The importance of the brief

'Translating without clear instructions is like swimming without water'
(Nord, 1997, p.78)

It is extremely difficult to produce a competent translation, if you have no clear idea of the reason for which you are translating. For Nord, the instructions do not emanate from the ST itself. A functionalist approach to translation considers the purpose for which the translation will be used: “the situation in which the source text fulfils its functions is, by definition, different from that of the target text” (Nord, 1997, p.59). So it is crucial for you as a translator to elicit this information from your client at the outset of the task.

In some of the translation modules you study here at Birmingham, you will be required to choose your own text for translation. You will be your own client! It is good practice to create your own plausible brief for your translation project. Why will you be translating this ST? Who is your intended readership? How will your translation be disseminated (theoretically speaking, unless you have landed yourself an actual commission, which has been known from time to time)?

Nord lists the key information that a brief should contain (1997, p.60):

- the (intended) text function(s)
- the target-text addressee(s)
- the (prospective) time and place of text reception
- the medium over which the text will be transmitted
- the motive for the production or reception of the text

Useful links on translation briefs

The Institute of Translators and Interpreters (ITI) produced a very useful document in 2002, entitled The Thirty-Nine Steps. They don’t seem to publish it on their own site any more, and while it is available elsewhere on the web, it keeps inconveniently shifting about. I therefore embed it at the end of this document, which makes it slightly less legible than I would like, but at least keeps it from disappearing. It covers all the questions a translator needs to ask, both of the client and of him- or herself before submitting the translation. There is also a really detailed ‘toolkit’ for creating a brief here. It was designed for professionals in the healthcare industry to help them to give clear instructions to translators, but contains lots of useful information on the process.

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Sample student briefs (undergraduate) - 2014 cohort

The Opéra National de Bordeaux are bringing their production of the ballet Giselle to the UK for a national tour in the summer of 2014. As such, they require the programme for the production to be translated into English so that the audience has access to the background information and history of the ballet. They have asked for a 1000-word sample to be translated from the production notes in the first instance. The company will deal with the layout and design themselves so only requires the text of the translation.

Penguin Classics have asked for 1,000 words of the French 19th-century children’s school book/novel Le tour de la France par deux enfants: devoir et patrie by G. Bruno to be translated. The intended target reader will be academics studying education in Third-Republic France and the historical period of the Franco-Prussian War. Therefore, the text must be translated with brief footnotes in order to provide historical and contextual comments, alongside references for further reading. The translation must maintain the temporal distance of the novel, written two centuries ago, and incorporate this 19th-century archaic language in order to make the English target readers feel the historical detachment. In order to prove the ability to translate the text with sufficient footnoting, archaic language and consideration of formatting, the publishers have asked for the first 700 words of chapter three, which is a part of the text involving essential contextual information, and the first 300 words of chapter four, which is a part of the text with an image, to be translated. The publisher will translate the title of the book.

The publishing house Véhicule Press, which publishes English language translations of French Canadian novels, has commissioned a translation of the novel Ouf! by the French Canadian author Denise Bombardier. Bombardier’s novels are yet to be translated into English, but a French Quebecois reader has enquired about the availability of English translations of Bombardier’s novels, as they would like their Anglophone counterparts to be able to enjoy them. Due to public demand and interest, Véhicule Press is beginning the translations of Bombardier’s novels with Ouf! with her other novels prospectively being translated in the future. The publishing agency would therefore like an English language translation of the first 1000 words of the novel, which would meet the requirements of being suitable for their targeted international Anglophone readership. The translation will be available from all reliable Anglophone booksellers and in e-book form from late 2014. However, the publisher itself will deal with creating a title for the translation and also with any presentational concerns.

With the recent release of Anna Gavalda’s novel Billie (2013), Random House are asking translators to submit a sample translation of up to 1000 words of the French source text (ST) translated into English from which they will select a translator to translate the full text. However, the author’s principal wish is that the novel is translated according to the voice of Billie, and transposed into the target language and culture (see appendix A for personal correspondence with author). For my sample submission I decided to translate three sections of the first chapter (ST lines 2-18, 30-68 and 89-104). As one of France’s most internationally recognised contemporary authors, Anna Gavalda has seen her works sold in many Anglophone countries and her 2004 novel, Ensemble, c’est tout, was made into a film starring one of France’s most prominent international actresses, Audrey Tautou, as such the English translation must do a justice to the ST author, as the international success of Anna Gavalda’s past work is self-evident.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is looking for ways to develop its global strategy in dealing with the improvement of after-care support for victims of sexual violence. As a result, they are in the process of commissioning an online health report to gather expertise from professionals dedicated to this field.

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of research. This particular newspaper text has been requested to voice the opinion of the world-renowned French psychiatrist and victimology expert, Muriel Salmona.

The Centre for International Studies and Research (CERI) has commissioned the translation of a series of journals on topical issues which give insight into particular countries, regions, industry sectors, geopolitical issues and economic trends. These have been written by intellectuals and experts in the respective fields. CERI has requested the translation of a 1000 word sample of the journal, “Le rêve arabe de la Turquie brisé par la crise syrienne,” to assess the quality of translation. The journals will be freely available on their English site, once translated, and are to be used by academics and policymakers for research purposes. The intended reader and the skopos is the same for both the ST and TT. Any formatting is the responsibility of CERI.

The source texts (ST) that I have been asked to translate are two articles published on the website of the French newspaper, Le Figaro. The two articles which appear on the ‘l'étudiant’ section of the website draw attention to the ‘Bizutage’ trend in France, otherwise known as initiations. The English newspaper, The Guardian, has commissioned a translation of these two short texts to form part of a supplement that they are producing on studying abroad. These texts are informative, with the aim of educating prospective students about the realities of studying in France and therefore the level of assumed knowledge of the target reader is fairly basic. The two source texts will be compiled together into one supplement that is to be published in the United Kingdom, in anticipation of the academic year, when students must start looking into any international study options available to them.

As part of its build-up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup taking place this summer, BBC Sport is developing a ‘World Cup 2014’ section on its website (bbc.co.uk/sport) which, amongst other things, will display a plethora of content relating each participating team’s recent results, their current squad and also their manager. The Source Text (ST) I have been asked to translate, taken from francetvinfo.fr/sports, is an appraisal of Didier Deschamps’ performance as France manager since he took over from Laurent Blanc in 2012. I have been asked to simply translate the text and leave issues of formatting to the BBC Sport editorial team, who will seek to upload the translation to their website as soon as possible. The target audience of the text is made up of British football fans, many of whom will not have kept up-to-date with the France team’s progress since the last major tournament, the 2012 European Championships, which preceded Deschamps’ appointment. The skopos is thus to provide readers with an insight into the type of manager Deschamps is and how France have progressed under his leadership.

The translation of an extract of an article from a French monthly magazine entitled Causette. The article is a report on the current (2013) situation of childcare in France which highlights the reasons behind the difficulties women face reconciling their work life with motherhood. The translation’s function is to inform an English speaking reader about the obstacles faced by women from a French perspective. Secondly, it will enable English readers to access a different type of ‘women’s’ magazine that deals with topical issues with a critical, intelligent and humorous perspective. The translation will be made for both men and women who are culturally and politically engaged but who are not necessarily equipped with French specific cultural knowledge. The translation will feature in the Guardian Weekly (in which articles incorporate translations of foreign publications) as part of a special feature on the professional situations of women worldwide, to have been published on International Women’s Day, Saturday, March 8, 2014.

The UK-based publishing house Faber & Faber has requested a translation of Laurent Mauvignier’s novel Des Hommes. The novel first appeared in 2009 and follows a veteran in his experiences both during and
after the Algerian war. In recent years there has been a greater focus on the understanding of war and the plight of men returning from war. Literature has been widely used to enhance memory and understanding of the war and there is thus a market for this translation. The purpose of the translation will not differ from the original source text; a novel that informs the reader of the Algerian War. The target audience will thus be similar to the source text audience; a general novel reader who may or may not have prior knowledge of the Algerian war. Hence, the publisher has encouraged the recreation of a similar register as that featured in the ST; however, the TT will differ in that the target audience will be English-speaking and therefore the TT must be comprehensible to the British/English speaking audience. Contextual reference must remain the same and similar content is a prerequisite, namely the incorporation of military-specific vocabulary and associated expressions; however, form is expected to change so as to ensure a comprehensible translation to the English speaking audience. The TT layout is not of importance; the publisher has requested the text only. Completion of the full translation is required in time for a winter 2014 publication. This extract of 1,000 words is a preliminary sample as requested by the publisher.

Sample student briefs (undergraduate) - 2013 cohort

A translation from a newspaper article taken from Jeune Afrique for use in an International Relations textbook as one of various sources to inform students about France's attitude towards the unrest in Mali and DRC.

An extract from the article called 'Tiendas de Nueva York' on the online blog 'Mi patria son mis zapatos' by Victor del Pozo. The TT will be published on the blog, available by clicking on the 'English' option on the website, in order to reach a wider Anglophone audience as a representation of the global outreach of the author.

The translation company have asked me to produce an English version of the Fédération Française de Canoë-Kayak (FFCK) website so that it is accessible to British expatriates who do not understand French. The level of assumed knowledge of canoeing of the TR is equal to that of the TR of the ST, but the cultural knowledge of the TR of the TT will be less than that of the TR of the ST. The translation company have informed me that there will be an icon on the homepage of the website which will provide the option of the English versions, and that I am to produce a version which is as close as possible to the format of the French version of the website.

The Arab Review, an online journal which promotes cultural understanding of the Arab world, wants to publish an article on their website which identifies what is Islamic and what Islamic culture and society is, with the aim of avoiding misunderstanding's and misrepresentations of Islam in the Western world and hence overcoming cultural barriers. Due to the clarification of Islamic religion and culture and society given in the Moroccan online magazine Tel-quel-online's article, 'Halal Haram. Ce n'est pas forcément ce que vous croyez', The Arab Review would like it translated for their website. The target audience of the translation is therefore a Western reader who has an interest in the Arab world.

The ST that I have been asked to translate is taken from the FFR (Fédération Française de Rugby) website and details 'La Comité Départemental' and their role within French rugby during the 2011 Rugby World Cup. I have been asked by the IRB (International Rugby Board) to translate it for the RFU (Rugby Football Union) in light of the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England, as well as any other Rugby Union that would like to see how the French coped with and used the Rugby World Cup to improve rugby within the country. The ST is an online document available on the FFR website. It will stay an online document

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being made available on the RFU website as well as any other Union’s website that may want to use it. It is a rugby-specific document with rugby-specific terminology and is meant for people either involved with or interested in rugby. This allows me to keep most of the technical terms relative to rugby in the text. This translation is being produced a couple of years after the original publication. However, this does not affect any part of the translation.

The Princess in the Woods (La Biche au Bois) is a 17th-century French fairy tale that an American film company has commissioned to be translated and updated with the intention of later being adapted into a screenplay. The target reader will be the film company, the target audience will be young adult. The typical modern Western audience is familiar with texts of this genre because of the current popularity of fairy tales in the cultural sphere. The full text of 1000 words will be published and sent electronically to the addressee. The extract of 10000 words is a mere sample.

A translation of Christiane Rochefort’s Les Petits Enfants du Siècle into English commissioned by A level exam boards. This translation will be used as a teaching aid and will contain contextual notes relating to French culture in the 1960s and French idioms.

The UK version of Marie Claire, as a magazine aimed at educated women between the ages of 25-35, is looking to publish something a little meatier and more controversial than its usual fare of fashion and beauty tips, celebrity interviews and even topical debates such as women’s rights. It has thus asked you to translate an excerpt from a blog entry posted on the popular French blog C’est la Gêne. The blog entry it has selected discusses the attitudes of so-called 'liberal' thinkers towards the proposed gay marriage legislation, because it is likely to spark interest and discussion. However, you have been specifically asked to translate the article in such a way that the characters portrayed cannot be identified as your typical Marie Claire reader so that the published article does not offend and the magazine does not alienate its readership in trying something new. This is precisely why it has chosen a blog written by a French homosexual male, and which describes male characters.

The BBC Proms have commissioned me to translate an already existing concert programme of a visiting French orchestra into English. The orchestra gave a performance of the exact same concert a week ago and wish that the programme is translated as accurately as possible, keeping all information from the French, including that of their sponsors, who agreed a deal with the orchestra to promote their business abroad. The target audience is similar, but not identical. The same level of wider musical knowledge is assumed, including other names conductors and orchestras, but some French institutions and bodies need to be clarified in English. As the concert is taking place less than a month after the original, no alteration to time periods are needed, but the programme itself does need to be presented with the BBC Proms logo.

Sample student briefs (postgraduate)

Owing to the popularity of mystery novels in the UK and following the success of Fred Vargas’s The Three Evangelists, Vintage Books is commissioning a translation of Michel Bussi’s Un avion sans elle. The translation is aimed at British readers of this genre and should therefore meet their expectations.
The Independent has decided to add a health encyclopaedia to its website, modelled on the one that appears on Le Figaro's website. The Independent is working with the French newspaper and has commissioned a translation of Le Figaro's Encyclopédie santé. ‘Accidents ischémiques transitoires’ is one of the sections of the encyclopaedia. The encyclopaedia will be a permanent feature on The Independent's website and will provide readers with detailed factual information of the diseases and illnesses it describes.

The History Press has commissioned an English translation of George Blond's La Marne for widespread distribution in the UK and Northern Ireland, as part of the First World War centenary commemorations. The publisher plans to improve public awareness of events endured by different nations during the war, whilst exposing English-language readers to foreign cultures with their own experiences and memories of 1914-18. Readers need to gain a nuanced historical and cultural understanding of events not only through the eyes of a French population fleeing a brutal and devastating invasion, but from the perspective of the French and German high command whose decisions would alter the course of the First World War.

After the success of Emine Sevgi Özdemar's The Bridge of the Golden Horn (2007), the publisher Serpent's Tail is commissioning a translation of Yadé Kara's Selam Berlin and is asking for a test piece of 1000 words. The English translation is to be published in the United Kingdom. It is targeted at a general readership and the aim is to immerse the reader in the novel's cultural and historical setting so that they can experience the events from the protagonist's point of view.

Bibliography

Christiane Nord (1997), Translating as a Purposeful Activity (Manchester: St Jerome)
The thirty-nine steps

Questions you need to ask yourself when undertaking a translation

1. Into what variant language is the translation to be made?
   E.g. Castilian Spanish, Mexican Spanish...

2. What is the purpose of the translation?
   E.g. information, publication, use in court, training...

3. What is the target readership of the translation?
   E.g. literacy specialist...

4. What is the intended quality level for the translation?
   E.g. draft revision, third party review...

5. Does the style or terminology used in the translation have to conform to any specific requirements?
   E.g. consistency with ISO document, house style, pharmacopoeia...

6. Can any reference/background material be provided?
   E.g. prior correspondence, reports, glossaries, specifications...

7. Who is the contact for queries?
   Keep records of the contact person's details: name, email, telephone...

8. Is the layout of the translation to comply with any particular requirements?
   E.g. facsimile of the original, page for page...

9. Are tables and graphical material to be incorporated with the text?
   E.g. figures, diagrams, equations, flow charts...

10. Which particular word processing software requires the translation?
    E.g. MSWord, Macintosh, QuarkXpress...

11. In which format is the translation to be provided?
    E.g. paper, diskette, electronic file...

12. When is the translation to be delivered?
    Don't forget there is always a deadline for the submission of translators.

13. How is the translation to be delivered?
    E.g. fax, modem, internet...

14. Where is the translation to be delivered?
    E.g. client's address, intermediary, both, internet address...

15. Is any non-standard form of delivery required?
    E.g. courier, express post, recorded/special delivery...

16. Before delivering: has the translation been properly checked?
    E.g. correct terminology, spell-check, structure and syntax...

17. Does the target text read like a piece of original text in that language?

18. Is the source text, reference material, to be returned?

19. Does the translation have to be certified?
    E.g. official documents. An ITI official translator can certify documents. If not, you have to go to a notary public, solicitor or registrar.

20. On what basis will the translation be charged?
    E.g. target text length, source text length, time, lump sum...

21. What rate will be applied?
    Some publications like the ITI Rates & Salaries survey will give you all the details about charges taking into account all the above specifications.

22. Will there be an additional charge for urgency?
    E.g. unsociable hours, weekend working (see step 20)

23. Will there be an additional charge for complex layout?
    E.g. multiple page changes, complex tables...

24. Will there be an additional charge for unusual difficulties?
    E.g. poorly legible text, contact with foreign informants...

25. Will there be an additional charge for special presentations?
    E.g. bromides

26. Will there be an additional charge for research?
    E.g. pertinent legislation, specialist terminology, prior documentation

27. Will there be an additional charge for attendance?
    E.g. for certifying a translation, travel to collection point...

28. Will any other additional services be required?
    E.g. post-editing, proof-reading...

29. Will VAT apply to these charges?
    Refer to step 20.

30. How is payment to be made?
    E.g. single payment, advance + instalments...

31. When is payment to be made?
    E.g. on delivery, 30 days

32. What method of payment is to be used?
    E.g. bank transfer, cheque, eurocheque, banker's draft...

33. Does foreign payment convey any charges?
    E.g. foreign cheques, bank transfers...

34. Is copyright to be returned or transferred?
    E.g. by assignment, licence...

35. To whom and under what conditions?
    See ITI Model Terms for Business.

36. Is the subject matter of the translation under confidentiality restrictions?
    Refer to the previous step.

37. Is there any source of possible consequential liability of which the translator should be aware?
    E.g. printing of documentation...

38. Is there any mention of a possible liability, which might exceed the normal level of insurance cover?

39. What compensation should be agreed when a job is cancelled after work has begun?
    See step 35.

Further reading

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