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LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL PECULIARITIES OF ACCOUNTING TEXTS AND THEIR TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The present article deals with the peculiarities of translating accounting texts and the challenges translators are frequently faced with. The study is of theoretical and practical importance. The challenges while translating accounting texts are presented in the form of examples analyzing both grammatical and lexical peculiarities of such texts. The examples of both the source (SL) and target (TL) languages are extracted from IFRSs (International Financial Reporting Standards).

Key words: financial standards, equivalence, terminology, accounting language

1. Introduction

Accounting is a social science that describes the factors that determine the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Accounting focuses on the behavior and interactions of economic agents and how economies work. It may appear to be the study of complicated tables and charts, statistics and numbers, but, more specifically, it is the study of what constitutes rational human behavior in the endeavor to fulfill the human needs and wants.

Nowadays the translation of accounting texts has acquired great importance, as it serves the exchange of vital information between the two languages involved. This field has been and still needs to be discussed, as different people find different ways of dealing with it. The ultimate goal of accounting is to improve the living conditions of people in their daily life. So, translation is necessary in order to make this objective come true. Although now the development of technologies has made life easier, and despite the fact that people can translate things with the help of the various Internet programs for machine translation, the sphere of accounting requires that translators make use of specific dictionaries which provide definitions of terms. Professionals of this field often need translators to work with, in order to present their interests and even their products to the world. In order to succeed, the translator must have a number of prerequisite skills, such as background preparation and an eye for details, the ability to work under time pressure and the ability to maintain confidentiality.

2. Theory of Translating Accounting Texts

At the very heart of translation studies is the issue of translation quality. Numerous scholars, such as Reiss (1971) and House (1977) have proposed various methods for

determining what makes a translation good or whether a translation should be called good or adequate or appropriate.

One of the most important conditions for a translation to be adequate is accuracy. The criterion of accuracy varies according to the style and genre of the text. The translator should avoid altering the text, introducing improper, foreign elements in the translated text or performing a literal mechanical translation. To translate means to express exactly and to reproduce not only the content of the original text, but also the form.

According to Nida (1977), because there are not so-called identical equivalents, in translating one must find the closest possible equivalent. So according to Nida there are 2 types of equivalence:

Formal equivalence translation focuses on the message itself in both form and content. In such translation translators should be concerned with sentence to sentence, concept to concept correspondence. Here the translator is concerned with matching the receptor language as closely as possible with the different elements in the source language.

Dynamic equivalence not concerned with matching the target text with the source text, but with dynamic relationship. This relationship requires that the bond between receptor and message should be the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message. It aims at complete naturalness of expression and requires that translators know the source language culture to appropriately comprehend the message.

If we discuss translation of accounting texts according to Nida's approach we will see that it requires formal equivalence which focuses on the message itself, its form and content. This kind of equivalence distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the target language and hence distorts the message. Dynamic equivalence cannot be used in accounting texts when translating them from the source to the target language as dynamic focuses on the meaning of the original which is to have the same impact on the reader of the target language as that of the receptor of the original.

Non-equivalence at the word level means that the TL has no direct equivalent for a word which occurs in the ST. Baker (1998) identifies the following common types of non-equivalence at word level:

Culture-specific concepts which are totally unknown in the target culture (TC), because they reflect a reality specific to the source culture (SC). E.g.:

affinity card – վարկային քարտ, որը տրամադրվում է ԱՄՆ-ում և նախատես-ված է որոշակի խմբի (affinity group) անդամների համար, inland bill –երկրի ներքին օրինագիծ, որը թողարկվել է Միացյալ Թագավորությունում, moonligh-ting – ունենալ հիմնական և երկրորդ աշխատանք, հիմնականում զաղտնի և գիշերային, prime rate – ամենացածր տոկոսադրույքը, որով ամերիկյան բանկե-րը կարող են զումար տրամադրել կոմերցիոն նպատակների համար, etc.

Gradually, some of these terms may become part of the reality in the TC and they could be borrowed and used as loans.

SL concept not lexicalized in the TL: the SL word may express a concept which is known in the TC, but simply not lexicalized yet, e.g.: *gazump - վաճառող, ով բարձրացնում է իր սեփականության (բնակարան, հողատարածք) նախապես պայմանավորված գինը, gazunder – գնորդ, ով վերջնական բանակցություն- ների ժամանակ իջեցնում է վաճառողի սահմանած գինը*.

Semantically complex SL word: a single word, which consists of a single morpheme, can sometimes express a more complex set of meanings than a whole sentence; hence languages automatically develop concise forms for referring to complex concepts if the concepts become important enough to be talked about often. E.g.: *cross-selling –վաճառել որևէ ապրանք կամ մատուցել որևէ ծառայություն արդեն գոյություն ունեցող հաճախորդին, intestate - անձ, ով մահանում է առանց կտակ կազմելու, lien –պարտապանի գույքի վրա կալանք դնելու իրավունք, spamming – ուղարկել միևնույն հաղորդագրությունը մեծ թվով ինտերնետային օգտատերերի.*

Loan words in the ST: these are often used for their prestige value adding an air of sophistication to the text or its subject matter. In Armenian economic texts there are increasingly more terms borrowed from English, such as*: management, manager, leader, coaching, mentoring, broker* etc.

According to Baker (1998), professional translators should use a number of strategies to deal with non-equivalence at the word level. Among them, she mentions:

Translations by a more general word (superordinate) - is used in order to overcome a relative lack of specificity in the TL compared to the SL; translators have to find a more general word that covers the core prepositional meaning of the missing hyponym in the TL. For example, the English term *liability* with the specific meaning of 'legal responsibilities for something, especially for paying money that is owed, or for damage or injury' is translated into Armenian by means of the more general term 'պատասխանատվություն.'

In general, accounting texts belong to the functional style of official documents. The aim of such documents is to reach agreement between two contracting parties, to establish, develop, control business relations between individuals and organizations. It is impersonal, rational but devoid of expressiveness. The lexical level is distinguished by the use of borrowed, archaic words, professional terms and clichés. It makes use of special terms, abbreviations. The main features are: careful paragraphing, logically precise clear cut syntax, thoroughly thought out selection of words.

Translators should be aware of all innovations and modifications of the sphere. Innovation can be viewed as applying better solutions that will meet new requirements or existing market needs. The term 'innovation' can be defined as something more effective to be used and, as a consequence, something new that appears in the market or society.

Translating accounting texts, in general, and the accounting terminology, in particular, is not a simple task, especially when the new terms keep being created along with developments in business life. This is one of the most scrupulous and time-consuming translations: the reason is that it requires accuracy and a great attention to details. This includes the process of translating, editing and proofreading, like

translation in general. Translators can find difficulty in understanding the concepts and vocabulary. Faithfulness is the primary concern. The translator should be loyal to the source language and then completely and accurately render it in the target language. In translation it is not allowed to falsify, distort or delete source text on purpose. In this case, this will result in the company's financial loss and can affect its reputation. As in case of other sciences, in this case, too translator should not only have just skills and rich experience in translation, but also have profound background knowledge and, in general, know something about economics. This will help the readers better understand the source language.

3. Lexical and Grammatical Peculiarities of Accounting Texts

While translating accounting texts translators should try to reveal lexical peculiarities of such texts. First, it is necessary to specify that the characteristic features of accounting texts in English and Armenian lies in its lexicon. Terminology is the greatest concern which will be further revealed. Certain aspects of lexical peculiarities of accounting texts in English and Armenian are presented below.

The words and terms, as a rule, are used in one meaning of a subject, for example: *current tax (ընթացիկ հարկ) - the amount of income taxes payable in respect of the taxable profit for a period (տվյալ ժամանակաշրջանի հարկվող շահույթի գծով վճարման ենթակա շահութահարկի գումարը)*.

- **Simple words**

According to Quirk et al. (1985), some of the most frequent words in the English language are simple: they cannot be divided into smaller meaning segments. Accounting English has simple words such as *asset, capital, debit*, etc. In Armenian it is the same: *ակտիվ, կապիտալ, դեբետ*. These words are included in Glossary of Terms approved by the IASB.

English, in the area of accounting, has composite words (which have their equivalents in Armenian, respectively), such as *provision (պահուստ), solvency (վճարունակություն)*. These, too, are included in Glossary of Terms approved by the IASB.

- **Compound words**

According to Quirk et al. (1985), compound nouns consist of two or more words joined together to form a single lexical unit. According to Longman Business English Dictionary (2007), compound nouns make up a large part of the vocabulary of business English in general. Some compounds consisting of verb + preposition are also added to the terminology of accounting such as 'turn-over,' 'write-off' and so on. In Armenian compound nouns are formed with linking elements, e.g.: *բաժնետոմս, հաշվեկշիռ*, but their equivalents in English are simple nouns: *share, amount*.

- **Phrasal words**

Some phrases (conversion from phrases to adjectives), though not common, are alsopresent in financial English as in above-par, taken-through, below-the-line and so

on**. In Armenian this kind of words are not used, as a rule, in the financial language.**

- **Phrasal verbs**

Verbs are made up of two or more words. According to Quirk et al., constructions on the pattern of verb + preposition are very common in English. However, we see only a few verbs in accounting English as in *to set-off - հաշվանցել*. This example makes it obvious that the English phrasal verb is translated as a composite verb in Armenian. **So, not all the phrasal verbs in business English have their grammatical equivalents in Armenian, but in general there are phrasal verbs in Armenian business language, too, such as:** *պատասխանատվություն ստանձնել, միջոցներ ձեռնարկել*, **etc.**

The translation of accounting texts has many peculiarities and the translator has to deal with specific terminology, so it is advisable that he/she consults with the experts to ensure quality translation. The terminology of accounting texts is highly specialized. In addition, there should be one-to-one correspondence between one term and its translation and this is a good way to avoid incomprehension because of polysemous words. A lot of terminology or technical words with specific meaning in the texts which are loaded with special meanings are fixed and mainly used in accounting texts. For example, in case of such terms that seem to be synonyms like: *income* and *profit* - both terms mean inflow of funds. These terms may seem to be synonyms for non-professional users, but for professional users the difference is apparent and definitely these terms cannot be used interchangeably. It should be further specified that *income* means *money received*, especially on a regular basis, for work or through investments, while *profit* means a *financial gain*, especially the difference between the amount earned and the amount spent on buying, operating or producing something.

There are also many polysemous words with one or many specialized meanings, for example, the word *return* may have at least 10 meanings, one of which refers to 'financial subject' – the amount of profit or income that you get from a particular investment). The translator should also be aware of certain Latin expressions which frequently flavor the business communication in general, for example: *ad hoc - to this* /*հատուկ*/; *de jure - by law* /*դեյուրե*/; *pro bono - for the public good* /*հասարակական հիմունքներով*/.

In the sphere of economics word-for-word translation is never acceptable. The translator should by no means be aware of the specialized terms and other sphere-specific words and expressions. E.g.:

հիմնական միջոց - property, plant and equipment

սկզբնական արժեք – cost

օգտակար ծառայություն - useful life

In economic texts, in general, and accounting, in particular, we can also find many expressions named after one's name. For example, in the expression *Gini coefficient*[1] Gini is the name of an Italian economist (Gini Corrado) who introduced this concept.

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[1] **Gini coefficient** is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents, and is the most commonly used measurement of inequality.

As a general rule, British English should be preferred in the accounting language, and Americanisms that are liable not to be understood by speakers of British English should be avoided. However, bearing in mind that a considerable proportion of the target readership may be made up of non-native speakers, very colloquial British usage should also be avoided.

The task of translators of accounting texts has been facilitated as there is a glossary of terms which is extracted from the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs) and International Accounting Standards (IASs) approved by the IASB as at 31 December 2007. References are by Standard and paragraph number. This glossary includes terms with their equivalents which are translated from English into Armenian.

Accounting texts are devoid of phraseological units, stylistic devices (simile, metaphor…). This means that while translating accounting texts translators should 'ignore' their attitude towards the company, emotional state, personal opinion: they just need to do their work, that is, translation. The analysis of the lexical characteristics of the accounting language enables us to conclude that the main challenge is terminology as all the substeps discussed are explained through "Glossary of Terms" (International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs) and International Accounting Standards (IASs) approved by the IASB, 2007).

So why is terminology the main challenge for accounting texts? What are they in general?

Terms are <u>words</u> and <u>compound words</u> or multi-word expressions that in specific contexts are given specific meanings—these may deviate from the meanings the same words have in other contexts and in everyday language. As for the types of terminology problems, there may be:

1) non-equivalence, because the target language lacks the source term,

2) the same as the first point but the SL lacks the terminology and uses a descriptive phrase,

3) register - the standard term may be too technical for the target readers,

4) irrelevant equivalence. In parallel text analysis sometimes a common SL term is simply not used in equivalent TL texts because of the differences in the way certain entities or events are described. In such cases, the problem is whether to mechanically stick to the SL term or follow the natural TL conventions.

There are various methods for translating terms. One of them is:

- *Borrowing* - from English they are very common given that the language of business communication is English and the economic field is one of the most quickly developing ones, so target languages often simply borrow new terms at least until the language system itself elaborates its equivalent for the terms, for example there are many economic terms in the Armenian language borrowed from English, such as *հեջավորում* (hedging - a way of protecting oneself against financial losses or other adverse circumstances), *ֆակտորինգ* (factoring - buying of the trade debts of a manufacturer, assuming the task of debt collection and accepting the credit risk, thus providing the manufacturer with working capital).

- *Descriptive Translation* - though this method is used in other kinds of texts (literary, etc.), in accounting this method is not used as accounting texts are

devoid of cultural elements and cultural-specific words and word combinations. For each word or word combination there is an equivalent translation in the target language.

- *Neologism* - term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering into common use, but that has not yet been fully accepted into mainstream language. For example, *hedging - a designated derivative or (for a hedge of the risk of changes in foreign currency exchange rates only) a designated non-derivative financial asset or non-derivative financial liability whose fair value or cash flows are expected to offset changes in the fair value or cash flows of a designated hedged item.*The term is translated into Armenian by means of borrowing:

Հեջինգ – նախատեսված ածանցյալ գործիք կամ (արտարժույթի փոխարժեքի փոփոխությունների ռիսկի հեջավորման դեպքում միայն) ոչ ածանցյալ ֆինանսական ակտիվ կամ ոչ ածանցյալ ֆինանսական պարտավորություն, որի իրական արժեքը կամ դրամական հոսքերը ակնկալվում է, որ կփոխհատուցեն նախատեսված հեջավորված հոդվածի իրական արժեքի կամ ապագա դրամական հոսքերի փոփոխությունները:

As a rule, source and target language texts differ formally due to a number of reasons. There are a number of grammatical peculiarities in accounting texts that have both similarities and differences in both languages. For example, the modal verb *shall* in the accounting language expresses commands and obligations, as in all other types of formal documents, and is translated into Armenian by means of *պետք է.*

English and Armenian passive forms are different both in type of form constructions and in frequency. English passive voice is used more frequently due to the various types of construction it occurs in. Whereas Armenian passive voice construction is formed only by transitive verbs requiring a direct object. From the grammatical point of view the arrangement of sentences in English is fixed (as the rule of English language requires). In Armenian, it is generally free.

Considering the syntactical viewpoint, accounting texts may consist of *long sentences*: one sentence consisting of several short pieces. Sometimes when one sentence is divided into several parts, it is not hard to understand. That is to say, it is complicated in form, but simple in content.

- Word order

In fact, the word order in English, as it is known, is fixed while in Armenian it may be not. In spite of this fact, in technical texts everything is different: it is fixed in Armenian.

Կազմակերպությունը չպետք է կիրառի սույն ստանդարտը որոշ դեպքերում:

This sentence does not have enough possibilities of variation if compared with the above example. So we cannot write:

Սույն ստանդարտը չպետք է կիրառվի կազմակերպության կողմից որոշ դեպքերում:

But we can write:

Որոշ դեպքերում կազմակերպությունը չպետք է կիրառի սույն ստանդարտը:

This example allows us to conclude that the word order in Armenian technical texts may be changed but it is not desirable.

From the grammatical point of view the arrangement of sentences in English is fixed (as the rule of English language requires). In Armenian, it is generally free.

Considering the syntactical viewpoint, accounting texts may consist of long sentences: one sentence consisting of several short pieces. Sometimes when one sentence is divided into several parts, it is not hard to understand. That is to say, it is complicated in form, but simple in content. There are various strategies for dealing with such cases. For example, the device of:

-partitioning - one sentence should be divided into several syntactic units and sense groups rather than translating which makes the whole sentence more expressive and fluent,

-integration is another translation device used for reorganizing the sentence order of the source text sentence. In this case the translator joins several simple sentences into a complex or a compound one depending on the communicative function of the sentence.

Figures and tables, playing an important role in accounting texts, can vividly describe economic principles with least length and are popularized among economic literature, in general, and accounting, in particular.

Diagrams and tables are often found to make complicated description or explanation simple, clear and conspicuous. In its translation process, the title of figures should be simple and clear to highlight the features of figures. Sometimes, we may have word extension.

Punctuation is another aspect which should be taken into account. It must follow the rules and conventions of English. So it is necessary to pay attention to punctuation both in the source and target languages.

The translator of accounting texts also has to consider normalization and specialization.

Text normalization requires being aware of what type of text is to be normalized and how it is to be processed afterwards. Text normalization is frequently used when converting text to speech. Numbers, dates, acronyms and abbreviations are non-standard 'words' that need to be pronounced differently depending on the context. For example, *$200* would be pronounced as *two hundred dollars* in English.

Specialization means that translators should focus on one or more particular fields and not try to translate every document that comes along. Specialization is the manifestation of high-quality translation.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, accounting is a very demanded sphere. In the translation of accounting, as well as all other types of economic texts, the primary consideration of translators should be both grammatical and lexical peculiarities. In the process of translation, changes in word order as well as substitutions both in grammatical and lexical units make up the premise of carrying out an equivalent translation (as analyzed above). For an adequate translation formal equivalence is required which focuses attention on the source message, in both form and content so it is mainly impossible to translate accounting texts sense-for-sense, as this is a specialized field and needs accuracy to be comprehensible to the target audience. To achieve an accurate translation it is crucial to consult an expert who can give answers to all the questions concerning terms and other area-specific issues.

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