**Specificity of medical texts translation**

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*Dictators should be afraid of the translator and the*

*dentist, as these are more powerful than themselves.*

*Sir Winston Churchill*

Translation of medical texts (medical translation) is

translating from one language into another of specialized

medical publications and texts of private character

which content is directly connected with the person’s health.

A special position of this category of specialized translations

is defined by the importance of any translated information,

increased requirements to the accuracy of the translation

and observing confidentiality of private data, as well as

pronounced heterogeneity of the used terminology. A feature

of medical texts is the existence of special terms and abbreviations.

Medical texts do not contain enough metaphors

and other stylistic means therefore translating specific terminology

and abbreviations is the most difficult thing in the

translation process. An important factor is also studying the

structure of terms and abbreviations and their use in various

contexts.

The purpose of the article is specifics of translating medical

texts; there are considered characteristic features of informative

translation, «false friends of the translator» in

medical texts, as well as the problem of translating such a

lexical group as the group of abbreviations in the field of medical

translation.

Medical translation includes translating the texts of the

all-medical and pharmaceutical direction, it is by right possible

to call medical translation one of the most difficult specialized

translations and it is even possible to allocate it as

a special type of translation activity. In the process of conversion

of medical and pharmaceutical texts a translator

constantly compares a source text of the original with the

translated text, every time switching from one language to

another. In this process the set of the translator’s actions is

divided into the actions relating to the source medical text

and respectively to the text of medical translation, that is in

this process a translator at first perceives and understands

the text of the original and on its basis he forms the translated

text. Thus, medical translation is made by a translator

on the basis of two interconnected stages of the translation

process which are undertaken by the translator, namely: the

first stage includes extraction of information from the original

medical text, and the second stage is selecting the needed

translation means and methods for implementation of medical

translation. The extraction of information from the original

medical text is the first stage of translation process,

which is related to informative translation. Informative translation

represents translating the texts which main function

consists in informing of some data, the information transfer;

it makes no art and esthetic impact on the reader. All materials

of scientific, business, social and political, everyday life

character belong to such texts. There should be referred to

this group translating lot of detective stories, descriptions of

travels, sketches, official materials and those materials where

there prevails purely information narration.

The aspiration to the clearness and strictness of a statement,

refusal of indirect, descriptive designations of objects,

wide use of stamps and stereotypes of special vocabulary

is characteristic of informative translation, both in the

English and in the Russian languages. However more detailed

analysis shows that strictness of using terms and habitual

formulations is in general more peculiar to the Russian

special texts. Therefore a translator quite often feels

obliged to make «stylistic editing» of the original, to enter

an exact term instead of a paraphrase, to explain what is specifically

meant, to replace an author’s construction with a

more habitual stamp. A translator is to report fully and precisely

the thought of the author, giving it the shape inherent

in the Russian special text and without transferring peculiar

features of the English original to the Russian text. In the

English text there prevail personal forms of a verb whereas

in the Russian text there are more impersonal or indefinite-

personal constructions.

Prevalence of simple sentences which average over 50%

of the total number of sentences in the text is characteristic

of informative texts of English. At the same time the number

of compound sentences is rather small. This phenomenon is

unusual for the corresponding style in Russian where compound

sentences are used very widely.

One of the criteria of selecting the variant of translation of

the text is the genre and stylistic accessory of the text being

translated. According to this criterion informative translation

allocates:

− translation of social and political texts, journalism and

oratorical speech; the commonness of lines of this category is

caused by the propaganda or a propaganda aim of the translated

material directed to forming or changing public opinion

and its abundance with language elements of polemic: language

cliches, rhetorical structures, literalisms, newspaper

cliches, social and political terms, estimated words, slang

and popular speech;

− translation of scientific texts depends on their types

and content. The more is formalized a scientific text, and it occurs first of all in natural sciences especially, the more is

translation equivalent to the original. Translations of works

in mathematics, chemistry, biology and other exact sciences

consisting of stereotypic phrases and highly specialized

terms are identical to the original, i. e. they possess full

equivalence.

The fullest equivalence is observed in translations of the

texts of highly specialized character owing to unambiguity of

terminology. Translation of the texts of general scientific or

medical subject requires selecting a correct variant of translation

of one of the meanings of a polysemantic term:

− translation of official texts is completely focused on

transferring the content, i. e. it has an informative character.

The form of texts is in most cases stereotypic.

Medical translation, as well as any other type of translation,

has its features and can cause difficulties for a translator.

Difficulties of medical translation consist in the presence in

texts of difficult medical terminology, as well as special words

and abbreviations. In addition to it, depending on the country

and even its region the same term can have several meanings

and it is necessary to translate it taking into account the

geographical aspect. A very important condition facilitating

the work at medical translation is the thorough knowledge by

the translator of Latin, the language universal for physicians

around the world.

When translating medical texts there should be paid attention

at the following moments:

1. Using transcription when translating the names of diseases

and preparations.

English variant: Klaritin is allergy relief medicine.

− Lymphangioma

− Lymphedema

− Metronidazole

− Sulfasalazine

− Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy

− Methylmethacrylate

− Pharmacomania.

Russian variant: Кларитин является противоаллергиче-

ским лекарством.

− Лимфангиома

− Лимфедема

− Метронидазол

− Сульфазалазин

− Гипертрофическая кардиомиопатия

− Метилметакрилат

− Фармакомания.

2. Using transcription when translating medical terms.

English variant:

− Antibiotic

− Narcotic

− Penicillin

− Chlamidia

− Stimulator

− Hematocrit

− Hemoglobin

− Vitamin.

Russian variant:

− Антибиотик

− Наркотик (наркотическое средство)

− Пенициллин

− Хламидия

− Стимулятор

− Гематокрит

− Гемоглобин

− Витамин.

3. Grammar transformations (antonymic translation,

grammar substitutions).

Partial atrioventricular septal defect — неполная форма

открытого атриовентрикулярного канала.

There is a mild intrahepatic biliary ductal dilatation —

Незначительное расширение внутрипеченочных желчных

протоков.

Antonymic compliances exist not only for Russian verbs

but for other parts of speech: adjectives, participles, pronouns,

adverbs: небольшой — small, minor, mild; недопу-

стимый — prohibitive; невооруженный глаз — naked eye;

не содержащий окислов — oxide-free; не такой, какой хо-

телось бы иметь — less than desired; небольшими ступе-

нями — incrementally; неблагоприятно влиять — to affect

adversely.

4. «False friends of the translator» in medical texts.

False friends of the translator are foreign words, conformable

with Russian but meaning something quite different.

There are especially a lot of false friends among

medical terms. A typical example is: cystic fibrosis. It is not

«кистозный фиброз» but «муковисцидоз». Unlike a classical

false friend it reminds not something certain but a certain

term in general. A person never heard the term «ки-

стозный фиброз» but, as they say, all can’t be known. A

conclusion is simple: it is necessary to check whether there

is this or that illness (a syndrome, a symptom). Of course,

new diseases develop from time to time, but it happens not

so frequent.

Examples: cellulitis — not «целлюлит» but «флег-

мона»; potent pathogen (about a bacterium) — not «по-

тенциальный» but «мощный патоген», that is a simple

pathogen (opposite to a conditional one); by the way, as for

power: third power — not «третья сила» but «куб» (third

degree).

Symptomatic can mean not only симптоматический but

also with clinical manifestations, for example: symptomatic

hypertension — артериальная гипертония с клиническими

проявлениями but not «симптоматическая артериальная

гипертония», but symptomatic therapy — симптоматиче-

ская терапия.

The translation of medical texts is a very demanded type

of translation but at the same time one of the most difficult

and responsible.

This genre assumes an absolute understanding by the text

translator of the original and laborious work with dictionaries

and reference books. Here it is forbidden to dream and guess,

the medical diagnosis, the appointed treatment and, as a re sult, the patient’s life quite often depends on the translation

accuracy. A translator of medical texts should be guided very

accurately in the subject to reveal surely ambiguous terms

and expressions and to define correctly their treatment.

«The medical language» is an extended modification of

the basic language, that is apart from the main rules there act

additional (specific) ones.

There exist several types of medical translation:

1. translation of medical analyses which contain a lot of

abbreviations where each, sometimes absolutely unreadable

letter or figure, means something;

2. translation of instructions to medical equipment where

it is necessary not only to understand well medical issues but

also to have some technical knowledge;

3. translation of specialized texts. In case with such texts

it should be considered that texts of adjacent subjects can be

sated with absolutely different terminology. For example, different

terms can occur in the description of two autoimmune

diseases.

A special difficulty in translating medical texts is made by

«false friends of translators»: a couple of words in two languages

similar in writing and/or pronunciation, frequently

with the common origin but differing in meaning.

For example: Latin term «cellulitis» means not «цел-

люлит» but «флегмона». The English word «vector», apart

from its first meaning «вектор» can be translated as «пере-

носчик инфекции».

To avoid mistakes when translating, it is necessary not

to trust in the seeming coincidence of the meaning with a

similarly sounding word in the target language, as well as

to seek to seize all lexical and stylistic subtleties of both the

source language and the target language. In the presence of

the slightest doubt there are used both explanatory and special

dictionaries.

Besides «false friends of the translator», medical texts are

characterized by a peculiar building of sentences (the grammatical

relations between words become clear only at the accounting

of sense), the sentence structure (the problem of

definition of the logical accent in the sentence), there is also

possible an unsuccessful building of sentences abounding

with the developed definitions complicating the definition of

connection between the words. All this leads to the emergence

of ambiguity of the text being translated. When preparing

medical documents there are often used cliches and

terminological phrases.

The problem of set expressions, cliche and stamps is topical

for any translation, and medical literature is not an exception.

The abundance of phraseological units and words

with various lexical coloring does the translation of medical

documentation not less difficult than of highly specialized

technical texts. For example, the expression «under the

weather» (literally, «под погодой») means that the person is

unhealthy, feels bad. The idiom «pigging out» (from English

«pig» — «поросенок») means переедание, обжорство.

One of the most problematic for translation lexical groups

is the group of abbreviations in the field of medical translation.

Abbreviations (which are especially coming from Latin)

are some of the most often used elements in written and oral

medical communication. Many terms, such as names of diseases

and their treatments, the names of chemical compounds

are seldom used in their full, bulky form as it would

interfere with effective communication. Wide popularity of

abbreviations in the medical language, undoubtedly, provides

economy of space and time in the emergency medical

situation. Besides, abbreviations provide understanding only

for health workers, doing materials inaccessible for the patient

that is in certain cases expedient for ethical reasons.

However, quite often one abbreviation stands behind several

medical terms that undoubtedly leads to the ambiguity

of understanding and considerably complicates the translation.

For example, abbreviation CF has about 20 medical

meanings (Californium, Cystic Fibrosis and so on), as well as

not medical meanings (Compact Flash — a device for saving

data).

The following is considered as the main ways of translating

the English medical abbreviations:

1. borrowing a foreign abbreviation with preservation of

Latin writing;

2. transliteration (presenting the literal structure of a foreign

abbreviation by the Russian letters;

3. transcription (presenting the phonetic form of a foreign

abbreviation by the Russian letters);

4. descriptive translation (in the absence of an equivalent

abbreviation).

Medical texts are characterized by a peculiar building

of sentences. Quite often the structure of an English sentence

abounds with difficult grammatical constructions

(infinitive and participial phrases) that complicates the

definition of a logical accent in the sentence. All this leads

to the emergence of ambiguity of the text being translated.

From the point of view of grammar sentences can be divided

into translated practically without changes, translated

by means of the changed word order; requiring when

translating partial syntactic and lexical changes; requiring

descriptive translation sentences that are difficult in every

respect.

Thus, the complexity of medical translation consists in the

huge and promptly growing vocabulary of medicine, abundance

of synonyms and an idiomaticity of the professional

medical language, prevalence of abbreviations in medical

communication, grammatical difficulties of the English sentence.

Successful performance of this kind of activity requires

a close acquaintance with medicine — for this reason the

best translators of similar literature are graduates of medical

schools.

From the above-mentioned it follows that medical texts

represent complexity when translating not only at the lexical

level but also at the syntactic and grammatical ones. The

described problems are not the only that can be faced when

translating. But having correctly presented the matter at the

syntactic, lexical and stylistic levels, it is possible to achieve

the correct and high-quality translation.