Measuring the difficulty of a Source Text

For some of the assessments you are asked to do at UG and at PG level, we ask you to select your own ST. Like Goldilocks’s porridge, this needs to be just right: not so difficult that translating it ties you up in knots, nor so easy that it doesn’t stretch you at all (it will be difficult to get a high mark, even for a perfect TT, if you have given yourself an easy ride).

The ideal text will fall somewhere in between, of sufficient complexity that it allows you to demonstrate your prowess as a translator to the full.

So what does a sufficiently complex text look like?

Challenging … from a translation perspective

You need to make sure that you choose a ST that forces you to stop and think, sends you off to look things up, presents translation challenges (preferably a range of them) and allows you scope to bring in your background reading, if you are required to write a commentary.

Challenging … from a linguistic perspective

It is also a good idea to ensure that you have selected a text that is sufficiently challenging from a linguistic perspective. One way of testing this is to use a ‘readability’ test.

The readability test devised by Kandel & Moles is a modified version of the Flesch Reading Ease Score for English language texts. It indicates the degree of difficulty of a piece of French text, on a scale from 1 to 100. The higher the score, the easier the text. I suggest you select a text that falls within the bands <Normal - Fairly Difficult - Difficult>.

How to test the ‘readability’ of your chosen text:

2. Cut and paste a decent chunk of the text into the text box
3. Select Kandel & Moles from the drop-down menu
4. Click the 'calculate the score' button

This website also tests the readability of texts in Spanish and English (and Dutch and Swedish). Incidentally, the English test (Flesch Reading Ease score) can be set up with Microsoft Word, using the Proofing Tools.

Kandel and Moles scale (for French texts):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Fairly Difficult</th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Fairly Easy</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very Easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>70-80</td>
<td>80-90</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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