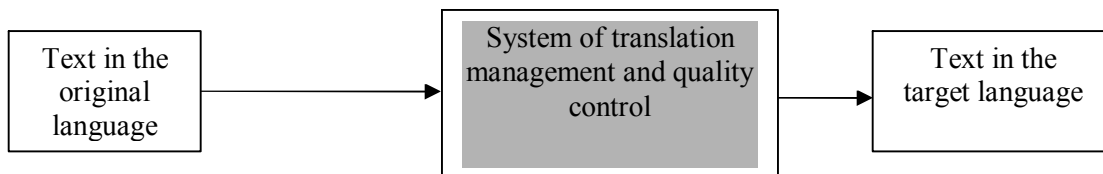
Technical translation is called technical exactly because it is located at the juncture of the disciplines that define its content, and on the other hand, linguistics which creates a linguistic medium for communicating this content to its audience clearly and precisely. People come to technical translation by various professional paths, but despite their diversity professional translators may be divided into two main groups: translators with a linguistic education and with experience in a particular field, and specialists in such field who have learned the foreign language. In general, it is impossible to tell which is better, even by comparing the quality of two individual translators' work. At the same time, this question becomes irrelevant when applied to a group of associated translators. This article explains why this is the case and presents our viewpoint on the evolution and the direction of future development of professional technical translation.

Translation technology: How is added value created?

At a certain stage of development of the market economy the rules of the market forced entrepreneurs to unite translators into groups which they themselves called translation bureaus or agencies. These labels perfectly reflect the functional principle of the majority of translation groups in Russia, viz. the "black box principle" (see diagram). The equipment of many translation agencies and bureaus consists of a telephone, a computer, and a modem, all of which could easily fit in an average kitchen. Neither the customer, nor the agency or bureau, has any idea what happens to the text between the time when it is handed down to the translators working at home, and the time when the text is delivered to the customer. Often the translation does not deserve its name.



In other words, a simple matching of customers with translators takes place (analogies to marriage matchmaking agency come to mind here), or the hiring of unskilled “peons” who often use computer translation programs (a direct analogy to a typing service applies here). Of course, one must admit that a marriage matchmaking agency might produce a happy marriage, and a talented typist in a typing service could, by chance, type up a novel of his or her own instead of the dissertation ordered for typing. Nonetheless, in bureaus and agencies that follow the “black box principle” in their work, translations that terminologically and stylistically correspond to the original are the exception, rather than the rule. A system can be formed only with the awareness that technical translation is simultaneously both a process and a product. Even a group made up of the most professional telecommuting translators will not be able to achieve terminological and stylistic consistency when working on large projects with complicated content. For this, an agency must have an operations/administrative group including a production director, project managers, editors and production editors, and, most importantly, staff translators, each of whom ensures terminological and stylistic quality in the work of the group of freelance translators assigned to him or her. This produces a “production pyramid” which allows achieving high quality of translation combined with a high level of productivity - thousands of pages per month (see diagram). The achievement and maintenance of high translation quality is guaranteed by the implementation of a Quality Management System, certified on the basis of international ISO 9001 standards. A system so constructed is capable of addressing global challenges arising in connection with translation of large-scale projects, viz. the creation of terminological databases and the standartization of particular types of translation (production interfaces, diagrams, etc.) with the help of translation memory tool software. The ultimate goal of implementing the aforementioned translation products is the comprehensive regulation of bilingual and multilingual customer documentation at all stages of its development and coordination. Only then does the translation end product acquire “added value,” and only then may its producer properly call itself a translation company.



The Present and Future of Translation: What is System Integration?

Needless to say, the technology described above makes possible the structuring and fine-tuning the translation process, and certain Russian agencies and bureaus have already achieved the technical level described above. Nevertheless, even such companies are still seen by those specializing in “content” production as a source auxiliary services while the technical translation itself continues to develop separately from the content which it is meant to deliver to the foreign-language audience. In order for translation to stop being a “thing-in-itself,” it must be included in the “content”-producing process. This approach implies system integration of the technical “content”-producing process with that of “content”-translation. Only a few companies in the market of services for the oil and gas industry have undergone the long and complicated evolution from a translation company to a specialized agglomerate and are successfully implementing the concept of system integration of technical translation into a system of specialized services on the Russian market.

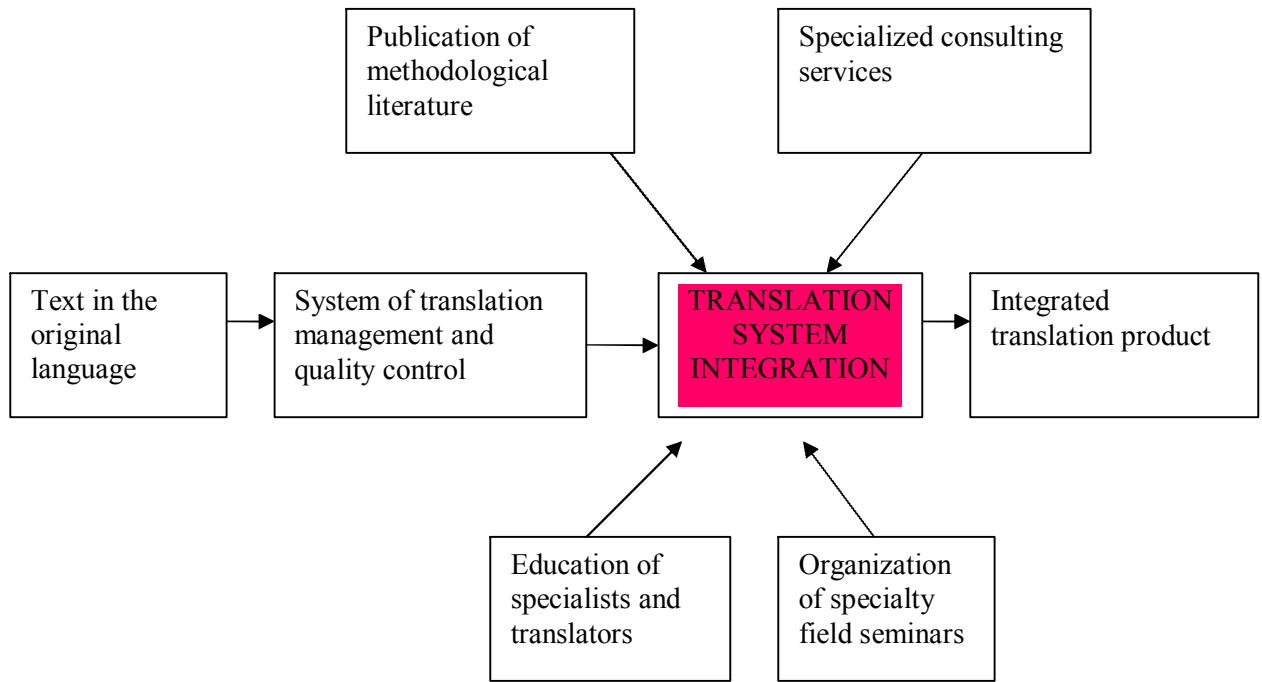
The oil and gas industry is one of the most dynamic industries. Along with new technologies for the evaluation, development, shipment, processing, and marketing of oil and gas, a new terminology is emerging that describes these technologies, previously non-existent in the Russian language. Translation in this field often falls behind the emergence of new concepts, and only specialists working within these new fields can adequately express these new trends in their native languages.

This is why the next stage of development of a translation company in the field of services to the oil and gas industry consists in partnership with the leading consulting companies of the world in the field of oil and gas reserve auditing, petroleum refining, shipping and marketing of oil and oil products, i.e. sections of the oil and gas industry which in the original language are called “upstream” and “downstream.”

This requires systematizing the unique terminological base created by the company in the process of highly specialized translation and consulting, with the subsequent development of a methodology of teaching it to industry specialists as well as to staff and freelance translators. This may be performed by a company’s publishing and education divisions, which may publish methodological and specialized literature on the subject of oil and

gas, develop and conduct special courses for teaching English to petroleum specialists, and also organize seminars in particular specialty fields.

Having thus combined divisions providing an array of related services, the company undertakes the integration of technical translation into a system of consulting, publishing, and educational services provided to the oil and gas industry. Using the company as a basis, a special agglomerate is formed to implement this process (see diagram). The emergence of such an agglomerate—the “context” in which modern high-profile and high-technology translation is created as a product of system integration—can serve as a direct answer to the question asked in the first sub-heading of this article.



Technical translation as an integrated product is a result of the combined work of linguists and specialists in various technical disciplines.

Our next article will address auditing oil and gas reserves, risk analysis for exploration, the determination of fair market value for oil and gas sites, and, of course, the complicated process of system integration of translation and consulting services for improving the bilingual communication space for specialists in this field.