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An Extended Translation Service Portfolio in Research Translation

Abstract

This article is a proposal to think about translation service portfolio in categories of contemporary service provision. As observed in the recent literature of the field, today's services rely more and more on customisation, interactivity and relation-building. This article presents examples of opening a standard portfolio to opportunities identified by the translator through direct communication with the client. Benefits and limitations of such portfolio modifications are also discussed. The article is an invitation for the readers to rethink their portfolio strategies in search of competitive market advantages.

Keywords: translation as a service; Service-Dominant Logic; translation service portfolio; service customisation; research text translation

Introduction

The functionalist turn in translation studies can be credited with profiling translation as a service-based phenomenon. Holz-Mänttäri's (1984) *translatorial action* and the collaborative framework she advocated for is a good illustration. Yet, it is perhaps only recently that the notion of translation service is winning a greater recognition. Recent concepts like user-centred approach to translation (UCT, Koskinen 2020) or Service-Dominant Logic in translation service design (S-D L, Kujamäki 2020) can be approached in terms of adapting the functionalist paradigm to the 21ˢᵗ century context. Yet, one cannot ignore the fact that these new concepts reach far beyond the original functionalist conception. Firstly, they discuss new roles in the translation process that Holz-Mänttäri's model could not anticipate. These roles are studied in a growing number of publications on sociology of translation (e.g. Chesterman 2009, Risku *et al.* 2016, 2017), translator status (e.g. Ruokonen 2013, Dam and Zethsen 2016) or translator workplace practices (e.g. Risku *et al.* 2020). Secondly, these recent concepts are informed by findings from other

research domains like service science or management (e.g. Brax 2013, Wharton 2016 or Moeller 2008, 2010). This relatively recent research trend takes the concept of translation service (or broader language service) as a point departure for discussing translation processes, their complexity and their stakeholders. Both authors quoted above argue that the translation service needs to be understood and practised as dependent both on the expert exercise of 'core' translation competences (language, transfer, subject matter, culture, technology *etc.*) as well as on the client-translator's interaction in constructing the service together (see: EMT 2017 for the concept of translation service provision competence). Koskinen (2020) observes that:

> [p]rofessional services are defined by characteristics such as a high degree of customization, information asymmetry between the client and the service provider […] In short, clients do not necessarily understand what is essential to the service, and they often cannot judge the outcome. To be meaningful for customers, services have to be designed to meet their needs and expectations, and in dialogic interaction with them. (Koskinen 2020: 142)

This customisation (see: Kujamaki 2021) of translation service provision is an underlying concept for our study. Subject to analysis here is direct research text translation service as part of my own experience in delivering this kind of service. Directness of the service as I want to understand it here means that the service framework allows for direct communication between the author (client) and the translator. In this sense, the study analyses services where the authors commission research texts themselves as well as those commissioned by publishing houses, where contact with their authors is possible.

The main objective of this study is to argue that the interactive, iterative and relational understanding of the translation service can be a vital factor in safeguarding service quality and can be a source of competitive advantage for a professional translator. Equally important are benefits to the author (client). The translator's main advantages include guided translation specialisation (core competences) and enhanced opportunities to build strategic customer relations (translation service provision competence). At the same time, the author who seeks success with their publication (usually the client) can keep optimal control of their translated research text, which enhances publication opportunities and allows flexible modification strategies.

I argue that for cases under analysis here, the enhanced service quality and an opportunity for a translator comes with a re-positioning of the main communicative and business objective of the service. Under its classical formulation, the translation service implies a situation where a text is commissioned to a translator, and they perform to the best of their core and project management competences to yield a quality text. Once the text is delivered to the client the service cycle is complete (except post-project feedback).

The problem with what I call the classical service approach when applied to research text translation is that it perhaps ignores the fact that the client's *skopos* is not exhaustively satisfied by however effective translation. Conversely, I would like to argue that the translator accepting a research text commission needs to re-position the *skopos* to the stage of text publication. Central to our argument here is that such a re-positioning of the translation-bound *skopos* to text publication can only take place if the translator and the client engage in a communicative interaction to maximise chances of publication success. In this sense, the approach I propose seems in line with the service-oriented approach advocated for by Koskinen (2020):

Service design and UCT are both based on a human-centric approach in the sense of stepping into the other person's shoes and empathetically understanding their experience […]. They are interactive and iterative approaches based on direct communication and on active listening and observing of actual practices. (Koskinen 2020: 146)

In what follows, I first elaborate on the postulated *skopos* re-positioning. Starting with Gouadec's (2007: 13ff.) overview of the translator's job, I propose an extension of his model to illustrate how collaborating on research publication rather than on research translation only changes the perception of the translation service and the related communication practices. Next, I provide two cases of services that I deliver under the extended scenario. This step provides me with a background to elaborate on enhancements to my own service portfolio, pinpointing sources of added value. The discussion ends in listing limitations that the proposal contained herein can face in practical application.

Gouadec's overview of the translator's job

In his seminal work entitled *Translation as a Profession* (Gouadec 2007), Daniel Gouadec makes a detailed list of components that make up a translation service. The table below summarises Gouadec's list to provide a general view of his conception. Gouadec's service components are listed in the left-hand column, while the central column contains key actions necessitated in each component. The right-hand column is used to mark these service components which are particularly dependent on effective translator-client communication.

Table. 1. *Gouadec's overview of the translator's job: based on Gouadec (2007:12-20, 55-83)*

	Gouadec's (2007) service component	Key components or actions	Relevance for translator-client communication
1	Getting the job	Translation offer, terms and conditions (e.g. time estimation and charge), contract	Highly relevant: effective communication at this stage is crucial not only for getting the job, but also for translation quality and the stakeholder's satisfaction (added value)
2	Analysis and planning	Preparing the material for translation, content analysis, translation options	Relevant: even though this stage is mostly the translator's responsibility, potential problems revealed through analysis can or need to be consulted with the client
3	Resource management	Terminology research and knowledge management, discourse/language resources, setting up translation environment	Hardly relevant
4	Transfer, proofing and revision	Ultimate translation choices, safeguarding target text coherence and cohesion, terminological validity etc.	Hardly relevant

	Gouadec's (2007) service component	Key components or actions	Relevance for translator-client communication
5	Other corrections or adaptations	Making translation comply with specific constraints, *skopos* modifications or additional text formatting	Highly relevant: effective communication at that stage can be crucial for maximising the client's control over the content (source and target) and its end-use
6	Final edition and delivery	"Finishing touches" and confirmed job delivery	Highly relevant: requires effective information exchange practices to avoid project delays or other miscommunication events
7	Follow-up	End-use of the target text: dissemination, reproduction, follow-up texts	Highly relevant: particularly with texts whose end-use is iterative or subject to further modifications – research text translation and publication seem a perfect illustration

It takes no convincing that the stages of 'getting the job', 'final edition and delivery' or 'follow up' are key for successful service delivery, and that this success depends on effective communication. This can be of particular importance in view of the information asymmetry that occurs between the client and the translator (Chan 2009, Pym *et al.* 2013). However, a claim made here is that both 'analysis and planning' as well as 'other corrections' are also worth studying for their communicative potential in ensuring service success.

A key point in this article is that with direct research text translation, the *skopos* of the service is not achievable through delivering a quality target text to the author-researcher. Instead, the main objective of the cooperation of the translator and the client needs to be re-positioned to the stage of successful publication. Therefore, I postulate that for the translation service under analysis one stage be added to Gouadec's (2007) service components overview:

1. Getting the job
2. Analysis and planning
3. Resource management
4. Transfer/proofing/revision
5. Other corrections/adaptations
6. Final edition and delivery
7. Collaborative reaction to publication reviews (successful publication)
8. Follow up and feedback

The proposed service component (7) consists in assisting the author in what happens to their text when reviews and recommendations are issued. Under the original Gouadec's (2007) view, the moment when the author gets the review is likely to mark the beginning of another translation service cycle. The author would send the text to the translator (the same or new), the translator would perform an analysis and follow through the consequent stages, exactly the same way as in the case of the first-instance service.

Under the proposed extended service approach, this re-iteration would not be necessary, and the stage of 'collaborative reaction to publication reviews' would help develop a well-informed strategy of handling the job.

Approached on a regular basis of translation service provision, the 'analysis and planning' stage is regarded in terms of the translator's individual efforts. Yet, relying on my own professional experience in the case of Polish-English research translation, I am ready to claim that e.g. text structural factors lead to complications in Polish to English research translation that often necessitate communication with the author. Exploring and explaining the reasons behind this state of affairs - or at least for our opinion about it - reaches beyond the scope of this article. A marginal note on these problems can be found in the later part of this article. Hoping that the reader finds my experience trustworthy, let me argue here that turning the 'analysis and planning' stage into a collaborative, communicative service component brings benefits that are not available under the 'standard' service approach. Keeping in mind the re-positioned *skopos* (publication), the partners can not only secure the communicative objectives of the target text, but also engage into collaborative knowledge building and decision-making. Benefits for the translator are more than obvious: they can develop knowledge in a supervised way, which translates into service quality. The author-researcher, on the other hand, can enjoy optimal control of their text, which is particularly important when working on modifications recommended by the publication reviewers. This latter advantage is hardly available when 'standard' service applies, even if the first and second-instance iterations of the 'standard' service cycle is performed by the same translator.

In a similar vein, I wish to claim here that in the case of direct research text translation service, it makes sense to introduce collaborative elements at the stage of 'other corrections and adaptations'. The advantages are similar to the ones discussed above. They relate to the translator's knowledge and service quality, but also to the author's control of the translator's ultimate solutions or corrections - including those introduced as part of the revision process.

Summing up, the claim made here is that direct service for research text translation offers an option to rethink the scope of the service to cover not only the 'standard' target text rendition, but also other service components necessary for successful publication. Extending the service this way entails adding one component to the translator's job overview proposed in Gouadec (2007). This component is expressed here with an umbrella notion of 'collaborative reaction to publication reviews'. It can cover a wide array of tasks that the translator may agree or may postulate to do for the author (client). The section that follows presents examples taken from my own professional experience to better illustrate my proposal.

The extended translation service: the context

Above, proposed is a specific extension of the 'standard' variant of the translation service outlined by Gouadec (2007). I have argued that the extension is triggered by a need to re-position the ultimate service objective: from the target text delivery to successful text publication. This section is to provide illustration to what has been proposed. It starts with an outline of my own services for direct research text translation. Then, two real-life cases are analysed to give the reader a deeper insight into the contexts in which the extended service can be advantageously applied.

The status of research text translation market in Poland – at least in my experience - is still weakly structured. Researchers have wide opportunities to seek funds for translation. Commissions from Poland's private universities raise no problem in terms of service management as these institutions display agility in financial management typical of business organizations. The same holds good for most publishing houses and research centres as long as they use their statutory funds. Contrary to the above, my professional experience forces me to observe that the administrative procedures for translation procurement at public universities in Poland are complicated, while good practices are scarce. Working with the same university, the translator can be expected to participate in a public procurement for one project, yet the procedure can (somehow) be waived for another project. Under the second instance (waiver), the author has a right to select the translator for their text. To sum up, my research text translation services usually take one of the following configurations: (a) a private university, a research centre or a publishing house makes a commission and accepts an invoice as a regular business practice; (b) a public university or an entity using public funds to commission translation holds a public procurement bid; or (c) a public university or an entity using public funds commissions translation and accepts an invoice.

As can be inferred from the configurations above, the way research is financed in Poland reduced the number of situations where text authors - researchers - commission the translation service on their own. What is more, my professional experience shows that oftentimes translation is commissioned by institutions seeking to translate and publish collections or research texts in English, in which case the position of the author becomes indirect in the publication process: they are not personally engaged in either translation or publication work. Nonetheless, in almost all cases representing these service configurations, I am able to reach text authors (researchers), directly or with the help of the editors, in cases that require the extended service approach.

Apart from this overt understanding of direct service, as exemplified above, some analogy can be found in how directness is defined in Moeller (2008), as discussed in Kujamäki (2020). Firstly, in terms of knowledge distribution, direct services are marked by direct distribution of knowledge (Kujamäki 2020: 195), and the client-translator interaction under my extended service matches this description. Secondly, as regards decision-making, my extended service represents an integrative approach, which means mutual dependence of the translator and the client for translation/publication success.

The extended translation service portfolio: case studies

This section provides two cases studies intended to further illustrate the client-translator relationship obtaining under the extended direct translation service, postulated in the previous part of this article.

Case 1. Collaborative knowledge building

This case covers the translator's interventions at the terminological level. They consist in addressing the author-researcher to: (a) confirm problematic terminological solutions against the researcher's knowledge background; (b) inform the author-researcher about the final problematic (e.g. ambiguous) terminological choices, reasons and consequences; (c) negotiate and collaboratively establish the final terminological variants if the author-researcher observes a need to modify the translator's choices.

The instances covered by this case are perhaps best classified as stage 5 in Gouadec's (2007) translation service. Crucial for this case is not only the collaborative effort to ensure the quality of the target translation. An equal emphasis needs to be placed on collaborative knowledge building and distribution. The translator's knowledge is enhanced through collaborative negotiation of senses of problematic terminological items. This empowers the translator to handle these terms effectively in future translations. The negotiations end in the author-researcher's final acceptance of the solution, which also matters to the translator: the author-researcher takes the role of a terminology manager (*cf.* the concept of customer expertise in Havumetsä 2012).

The case under analysis is classified under Gouadec's stage 5 since the majority of interventions it covers represent the post-translation phase. Nonetheless, I admit having initiated once a collaborative terminological approach to stage 2 (analysis and planning). This was the case where the author-researcher made an initial overt request that a dedicated terminological set be used, and that previous translations (by other translators) be consulted for reference. I found this brief extremely helpful, yet there turned out to be few terminological solutions that the previous translators seemed to have used inconsistently. As these were pivotal concepts in the text, I initiated consultations as part of analysis and planning.

Case 2 - Collaborative analysis and planning

Over the past decade, a growing number of publishing houses, research organisations and journals have been advancing rigid publication style sheets. Their regulatory power does no longer cover referencing, but often also text organisation. My clients - Polish researchers - often find it hard to adjust to this type of editorial 'intervention' into what they feel *they* author. Thus, adapting to the more and more globalised publication standards is a problem which has its consequences for translation. This study offers no space to analyse the phenomenon in detail, but my experience allows pinpointing two main structural issues: (a) defining and consistently pursuing clear research objectives: this is often marked with a either a badly structured introduction or limited comprehensibility caused by a missing or flawed communicative strategy. The same generally holds good for abstracts; (b) constructing the text as a tool to meet these objectives: this mostly concerns the stage of text design and planning, but perhaps first of all the role of the paragraph. My claim here is that Polish 'text culture' relies on sentences with a function parallel to that of English paragraphs. Argument elaboration is executed by expanding sentence structures, abundant with intrusions and complex, distant syntactic relationships. At least in the case of research text translation, a purely quantitative solution (make sentences shorter) risks unjustifiable manipulation of the text. Instead, a qualitative approach is needed to re-construct the information structure (hierarchy) before translation.

These problems offer further support to my claim that if the *skopos* of the researcher-translator cooperation is successful publication, the scope of the service need to cover potential interventions concerning text structure and function. I admit that successful interventions at the stage of pre-transfer 'planning and analysis' are rare. Even if the option is suggested to the clients, they tend to take the risk and wait for the reviews. Hence, most interventions in this case indeed take place as 'collaborative reaction to publication reviews.'

The extended translation service portfolio: benefits and options

This section of the article sums up the observations from the cases discussed. The main idea is to highlight the benefits for the extended service portfolio.

Case 1, which pertains to collaborative terminological adjustments, can cover translator's interventions that represent the minimum of service extension. In numerous translations, terminological adjustments are the sole responsibility of the translator, and any intervention at that stage must have a clear rationale. As argued above, situations where some form of collaborative effort at terminological adjustment may be triggered when the translator diagnoses potential complications in how target text relates to source text terminology. The most extended variant covers terminology-level collaboration as necessitated by comments and recommendations made by the reviewers.

Case 2 addresses collaborative analysis and planning, and again it is possible to think about its less extended variant, when one thinks about consultations before text transfer. As observed above, such interventions are rare in my practice. More often than not, collaborative analysis and planning results from remarks made by the publication reviewers. In this case, they make part of the extended service.

It can be argued that Case 2 unveils a potential avenue for further service portfolio extensions, with *skopos* re-positioning moving from translation to text co-authoring. The extension may cover such added value service components like language consultancy and instruction. I believe this type of service extension can go in line with Koskinen's (2020) observation that:

> in the future, some tailor-made multilingual services will not be labelled translation, as the term 'translation' may eventually begin to denote machine translation only. Some agencies are already marketing more creative forms of translation with the label of transcreation, and journalistic combinations of translating and rewriting are called journalation and transediting, among other names. (Koskinen 2020: 140–141)

If Koskinen is right, today's and future translators need to seek opportunities for service niches that reach beyond their current practices.

A handful of remarks are due from a more business-operational angle. Firstly, a decision for a translator to build their 'getting the job'-related communication with showing their understanding for the clients' ultimate needs and goals can be a valid source of competitive advantage. It can add viability to the long-term business functioning in profitable niches. The client's operational benefits include entering a service-based relationship for the whole publication process that can be replicated in future projects. This helps plan future research and budgeting.

The proposal's limitations

Apart from advantages, the extended service approach I advocate for here faces obvious limitations. Some readers of this text may find the solutions under analysis impracticable due to the type of translation market they operate on. Translation (language industry) market is structured in many ways around the world (Pym *et al.* 2013), which directly influences translators' service options.

To make matters even more complicated, one can pose a legitimate question whether it is an optimal approach to work on research translation in a direct service mode. It makes sense to ask whether

research texts are or can be better off 'processed' through multi-actor projects, with many eyes (reviewers, proof-readers) other than the author and the translator working pursuing publication success. I am not ready to answer this question here, as that would require a detailed weighing of the pros and cons of both approaches. Ultimately, my objective in this study is not to provide the reader with a service solution that is ready to apply. Instead, my main point is to inspire an approach that seeks sources of competitive advantage in remodelling translators' service portfolios so as to make their service provision address: (a) the needs that the client signals on their own; (b) the needs that the translator observes in the wake of their cooperation with the client(s); (c) and the needs that the translator presupposes may be worth addressing.

Another limitation that needs considerable caution is that the extended, collaborative service provision cannot be recommended for all kinds of clients. Among the ones I have been working for, there also are researchers whose approach to translation is 'one-go', where the division of responsibilities is not negotiable: researchers write, translators translate (see: Chan 2009's concept of asymmetric information in the translator's market). If the reviewers suggest corrections and amendments, the researcher addresses them on their own, and the translator is expected to translate. With clients who are not ready to engage in collaboration, trying to implement the collaborative approach can be interpreted as the lack of professionalism on the part of the translator. Also likely is that with this kind of client, the responsibility for failures is posed on translators: 'my article is perfect, so there must be something wrong with how you translated it.'

Concluding remarks

I hope to have argued convincingly that in the case of direct translation services - and for research text translation in particular - it may be worthwhile to re-position the objective of the service from delivering a target text to assisting the source text author up until the research text's successful publication. Firstly, I showed how this extended service profile relates to the latest literature of the field. Then, I outlined how I understand the extended service portfolio and how I implement it in my own translation service provision. I discussed the potential benefits of the extended service for the stakeholders, but not without due diligence to its obvious limitations in diverse contexts.

Let me emphasise again that this article features an open proposal, in which I try to pinpoint a problem, draw a map of related parameters and discuss solutions that I find satisfactory in my business practice. Consequently, this article is in itself an invitation to test, use and modify my proposal according to one's needs and requirements. All in all, only such tests, uses and modifications can prove the validity of my underlying view that translation service portfolio is not a list of tasks the translator is ready to perform, but a dynamic framework, where the jobs result from relational, co-creative modelling of the translation (and related) service(s).

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