

The Contribution of Pre-translation Reading to the Translation Process

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ABSTRACT

Pre-translation analysis phase is of great significance for the effective carrying out of a translation process. One of the most important stages of pre-translation analysis is pre-translation reading. At this stage, the translator encounters the source text for the first time and identifies possible difficulties that they may arise during translation. The role of pre-translation reading in the translation process is critical yet under-researched. This study aims to reveal the contributions that pre-translation reading can provide to the translator during the translation process. In this direction, a scale that can be used by translators during the pre-translation reading stage has been presented. The questions prepared in this scale have been grouped under the headings of topic - theme, purpose - target audience, text type - genre, and lexis - terminology. A hybrid text containing explanatory, informative and persuasive features has been analysed using the scale. This study has shown that pre-translation reading will greatly facilitate the translator's work during the translation process.

Keywords: Pre-translation reading, text type, textual analysis, translation

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Çeviri Öncesi Okumanın Çeviri Sürecine Katkısı

ÖZ

Çeviri sürecinin etkili bir şekilde yürütülebilmesi için çeviri öncesi analiz aşaması büyük önem taşımaktadır. Çeviri öncesi analizin en önemli aşamalarından birisi de çeviri öncesi okumadır. Bu aşamada çevirmen kaynak metinle ilk kez karşılaşır ve çeviri sırasında karşılaşabileceği muhtemel zorlukları tespit eder. Çeviri sürecinde çeviri öncesi okuma büyük öneme sahip olmasına rağmen yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu çalışma çeviri öncesi okumanın çeviri sürecinde çevirmene sağlayabileceği katkıları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çeviri öncesi okuma aşamasında çevirmenler tarafından kullanılacak bir ölçek de ortaya konulmuştur. Bu ölçekte hazırlanan sorular konu – tema, amaç – hedef kitle, metin türü – metin alt türü ve söz varlığı – terimler dizgesi başlıkları altında gruplandırılmıştır. Açıklayıcı, bilgilendirici ve ikna edici özellikleri ihtiva eden hibrit bir metin hazırlanan ölçek kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmayla çeviri öncesi yapılacak okumanın çeviri sürecinde çevirmenin işini büyük ölçüde kolaylaştıracağı ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çeviri, çeviri öncesi okuma, metin türü, metin analizi

1. Introduction

Many people regard translation as a product since it has become available to them as a concrete entity in the form of a book, journal, newspaper, web-site information, etc. However, translators go through several stages in the translation process and there is usually a great effort and thinking behind the final outcome. An important phase of this process is the pre-translation stage which includes steps such as preparation for the translation, reading and analysis of the source text.

The relationship between reading and translation is closely tied up, with reading being both a fundamental component of the translation process and a specialized form of reading in itself. The reading process in translation involves multiple stages: initial reading to grasp the text, additional readings of parallel texts for context, re-readings to update understanding, and reading the target text during production and revision phases. Newmark (1988) mentions two types of reading, the first of which is for general comprehension and the second one for interpretation of textual details. For him, translation is applied reading; the deeper the analysis, the more accurate the translation. Reading for translation is usually considered more demanding than general comprehension. According to some researchers like Neveu (2019) and Washbourne (2012), reading for translation is a distinct, active skill that requires explicit teaching in translator training programs which can enhance translation quality. Washbourne (2012) offers some basic reading methods such as skimming, scanning, exploratory reading, close reading / rereading, etc. for different purposes or subtasks.

Translational reading refers to the process of critically analysing a source text as a translator, not just for comprehension but with a focus on identifying several features of the text that impact the translation. Shreve et al. (1993) draw attention to the significant differences in how translators read for translation in their study, which implies that there are other approaches to this type of reading. Cragie and Pattison (2017) break down the reading stages of the translation process into four: the commissioning or assignment stage, pre-translation reading, in-translation reading, and post-translation reading. How translators read the source text in these stages will naturally differ due to the characteristic features and requirements of each phase. The commissioning or assignment stage is crucial because it sets the foundation for the entire translation process. This stage encompasses both professional considerations and practical factors. Professional considerations such as the translator's expertise on the field, ethical factors, workload as well as the practical ones like

deadline, payment, expectations of the client, etc. will definitely affect the rejection or acceptance of the commissioned task.

Since this stage is when the translator sees the source text for the first time, the reading is not expected to be a detailed and thorough one. The current study discusses the pre-translation stage in detail and demonstrates in what ways it may help translators during the translation process with the help of a scale with four basic criteria and a sample analysis.

2. Pre-Translation Reading

Among their several roles, translators' role as a reader and a writer is highlighted by many scholars such as Spivak (2000), Marquez (2002), Scott (2006), Bush (2006), etc. Bassnett (2014) states that the centrality of the translator's function is something that all of these authors and critics agree upon, seeing a translation as a (re)writer as well as a (re)reader. She also says that the intricacy of the translation process is now more widely acknowledged, and as a result, the translator's crucial function is being emphasized more and more.

Larson (1998) uses the term *exegesis* to refer to the process of discovering the meaning of the source language text to be translated. In this process, the translator should read the original text many times before reading other materials that could help them understand the language or culture of the source text. This will help them to fully understand it as he will look for the main idea and what the writer wants to say. He will also look for bigger portions or groups to figure out the outline of the text since the ultimate goal is to understand the whole text before he starts translating (Larson, 1998). The translator's role as a reader becomes apparent in the pre-translation stage as the translation process requires a deep engagement with the source text. Hence, reading the text from a dual perspective – both as a reader and a translator - before translating it can be regarded as a strategic preparation for the translation. Thus, translators can anticipate how readers in the target language will understand and react to the text, which will be a valuable asset throughout the translation process.

Zhang (1997) raises issues regarding the translator's unique interpretation of the original text, which is influenced by their historical background and cultural upbringing. He further claims that translators frequently cannot agree upon a single closest reading of the text in the source language. Regardless of these drawbacks, pre-translation reading analysis essentially serves as a diagnostic tool that gives the translator a proper grasp of the key elements of the source text, facilitating a translation output that is more reliable, accurate, cohesive, and efficient.

2.1 Initial Exploration

Upon a translator's acceptance of the task, the phase of pre-translation reading starts. In this stage, reading the entire text before translating is highly advisable primarily for a contextual understanding. Hence, the translator has the chance to detect themes, tone, and culture specific items that may not be clear in isolated sentences. The translator will also make a mental note of several expressions such as recurring phrases, idioms, or jargon that need special handling during the translation process. Zhang (1997) asserts that during the pre-translation reading phase the translator's selective attention is focused more on the concepts, facts, happenings, and linguistic components than it is on the feelings that the text arouses in the reader.

Pre-reading the entire text will also help the translator to anticipate challenges such as ambiguities, wordplay, or any other 'untranslatable' elements. Structural differences between various text types will also be revealed, which will also ease the difficulty of the translation task. Moreover, mistakes caused by misinterpretations of sarcasm, irony, or implied meanings can be prevented thanks to the

pre-reading stage. Some people may think reading the entire text is a waste of time; on the contrary, this stage contributes to the strategic planning of the translation by aiding time management since the translator will have the chance to identify problematic sections which need extra attention.

While it is strongly recommended to read the whole text prior to translation, it may not be applicable in all cases. Exceptions can include urgent deadlines. In case of a such scenario, the translator may opt for skimming key patterns instead of a full deep read. Some types of texts such as manuals or surveys contain highly repetitive content where consistency is formulaic, therefore the translator may skip those recurrent sections. Another exception might be very long texts. Translators may read a sample or outline of the text first, then proceed section by section.

Skipping the pre-translation reading process poses several risks for a desired output. To illustrate, translating “lawyer” as solicitor in one paragraph and barrister in another will create inconsistency in terms of tone and terminology within the same legal document. Such negligence in legal translations may cause legal consequences for the translator if not necessary attention is not given. Similarly, expressions like insomnia, insomnolency, insomnolence, sleeplessness, restlessness, agrypnia are used to adress “lack of sleep” or “inability to sleep”; however, using them interchangeably within the same medical document will be questioned in terms of consistency in translation.

The missing of nuances is likely to occur without a pre-translation reading, which may cause a key plot twist in a literary text and more revisions will probably be needed as fixing errors takes longer than preventive analysis. For instance, without pre-translation reading, a translator might not notice a humorous element in a novel, short story, or an anecdote and render a wordplay literally leading to loss of humour. Undoubtedly, translators must have the skill to read between the lines to detect such subtleties.

2.2 Criteria and Questions for Pre-Translation Reading Stage

The text type or genre influences how translators read the source text. On the one hand, translators can scan for repeated terms and verify their standardized translations in dealing with technical and specialized texts such as legal or medical. Definitions and explanations embedded in the text can be noted for future verifications. On the other hand, for literary texts such as poems, novels, dramas, etc. reading the whole text will help identify the author’s style, diction, choice of words, etc. for an effective translation. Furthermore, noticing the appeal in operative texts like advertisements, slogans, etc. will be possible by pre-translation reading, which is of great significance in the translation process.

As Cragie and Pattison (2017) state only a few clear characteristics, such as the topic or specialized subject, some vocabulary and terminology, and the fundamental argument or logic may be apparent upon the initial exploration of the source text. Additional research will be required for features like extra-contextual references, style and register, specialized language, language and structure etc. To reveal certain obvious features of the source text, translators may ask the following questions which can be grouped under four categories in the pre-translation reading phase. The questions may range from very general to specific ones to understand the text better.

Table 1: *Criteria and Questions for Pre-translation Reading*

CRITERIA	QUESTIONS
TOPIC – THEME	What is the text about at surface level?
	What nouns or key terms repeat frequently?
	Are there any domain specific keywords?
PURPOSE – AUDIENCE	Why was this text written?
	Who was this text written for?
	Who is the target reader?
TEXT TYPE – GENRE	What is the primary function of the text?
	Does the text follow a specific pattern?
	Are there any hybrid elements?
LEXIS – TERMINOLOGY	What kind of vocabulary is used?
	Are key terms / concepts defined?
	Does the language fall within one or more specific registers?

The questions in Table 1 will help the translator comprehend the text to be translated and identify potential challenges during translation. However, a more detailed understanding of the source text as well as the text's particular features will arrive at the in-translation reading phase where the translator undertakes an interactive role.

2.3 Sample Analysis

For the pre-translation reading analysis, the sample text below is selected and taken as an extract from the RAND Corporation web-site to set an example of a hybrid text which carries the features of informative and operative text types.

Text 1. Turning Towards Turkey: Why NATO Needs to Lean into its Relationship

Beyond its military contributions, Turkey's diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties extend into Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Unlike its European NATO counterparts, Ankara can engage with regimes that Brussels and Washington may prefer to avoid. Whether securing access to critical minerals, negotiating energy deals, or counterbalancing Russian and Chinese influence, Turkey can serve as NATO's bridge to regions where Western credibility is limited.

Deepening NATO's partnership with Turkey requires a shift in mindset. European leaders must abandon the illusion that Turkey will ever be the Westernised, values-driven ally they wish it to be. Instead, they must engage with the Turkey that exists today. A more transactional relationship, where shared interests take precedence over ideological alignment, is the most realistic approach. Turkey sees itself as an independent power, not a subordinate NATO member, and its leaders will continue to make deals that best serve their own national interests. Instead of resisting this reality, NATO should find ways to leverage it. (Lucas, 2025)

In terms of topic and theme, it is obvious that the text discusses Turkey's evolving role within NATO, emphasizing the need for NATO to adopt a more pragmatic, interest-based approach to its relationship with Turkey, recognizing its unique geopolitical positioning and independent foreign policy. Words such as Turkey, NATO, Europe / European are repeated within the text. Besides, domain-specific keywords like NATO, negotiating energy deals, transactional relationship, ideological alignment, subordinate member, Westernised, etc. imply that the text is mainly on politics and there is a geopolitical, diplomatic, and security-oriented domain.

As far as purpose and audience are concerned, it can be inferred from the initial reading that the purpose is to persuade NATO policymakers and analysts to reframe how they view and engage with Turkey by advocating for a strategic, transactional partnership over a value-based alliance.

The intended audience are most likely policymakers, defence analysts, diplomats, and strategic planners within NATO member countries, especially in Europe as well as academic and think tank communities interested in international relations and security. The target readers of the translated text will probably be informed professionals with a background in international relations, security studies, or diplomacy.

Concerning the text type and genre, the text carries the features of a commentary or policy analysis aimed at influencing strategic thinking within NATO. The text explains Turkey's strategic role in NATO (expository), while also arguing for a shift in NATO's approach to Turkey (persuasive). It provides analysis, evidence, and a recommendation, typical of policy-oriented writing. The balance between informing and persuading is apparent.

As regards lexis and terminology, it could be argued that the vocabulary type is elevated, formal, and analytical with a strong use of international relations terminology. Terms like transactional relationship, values-driven ally, and subordinate NATO member are not explicitly defined but are used in context that assumes the reader's familiarity with policy discourse. The register primarily falls within the policy register with academic and political overtones; the language is suited to a professional, policy-oriented context with no colloquial or informal elements.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Such pre-translation reading analysis equips the translator with a strategic map of the text, enabling them to recognize the text at close range and foresee probable difficulties in translating the text to prepare for the decisions on what translation strategies could be adopted. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis could be carried out at a re-reading of the source text or during the in-translation phase. In addition, the boundaries of the criteria and questions provided for the pre-translation reading analysis in this study are not sharp as there might be some overlaps in the analysis. To illustrate, questioning why the text was written under purpose and audience criteria may also give clues about the primary function of the text under text type and genre benchmark. Additionally, to search for the theme and subject matter, looking into the recurring words, frequent expressions, and specific domain terms will correspond to lexis and terminology as the vocabulary used in the text is also analysed under this criterion. Translators may jot down notes during the pre-translation reading phase when needed to distinguish between these criteria.

The translator's role as a reader is essential for producing high-quality translations. It entails active, critical, and interpretive reading that goes beyond mere surface comprehension. Despite its significance, reading for translation has been undervalued. Pre-translation reading greatly enhances translation quality and efficiency. It can act as a risk reduction strategy that saves time in revisions while ensuring coherence and consistency. For large projects, even a partial pre-read is preferable to none. With the assistance of pre-translation reading, translators can identify ambiguities, make cultural adaptations, maintain consistency, and avoid inaccuracies that may hinder the quality of the translation.

In conclusion, pre-translation reading and translation are fundamentally connected activities. The main objective of pre-translation reading is to provide the translator with an understanding of the source text as a whole, enabling them to devise appropriate strategies for overcoming translation challenges. Translators should appreciate the importance of effective pre-translation reading, as it assists them throughout the entire translation process. This is an ideal opportunity to identify potential problematic areas by adding comments or notes for challenging sections. Additionally, noting key features of the texts during this phase will help translators develop a mini-style guide for similar text types in future translations.

4. Statements

4.1 Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

4.2. Contributions

There is only one author who contributed all the study.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

There is no need for ethical approval as there is no human or animal subject.

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