

# USING A MULTILINGUAL PARALLEL CONCORDANCER IN ADVANCED TRANSLATOR TRAINING INTO L1<sup>1</sup>

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*This article investigates the use of parallel corpora as part of an integrated approach to translator training and considers its effectiveness in helping to develop a learning environment where static word-for-word equivalence in meaning between target and source text is replaced by a dynamic notion of chunk-by-chunk equivalence in use. The author argues that, far from being a drawback, the different levels of adequacy represented by the target texts in the corpus can be used in the classroom to enhance translation criticism. Moreover, parallel corpora can be used to provide the students with useful insights into the practices of the translation industry, including the ability to revise the translation of a fellow translator. By way of exemplification, the different translations into Italian of the multi-functional item -ing form are investigated.*

## 1. Introduction

The need for teaching-oriented research in translation and for training packages for translators which has been advocated by Gile (1995: 17) cannot be kept separate from the long-term trend in the informatisation of cross-cultural communication. Information Technology (IT) has revolutionised the translation profession to such a degree that handling computers to access information and to assist the translation process has become a basic skill of professional translators. Likewise, IT is also playing an increasingly important role in translator training where corpora-based techniques are proving particularly successful (Baker 1995). The use of parallel corpora, that is source-language texts in language A and their translations in language B, has been identified as a powerful and flexible teaching/learning aid because it provides an objective description of how translators in the "real world" have overcome specific translation difficulties. Consequently, the main assumption underlying this

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1 This article is based on the Windows-based multilingual parallel concordancer Multiconcord and on the multilingual corpus developed by the EU-funded Lingua Project (36860-CP-96-1-FR-LINGUA-LD) between 1993 and 1998, in which the SSLMIT of the University of Trieste was one of the partners.

paper is that the multilingual parallel concordancer should be an integral component in translator course design and implementation because it provides trainees with a powerful self-access tool of translation criticism which improves their transfer competence. Transfer competence is taken here as those technical skills of problem-solving and decision-making which are the distinguishing domain of translational competence and are closely interrelated with the other two types of competence translators must have, namely language competence and subject competence (Neubert 1994: 412).

The specialist degree of the SSLMIT of the University of Trieste produces professional interpreters and translators, the vast majority of whom follow careers closely related to their degree (translators/interpreters in international organisations, or in Italian firms, or free-lance). As there is a very selective entrance exam, right from the beginning of the course the linguistic competence of the students in at least one foreign language (English, French, German or Italian) is very high. Thus the use of a multilingual concordancer will not be aimed so much at improving the students' L2, usually the language they work from, but at helping them to achieve the full realisation of their translation skills. In particular, the trainees considered for this paper are 3rd and 4th year multilingual undergraduates having Italian as their L1 and English as their first L2, and attending a course in advanced translation from English into Italian. The study is carried out on a small corpus consisting of original English texts and their translations in Italian and, conversely, of original Italian texts and their translations in English. The texts of the corpus are mostly literary and were not made for teaching and testing purposes but are genuine communicative events. Though the translation course focuses on ESP, the assumption here is that the insights gained from literary texts are very often transferable to other text types, not to mention the fact that literary texts give more satisfaction to the students than ESP ones (Talbot 1996: 22). Through the use of a multilingual parallel concordancer, the corpus is however extremely flexible as it can be added to and modified to study texts from specific genres, thus leading the students to investigate the norms at all levels of language use and helping them to enhance the relevant translation routines.

## 2. Parallel corpora, translation criticism and translation pedagogy

Translator training is based on the interdependence between L1 and L2. More specifically, a translation course such as the one considered here, where translators access their L1 through the L2, tends to focus mainly on the quality of the product of the translation. The main problems seem in fact to lie in the reformulation phase and in the stylistic awkwardness associated with texts in translation vis-a-vis the original ones. The translated text may in fact "sound"

unnatural owing to an interference from the original text at all linguistic levels, basically because the students have not yet grown out of the idea that translation is merely about matching linguistic units in two different languages. To make matters worse, when translating into their mother tongue, students are less alert than when they are working from their L1 into the L2 (cf. Ulrych 1999), on the mistaken assumption that passive translation is somewhat "easier" than active. Even more noteworthy is the fact that lack of mother tongue competence seems increasingly to be a serious problem for trainee translators in Italy (Scarpa 1994) and elsewhere (cf. Lang 1994: 397; Talbot 1996: 22). This lack of ability that the trainees display in their own language clashes with the very high standard of competence in the L1 required in professional translating, as in the vast majority of cases translators work into their language of habitual use. Consequently, in an advanced translation course the trainees need to be reminded repeatedly that translation is a service provided to particular persons in a particular communication situation and that quality has to be judged against criteria based on the idea of professional translation being a communication service (Gile 1995: 19).

Parallel corpora can represent a powerful classroom tool to illustrate the shift from a traditional idea of static equivalence in meaning between target text and source text, where the standards of evaluation are subjective and *ad hoc*, to a new idea of dynamic equivalence in use, where standards reflect the real world (Baker 1993: 236; Talbot 1996: 21). In advanced translation training the automatic analysis of parallel text corpora can be used to enhance a new approach to translation criticism based on the probabilistic notion of "equivalence in use", that is the type of equivalence which is achieved in practice, where students (and trainers) should be less concerned with what is a *possible* translation and more with what is a *probable* way of re-expressing the source text in a target text (Lewis 1996: 127). As in Descriptive Translation Studies, where the object of research has shifted to generalisations about translational behaviour that minimise our reliance on intuition (Baker 1993: 240-241), in professional translator training Prescription should be replaced by Description and an abstract notion of "accuracy" should be replaced by a practical one of "adequacy", meaning that writing quality and accuracy are highly dependent on the final readers and the use being made of the resulting translation (Mossop 1992: 84). Moreover, as target texts in the corpus represent different levels of adequacy, multilingual concordancing can even become an occasional source of negative evidence, thus disturbing the preconceived idea often entertained by students that published translations are always accurate (Mossop 1994: 405). Consequently, parallel corpora can be used in the classroom to enhance translation criticism: both as a pedagogical activity to sensitise students to particular translation problems and strategies, and also as a

way to prepare the students for their professional work as translators by providing them with useful insights into the practices of the translation industry. As a pedagogical activity, translation criticism has the purpose of improving the students' transfer competence and their ability to manipulate the target language (ie. L1). The goal to be achieved in this case is excellence and any kind of improvement, necessary or not, should be encouraged. Tasks in this type of activity include firstly, the analysis of specific translation problems, such as compensation – "a procedure for dealing with any source text meaning (ideational, interpersonal and/or textual) which cannot be reproduced directly in the target language" (Hatim & Mason 1997: 115); secondly, the investigation of translation norms – strategies typically selected when translating between a specific language pair; and thirdly, research into the size and nature of the unit of translation. An important advantage of such a pedagogical approach to translation criticism is that it avoids translation theory and practice being kept apart as two distinct activities. Likewise, translation criticism may be also used in professional training for work as a translator, where it may serve as an introduction to revision teaching. The ability to revise the translation of a fellow translator is in fact becoming an indispensable skill for professional translators (Permentiers *et al.* 1994: 50). Whilst translation criticism as a pedagogical activity is used as a way to improve the students' critical sense and/or their transfer or target language skills, in professional revision teaching the goal to be aimed at should not be excellence (highly subjective) but adequacy (more objective) and students should be trained to avoid all revisions which are not strictly necessary (Mossop 1992: 81-82). This is undoubtedly a difficult goal to achieve in practice, as not-too-subtly suggested by the title of the chapter dealing with revision – *La volupté au bic rouge* – in a volume on the state of the art of the translation business (Permentiers *et al.* 1994: 49). In such a professional approach to translation criticism, trainees could be also made aware that in the translation industry quality is often sacrificed for lower charges and quicker turnaround and that in the coming decades the public will become more regularly exposed to texts which have been produced by Machine Translation and will consequently become more accustomed to "translationese" (O'Hagan 1996: 28; 106).

### 3. Practical applications

Parallel corpora can be used by the students either directly, as a form of Data-Driven Learning (Johns & King 1991) where they can access the authentic corpus materials by themselves and test hypotheses in an open-ended learning environment, or after the teacher has produced sentence completion tasks, for instance gap-filling exercises to test L2 lexical and grammatical collocations

which do not have immediate equivalents in the L1. The students can retrieve the linguistic context in which particular words and phrases are used in the source and in the target language and set up contrasts, an activity that is very useful for translator training because it discourages a word-for-word approach enhancing a chunk-by-chunk one instead, where the chunks can be multi-word lexical items (word partnerships and fixed expressions), clauses or even entire paragraphs. A particularly useful activity is the retrieval of multi-functional items in the source language and their different translations in the target language: the translation equivalents that have been found can then be described typologically, evaluated on the basis of their adequacy and stored by the students as a useful integration to the prototype standard examples usually found in translation textbooks and translation programs (Schmied 1994: 178).

By way of exemplification, the discourse feature that has been briefly investigated here is the non-finite *-ing* form of verbs, which has been defined by Newmark (1996: 59) as:

rare in the multiplicity of its functions and in its complexity. No two grammars appear to agree on the appropriate terms for these forms: gerund, verb noun, verbal noun, participial clause, participial adjective, present participle, deverbal adjective, deverbal noun. Moreover, often one or other of its uses is omitted.

Using Multiconcord, English was selected as the source language and Italian as the target, but it is useful to keep in mind that the corpus on which the search was carried out consists of both original English texts and their translations in Italian and original Italian texts and their translations in English.

Firstly, when the *-ing* form functions as a verb, the standard translation equivalents in Italian are the following seven (in order of frequency):

1) gerund,<sup>2</sup> eg.

then she lingers, questioning it and waiting...  
ora indugia interrogandolo e lasciando che...

2) relative clause, eg.

but it could also be the more distant pasts pursuing old Ruedi, finding the little gate...  
ma possono essere anche i passati più lontani che corrono dietro al vecchio Ruedi e rintracciano il cancelletto...

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2 This equivalent, however, is the most obvious choice on the part of the translator and consequently is not a particularly interesting translation shift.

## 3) past participle, eg.

salty ash resulting from...

sale ricavato dalle...

4) preposition,<sup>3</sup> eg.

considering the cargo

per via del cargo

exercising her role as...

in conformità al proprio ruolo...

5) 0-equivalence, ie. on a word-for-word level, the equivalent of the *-ing* form is missing altogether in Italian, eg.

a current flowing in the opposite direction

un flusso di direzione opposta

the canal of Corinth, running between high cliffs

canale di Corinto, tra alte pareti

a cargo of 160 pilgrims going to the Holy Land

un trasporto di 106 pellegrini in Terra Santa

## 6) noun, eg.

whoever feared passing around the Peloponnesus

chi temeva il periplo del Peloponneso.

Here an alternative Italian equivalent would have been a verb (*di passare*) that, as in English, would have been less formal than the nominal form (cf. Newmark 1996: 59).

## 7) present participle (where the following is the only instance that has been found), eg.

empty boats transporting perhaps the body

imbarcazioni senza equipaggio recanti però il corpo.

Here an alternative equivalent would have been a relative clause (*che recavano*).

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3 This type of equivalence in Italian bears out Halliday's classification as Prepositions of some English non-finite verb forms such as "regarding", "considering" and "including" (Halliday 1985: 189).

Secondly, when the *-ing* construction functions mainly as a noun (being preceded by a preposition, a possessive, a demonstrative or an article), the standard translation equivalents in Italian are the following two (in order of frequency):

1) noun (in the vast majority of cases), eg.

not even to become aware of crossing the border  
 senza nemmeno accorgersi del passaggio di frontiera

Drogo had got used to (...) reading quietly at night  
 Abitudine erano per Drogo (...) le placide letture notturne.

In this case too an alternative Italian equivalent would have been a verb (*passare* and *leggere*). Within this type of translation equivalence a possible regularity which has been detected is that frequently in the Italian source text the noun equivalent to the *-ing* form is in fact an infinitive functioning as a noun, which has been chosen because it represents a process (whilst the deverbal noun would have designated a state), eg.

an entangling, as if of branches and leaves  
 un aggrovigliarsi come di rami e di foglie

the clouding of your eyes, your laughing  
 l'annuvolarsi dei tuoi occhi, il ridere

the distance between my writing and her reading  
 la distanza tra il mio scrivere e il suo leggere.

2) verb, eg.

to the extent of its having acquired and conserved the symbolic  
 significance...  
 al punto di diventare il simbolo...

I didn't like the idea of her knowing them  
 Non mi garbava che lei li conoscesse.

These last two equivalences, however, are not particularly significant because both the Italian infinitive and finite verb (subjunctive) are the "unmarked" translation procedures.

Finally, when the *-ing* form functions as an adjective, the standard translation equivalences are the following four (in order of frequency):

## 1) adjective (in the vast majority of occurrences), eg.

the multiplying power of catoptric mechanisms  
 il potere moltiplicatore dei meccanismi catoptrici

## 2) relative clause, eg.

the hum of the following multitude  
 il rombo della moltitudine che lo segue

## 3) prepositional phrase, eg.

her drawing pad open on her lap  
 l'album da disegno aperto sulle ginocchia

rattling flush  
 scroscio di ferraglia

## 4) adverbial group, eg.

the intervening mountains  
 le montagne davanti

surrounding crags  
 rupi attorno.

Occasionally, the translation equivalents of the *-ing* form functioning as an adjective are a noun or a verb (either finite or non-finite), eg:

with its swaying lanterns  
 fra dondoli di lanterne

the wavering shadows of the two officers were projected monstrously on  
 either side

le ombre dei due ufficiali si proiettavano mostruose da una parte e  
 dall'altra, ondeggiando

And they heard the roaring thunder  
 E rombò il tuono.

## 4. Conclusions

From a course designer's perspective, multilingual concordancing may be part of an integrated approach to translation training in combination not only with more



traditional methods but also with other computer applications, for instance as part of a computer-based translation module included in a course curriculum for trainee translators. The idea of a translator's workbench, that is a set of integrated computer tools to assist the translator during the translation process, has in fact become a reality in the translation industry as an alternative to the expensive solution of a completely automated Machine Translation system. Likewise, a translation course at any level should prepare the trainees to use technology as a labour-saving aid to enhance the quality and consistency of the product of translation. Recent developments in computer-assisted translation include Translation Memory software – consisting of one or more databases of word/phrase/sentence pairs produced by the translator which are easily accessible when undertaking a new translation – and terminology management software – databases for storing and retrieving terminology.<sup>4</sup> With an appropriate program enabling the semi-automatic extraction of terminology and recurrent phrases in a specific specialised field (cf. Ahmad & Rogers 1992; Ahmad *et al.* 1994) and with an alignment program, special-subject corpora can be built for the students to retrieve potential terms to be stored for future reference and modification. The only problems in such a customisation of the corpus are to be found in the well-known difficulty of obtaining copyright clearance from publishers (even when the strictly research-bound purposes of the request have been clearly specified by the applicant) and in the alignment of the texts which can be a time-consuming process due to the language-specificity of punctuation marks and sentence/paragraph length (cf. Schmied 1994: 176). Corpus-based translation criticism, corpus-based terminography and, on a smaller scale, the creation of lexicons to be used by teachers and learners containing words, frequent strong collocations, semi- and fully fixed expressions and multi-patterned items (Lewis 1996: 143-144), can be all viewed as user-driven activities exploiting the flexibility and open-endedness of parallel corpora. This is an approach to translator training which can be adapted for students of different levels of translational competence and has further possibilities yet to be discovered.

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4 Such as MultiTerm by Trados which is currently used by the students of the SSLMIT to create their own specialised glossaries as part of their final degree dissertation. These individual glossaries are then fed into the multilingual terminological data bank TERMit that is being built up at the SSLMIT (cf. the article by Musacchio and Magris in this issue).

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