DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH MILITARY TEXTS

Abstract: The paper deals with the problem of translating English military texts. It shows that word for word translation of military terms often fails to convey their meaning correctly. The study results revealing the difficulties that cadets face while translating military texts are given. The reasons of these difficulties are listed.

Keywords: translation, military texts, translation transformations, difficulties, cadets.
Аннотация: В статье рассматривается проблема перевода военной терминологии с английского языка. Показано, что с помощью дословного перевода часто не удается правильно передать смысл текстов военной тематики. Приводятся результаты исследования, показывающие, с какими трудностями сталкиваются курсанты при переводе текстов военной тематики. Перечислены причины этих трудностей.

Ключевые слова: перевод, тексты военной тематики, переводческие трансформации, трудности, курсанты.

The quality of translation depends greatly on the ability of interpreter to understand and convey the ideas of the original text correctly. Word for word translation is often inadequate, especially in scientific and military texts. The difficulty of translating terms lies in the fact that the interpreter should not only be able to speak English, but also possess some background knowledge in the field, know necessary terms and be well-acquainted with the culture and history of the target-language country.

Military materials usually include literary, publicistic and political texts on military topics, military scientific and technical texts and documents of military administration. Military literary, publicistic and political texts share the characteristics of political, publicistic and literary texts, but their topic is different. Also they are filled with special military expressions, terms, collocations, abbreviations, notation conventions and military nomenclature [1, p. 83]. It is caused by the peculiarities of
the military communication that is characterized by brevity, precision and context specificity of wording, speaking accuracy and clarity, precise distinction of ideas.

V.N. Shevchuk defines military terminology as an «…ordered totality of military terms of the language, that reflect the definitions of warfare science and are related to the forms and ways of conducting war, issues of strategic use of forces as well as operational-tactical use of units (both large and small) and subdivisions with their organization, armament and equipment» [2, p. 97].

Accuracy is really significant for military translation, as the translated information can later serve as a foundation for making important decisions, conducting combat operations and so on. That is why the adequacy of military translation implies accurate relaying of not only the meaning of the text, but also its structural form, the order of parts and other aspects that can seem unimportant, but still can be significant for a military expert.

Word for word translation, however, often fails to convey the meaning of the original text correctly. That is why sometimes it is necessary to transform the initial text. For example, in translation we can use the plural form of a word even though in the original it was the singular and so on. Thus, we preserve the meaning of the text and make it readable [3, p. 42].

At the English lessons in a military academy the cadets learn numerous special terms, practice using basic grammar rules, develop their communication skills. However little attention is paid to improving their translation skills. Cadets read English texts, but their task is to understand the information and be able to retell the essential parts in English. They are not supposed to perform a written literary translation. However, the ability to perform a high-quality translation is vital for any interpreter. It ensures that the readers will be able to understand the ideas of the original text correctly.

In our study the cadets are asked to translate a set of words and word combinations. For some cases word for word translation is appropriate, and cadets can translate them using an English-Russian dictionary. Other word combinations have to be transformed with the help of translation transformation. The aim of the study is to
reveal both the translation transformations the cadets can successfully apply and the ones that are difficult to use. Also we defined the cause of these difficulties.

The words and word combinations chosen for the study can be divided into eight categories according to the method of their translation.

1. Calquing or word for word translation (e. g. field hospital, general of the air force, protective equipment, hold a position).
2. International words that have different meaning from the intuitionally chosen one (e. g. attack, army, military academy, mission).
3. Contractions and abbreviations (e. g. MAJCOM, US AF, NATO, UNO).
4. Multiple word expressions (e. g. tactical air command, electronic warfare aircraft, eight-man infantry squad, missile-carrying heavy bomber).
5. Military terms that have no Russian equivalents (e. g. classified information, ground zero, Air Base wing, company grade officer).
6. Terms that require grammatical replacement (e. g. landing zone, take-off distance, long-range fire).
7. Generalized terms (e. g. fly combat missions, kill probability, troop-carrying plane, airborne troops).
8. Terms translated via transcription or transliteration (e. g. master sergeant, warrant officer).

The results of the study showed that the highest percentage of correct translations was given for contractions and abbreviations (78 %). Also the cadets made a good job of word for word translation (calquing) and translation of multiple word expressions (66,2 % and 48 %, correspondingly). The worst results cadets demonstrated while translating military terms that have no Russian equivalents (32,5 % of correct translations), using transcription and transliteration (25 %) and working with international words that have different meaning from the intuitionally chosen one (7,5 %).

We suppose that difficulties in translation of military terms are caused by:
1. Terminological interference, leading to the appearance of so called “false cognates”. It arises due to the partial interlingual homonymy, when the words in the source and translation languages sound similar.

2. The lack of cross-cultural competence and background knowledge in the military sphere. Some notions exist in the English language but not in Russian. For example, rank structure of the US Army differs from the one of the Russian Army, and some American ranks do not have Russian equivalents. However, cadets tend to look for one-to-one correspondence with Russian terms.

3. Insufficient knowledge of the English grammar.

Thus, it can be concluded that translation difficulties arise primarily from the lack of the background knowledge on the topic of the text and English grammar. We suppose that to improve the cadets’ understanding of English military texts focused efforts aimed at overcoming these difficulties are necessary.

REFERENCES

