

# A Comparative Study on the Different Perspectives of Technical Translation: Influence of Technical Terms in Defining Technical Translation with Special Reference to selected English Non-Literary Documents

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**Abstract:** Technical translation has become such a crucial part of translation as it has been recognized that nearly 90% of all translations are technical translation (Kingscott (2002). Having recognized the importance of this, it is observed that number of universities and colleges have given prominence to technical translation in their respective degree programmes or diplomas in relation to translation studies. However, one of the difficulties confronted by number of students and academics in this particular field is that there is no definite theory as to what technical translation exactly mean. There are two widely known major perspectives on technical translation; translation of documents related to technology, and the translation of documents of specialized areas (Newmark, 1988). Although most universities have opted to include both highly technical documents and documents of specialized areas as technical translation, Jody Byrne (2006) argues that “in reality, ‘technical’ means precisely that, something to do with technology and technological texts. Just because there is a specialized terminology, doesn’t make something technical,” which leaves number of academics in the particular field confused. Hence, this research aims to provide a clear definition to technical translation. The key element in technical translation is the usage of technical terms. Therefore, quantitative approaches were employed to determine the usage of technical terms on the relevant documents of highly technical texts as well as specialized areas which had been selected through convince sampling. The study indicated that a considerably higher percentage of technical terms have been utilized in documents related to technology in comparison documents of specialized areas. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that technical translation should only mean the translation of documents related to technical translation.

**Key Words:** Translation, Technical Translation, Translation Studies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Technical translation takes the centre stage of non-literary translation. In fact Kingscott (2002) claims ‘technical translation already looms large in that it comprises more than 90% of the translation of the professional world output.’

However, the exact meaning of the technical translation remains unclear with different translation theorists providing different perspectives in relation to the definition of technical translation. This has resulted in major confusions among the academics as well as students, and potentially could have a negative impact on the Translation Studies degree programmes currently conducted in number of universities all over the globe.

Hence, the main objective of this research is to provide a clear definition to technical translation based on the different perspectives of translation theorists and institutes.

Qualitative approaches are generally preferred in solving most of research problems in relation to languages; however, this study is specifically focusing on the frequency of the usage of technical terms of the two main perceptives of technical translation in order to reach the main objective. Hence, quantitative approaches were employed to carry out the research with observation being the research method.

This study will provide a clear definition to technical translation based on the perspectives of theorists by analyzing each of the two major concepts through quantitative approaches focusing on the technical terms which will solve all the confusions on the technical translation within the translation community and having one clear definition about technical translation will pave the way for the next generation of translation students to learn this specific area of study without confusions.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Technical Translation is an integral part in the Translation Studies taught in number of universities and colleges all over the world.

“Translation Studies” is an academic discipline which concerns itself with the study of translation [7]; the term today is understood to refer to the study of the academic discipline

at large, including non-literary translation, interpretation, pedagogy and other issues. As an academic discipline, 'translation studies' is just a few decades old. Starting from 1950, scholars and experts were interested in forming coherent theories and conducting research on translation, but it is also true that not so much had been done within the framework of this new discipline, and there are still issues to be analyzed and discussed. That is because scholars went deeply in relating "translation studies" to other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology and, very recently, cultural studies. One has now to acknowledge the fact that translation studies as a discipline found its place among other academic disciplines and has become independent ("Development of Translation Studies and Approaches", 2020)

Technical Translation unlike most of the other types of translation doesn't appear to have one particular definition. For instance Daniel Gouadec (2007) defines Financial translation as the type of translation that "encompasses any kind of financial documentation (company reports, financial statements, finance deals, contracts, stock market information, banking documents, fiscal information, etc.) related to the areas of finance, banking, taxes, stock exchange transactions and economic activity in general. The volumes of financial translation are increasing fast with the move towards financial globalization. The demand for translators familiar with the world stock markets and financial markets has increased significantly over the past few years and financial translators associations are springing up in many countries."

However, Technical Translation doesn't have a clear definition about the content it includes with the translation theorists sharing two major perspectives.

Newmark (1988) claims that "Technical translation is one part of specialised translation; institutional translation, the area of politics, commerce, finance, government etc, is the other. I take technical translation as potentially (but far from actually) non-cultural, therefore 'universal'; the benefits of technology are not confined to one speech community. In principle, the terms should be translated; institutional translation is cultural (so in principle, the terms are transferred, plus or minus) unless concerned with international organisations. For this reason, in general, you translate ILO as BIT (F), IAA (G), but you transfer 'RSPCA' in official and formal contexts, but not in informal ones, where 'RSPCA' would become something like *briiischer Tierschuz-bund*, *society britannique pour la protection des animaux*."

Further Andrew Chesterman and Jenny Williams (2002) observe that "Technical translation covers the translation of many kinds of specialized texts in science and technology, and also in other disciplines such as economics and medicine. In the business sector, this work is often referred to as multilingual documentation. The translation is often of these texts needs a high level of subject knowledge, and a mastery of the relevant terminology. Some research topics concern problems of style and clarity text-type conventions, culture-

specific reader expectations and the special problems of particular document types such as patents. Applied research in this field also works on improving the training of technical translator. Other research looks more widely at the historical role of translators in the dissemination of knowledge."

However, Jody Byrne (2006) however, has a completely different view; "despite the overwhelming demand for and importance of technical translation, there are several stubbornly persistent myths about technical translation's importance, nature and role both in industry and within academia."

Byrne (2006) presents six misconceptions in technical translation which suggests that specialized translation of fields such as business and legal should not be considered as part of technical translation.

"Before we examine technical translation in greater detail and try to relate it to various theories of translation, it would be useful to look at what we mean by "technical translation" and contrast some misconceptions about technical translation with the realities of what it means to be a technical translator,

"In reality, 'technical' means precisely that, something to do with technology and technological texts. Just because there is a specialized terminology, doesn't make something technical. In discussing technical translation it is useful to make the distinction between specialised and technical translation. For example, religion has a very specific terminology and very definite conventions, styles and document structures but it is never regarded as "technical". The tendency among certain theorists to include LSP texts such as legal, financial and economic texts within the field of technical translation is less than helpful not least because each area has its own unique characteristics, requirements and constraints. Simply because a field or subject area has unique or specialized terminology does not make it technical. This is not to say that financial translation, or indeed legal translation, do not deserve to be studied in detail as areas in their own right, in fact there are a number of extremely useful books on these areas such as Alcaraz & Hughes (2002), but rather that they will not be discussed here. Instead, this book will take as its basis a definition of technical translation that has its roots in the translation industry and indeed industry as a whole, namely, that technical translation deals with technological texts. Or more specifically, technical translation deals with texts on subjects based on applied knowledge from the natural sciences."

According to Jody Byrne (2006) technical translation means translating documents in relation technology and in his book *Technical Translation: Usability Strategies for Translating Technical Documentation*, he specifically discusses in a chapter named "Typical Technical Documents" of the very common types technical documents; Proposals, Reports, Instructions and Software User Guides.

*Proposals*

Many products and services are come into being as a result of an idea. Ideas need to be proposed to someone in a position to turn this idea into a reality. Proposals are generally an offer to carry out research or to provide a product or service (Markel 2003:483) and may originate outside a company or from within the company. The crucial aspect of proposals is that they are persuasive documents. Whether the proposal is for a clinical trial of a new anti-ageing cream or to provide consulting services for air traffic control systems, the ultimate aim is to persuade someone else to agree to an idea. In order to do this a proposal needs to show that the writer understands the readers' needs, that the proposers can fulfill their promises and that they are committed to doing this (Markel 2003:488). Proposals can be quite challenging for writers and translators because they can frequently involve quite varied and disparate information such as financial information and legal issues in addition to highly technical engineering material (Byrne, 2006).

*Reports*

At various stages in a product's life, reports will be produced detailing various aspects relating to the product: its development status, viability, commercial success, safety, effectiveness and so on. A report consists of a statement providing facts and information to help readers understand, analyze or take action on some situation or idea. There are three basic types of reports: informational reports, analytical and recommendation reports. Where simple informational reports present information and results, analytical reports provide the same information as well as drawing conclusions based on the facts contained in the report. Recommendation reports build on analytical reports by making various recommendations as to further action etc.

*Instructions*

Instructions are one of the mainstays of technical communication. Technical writers will probably write more instructional documents than any other type of document. While it is convenient to speak of instructions simply in terms of user guides, there are, in fact, several types of instructional document each of which has its own particular content, format and audience. Repair manuals, for instance, are designed for readers who are not necessarily the actual users of the product. Most likely the readers will be engineers. As such, a repair manual will not explain how to use the product but rather will provide step-by-step information on diagnosing problems and remedying them. Since the readers can usually be assumed to have quite specialist knowledge, this type of document will have specialized terminology and will assume a high level of expertise. As such, certain information will be implicit, e.g. in the case of a machine, the manual may not state that a certain type of spanner needs to be used to remove an M15 hexagonal bolt (Byrne, 2006).

*Software User Guides*

Mobile phones, video games, digital cameras, MP3 players, word processing software, televisions, x-ray machines, satellite navigation systems, DVD players and industrial process control systems. A reliance on semiconductors notwithstanding, a common theme linking this diverse range of products is that they are all accompanied by some sort of user guide. More specifically, they invariably include a software user guide.

A common misconception about software user guides is that they are written only by software companies for software products. In reality, however, any company that produces software - even if it is only as a supplement to the company's main product - will produce software user guides (Byrne, 2006).

On the other hand, the other perspective states that technical translation is one part of specialized translation; institutional translation, the area of politics, commerce, finance, government etc (Newmark, 1988).

*Translation of Political Texts*

When studying political translation, two different objects of study are to be considered: translation of political texts and translation as a political statement. In both cases, the meaning of the adjective "political" is central to the analysis. With Chilton and Schäffner (1997: 212), we posit that a text or an action is likely to be political if it involves power or resistance. Hence, texts are political when produced by a politician, but also when they contain some form of power struggle. The translations of a political speech, of a controversial play and of a newspaper editorial are good examples of translated political texts. Translation as a political behaviour also covers a wide range of items, including activist translation, feminist translation and cannibalistic translation. Further, Translation Studies itself can be political, in the sense that the analysis is trying to engage in a debate. For reasons of space, the present piece will mainly deal with the analysis of translated political texts. But Gender in translation, committed approaches and activism or Post-colonial literatures and translation are also all related to translation as a political statement (Gagnon, 2016).

*Commercial Translation*

Commercial translation covers all types of commercial documentation, such as invoices, contracts, transport documentation, customs documents, etc. Most commercial translators are corporate translators or specialists in a translation company and their field of expertise usually extends into financial and legal matters (Gouadec, 2007).

*Financial Translation*

Financial translation encompasses any kind of financial documentation (company reports, financial statements, finance deals, contracts, stock market information, banking documents, fiscal information, etc.) related to the areas of

finance, banking, taxes, stock exchange transactions and economic activity in general. The volumes of financial translation are increasing fast with the move towards financial globalization. The demand for translators familiar with the world stock markets and financial markets has increased significantly over the past few years and financial translators associations are springing up in many countries (Gouadec, 2007).

*Translations Related to Government*

The digital and information age, communication between government agencies as well as between governments and their citizens has become increasingly diverse linguistically. A large amount of government information – everything from forms to public service announcements to legal documents – must be translated into a number of legally mandated languages so they are accessible to all. This might include the translation of large volumes of legal, financial, and government content with quick turnaround.

Meanwhile, a word that has a specific meaning within a specific field of expertise is considered as a technical term.

III. METHODOLOGY

As indicated in the literature the definition of technical translation is based on two major concepts (Newmark, 1998), which are based on the usage of technical terms. While majority in the field of translation seems to consider specialized areas of translation such as commercial translation and political translation as a form technical translation, Jody Byrne states that “in reality, ‘technical’ means precisely that, something to do with technology and technological texts. Just because there is a specialized terminology, doesn’t make something technical.”

This has left the world of translation studies, confused over definition of technical translation. Particularly, when teaching and learning the technical translation, number of individuals could find it difficult to understand its exact meaning.

Yet, Newmark (1988) mentions that technical translation is primarily distinguished from other forms of translation by terminology, although terminology usually only makes up about 5-10% of a text. Based on this statement, a comparative research was carried out through the quantitative observations on the usage of technical terms in the two perspectives by scholars.

As mentioned in the literature Byrne (2006) discusses four types of typical technical translations; proposals, instructions, Reports and Software Guides. Hence, non-literary documents related to Proposals, Instructions, Reports and Software Guides were selected to quantitative observations through convenience sampling which comes under non-probability sampling. The documents were thoroughly observed manually counting the technical terms in each and every document and finally calculated the usage of technical terms as a percentage of total words.

Meanwhile, the other perceptive suggests that technical translation is one part of specialized translation; institutional translation, the area of politics, commerce, finance, government etc (Newmark, 1988). Hence non-literary documents related to areas of politics, commerce, finance and government were selected to quantitative observations through convenience sampling. The documents were thoroughly observed manually counting the technical terms in each and every document and finally calculated the usage of technical terms as a percentage of total words.

Through the convince sampling a section of Sri Lanka’s constitution was selected as the political text while a document related to External Sector Developments and Policies was selected financial text. A business contract document was selected as commercial text while a document from the election commission of Sri Lanka was chosen as the government-related text.

The higher overall percentage of the usage of technical terms determines which of these two perspectives should be considered as the definition for the term ‘technical translation.’

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study indicated a clear difference between the two major perspectives in terms of the technical terms as the documents related to the technology depicts a higher number of technical terms in comparison to the documents of specialized areas such as texts of politics, commercial, finance and government-related.

A section of Sri Lanka’s constitution was selected as the political text and the selected passage was consisted of 6500 words, but only 243 turned out to be technical terms, which is 3.73 as a percentage. A document of External Sector Developments and Policies was selected as financial text and the selected passage was consisted of 5398 words with only 115 words recognized as technical terms leaving a percentage of 2.03. A business contract document was selected as commercial text and out of the total of 4836 words only 257 proved to be technical terms with a percentage of 5.31. Meanwhile, a document from the election commission of Sri Lanka was chosen as the government-related document which was consisted of 5789 words and only 231 identified as technical terms with a percentage of 3.99.

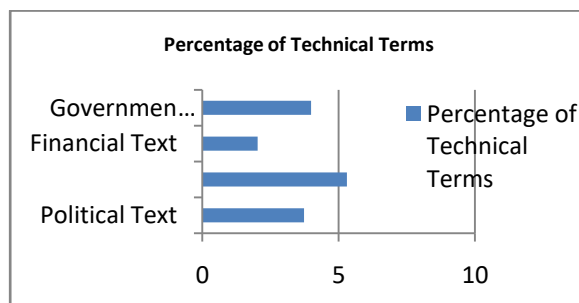


Table 1: The percentage of technical terms as per the specialized areas of translation is depicted

However, there was a significant difference in terms of the percentage of technical terms as per the other perspective highlighted by Jody Byrne. A software use guide on Capilo 500SE was selected and out of the selected 5000 words, 703 turned out to be technical terms with a percentage of 14.7 while a proposal titled Digital Terrestrial Radio Broadcasting Network was observed. This document was consisted of 8475 words, and 1349 words were recognized as technical terms which as a percentage were 15.9. A television repair manual was selected to observe the technical terms in instructions and out of 3479, only 186 turned out to be technical terms – percentage of 5.34. A report consisting of details over the development of a device was also selected to observe and it depicted 265 technical terms from a total of 4986 with a percentage of 5.31.

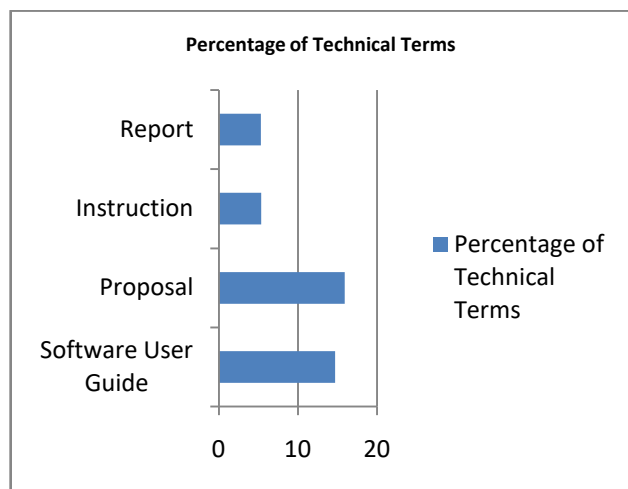


Table 2: The percentage of technical terms as per the documents related to technology is depicted

## V. CONCLUSION

As indicated in the Results and Discussion, the documents related to the technology clearly have a high percentage of technical terms in comparison to the documents of specialized areas such as politics. The technology-related documents such as proposals and software user guide have very high

percentage in comparison to the other types while finance texts appear to have the least percentage of technical terms.

The results draw the conclusion that documents related the technology such as technology based proposals, instructions, reports and software user guide have a higher percentage of technical terms and hence the translation of such documents should be considered as the technical translation.

On the other hand translations of texts of specialized areas have lesser number of technical terms in comparison to documents related to technology, hence the study could recommend that perceptiveness of Jody Byrne (2006) should be considered as the most suitable definition for technical translation.

The research further recommends that when technical translation is taught all over the world in different schools and universities, they student, teachers and lecturers should only focus on the documents which are related to the technology.

As for the specialized areas such as political texts, commercial texts etc should not be recognized as technical translation based on the results of this research. In fact Gouadec (2007) discusses technical translation as one of the specialized translation forms. Therefore, listing down texts of politics and finance etc., appear to be a clear mistake and confusion. Hence, based on the results, the translation of documents of specialized areas should considered as specialized translation, and not technical translation.

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