

Problems Faced in Translating Technical Manuals/User Guides from English to Sinhalese

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Abstract

Technical translation deals with technical documents such as advertisements, obituaries, marriage proposals, bids, procurement notices, user guides/technical manuals, specification sheets, scientific papers, engineering plans, IT documents and etc. Technical manuals or user guides can be considered as a technical document which assists people in using electronic goods, equipment, computer hardware and software and other related machinery and are usually written by a technical writer who is considered as an expert of that particular field. The process of writing a manual is always guided by a proficient of that field and when it comes to translation the guidance and knowledge of the related field is quite vital. In the process of translating a manual, a translator might face numerous difficulties and when paying attention to Sinhalese, the most popular among them is the inability to find equivalent technical terminology. On the other hand translating the safety words, identifying the target audience, usage of language, style of language can also be problematic. Though it is believed that finding 100% equivalent terms from one language to another is impossible, the responsibility of the translator will be to use language in a way that the consumer can grab the same message which was in the source manual.

Keywords: Translation, Technical Translation, Technical Manuals, Problems, Solutions

Introduction

Translation is mostly referred to as the act of transforming the data of a source language in to a target language. In this process, the translator's knowledge on these two languages is of great significance since a minor change has the capacity to change the intended meaning of the original text. Translation has various categories namely: technical translation, science translation, literary translation, legal translation, interpretation and etc. Though there are different kinds of translation types, technical translation is of great importance since it deals with all the technical documents such as advertisements, obituaries, marriage proposals, bids, procurement notices, user guides/technical manuals, specification sheets, scientific papers, engineering plans, IT documents and etc. When a translator is given a technical document to be translated then she/he definitely should be aware of the registers and lexicon which are

used in that particular society. On the other hand special attention should be given to the variety of language that should be used; which most of the times is considered as the standard language. Similarly the translator should be well aware of the target audience and should use language and lexicon accordingly.

Discussion

Technical manuals or user guides can be considered as a technical document which assists people in using electronic goods, equipment, computer hardware and software and other related machinery. Moreover, it is commonly written by a technical writer who is considered as an expert of that particular field and production. Generally most user guides comprise of both a written guide and associated images. On the other hand it is a book-length

document which contains instructions on installing, using, or troubleshooting a product. Similarly a user guide writer should possess expertise of the related field and object.

Translating technical manuals is generally considered to be an act which is far more different from translating other types of technical documents. A technical translator should possess some unique qualities if she/he is to translate manuals. Translating manuals requires a specific skill and most importantly the subject matter expertise. As mentioned earlier, the process of writing a manual is always guided by a proficient of that field and when it comes to translation the guidance and knowledge of the related field is quite vital.

In the process of translating a manual, a translator might face numerous difficulties and when paying attention to Sinhalese, the most popular among them is the inability to find equivalent technical terminology. During the past two decades mainly because of the open economy and the exposure to the western countries, much new electronic equipment has been introduced to the Sri Lankan market. Mainly due to this factor, novel concepts and terminology were added to the Sri Lankan society. In the past the Sri Lankan dealers or retailers did not pay attention in translating the user guides or manuals and instead of that they tend to give the English manual for the customers. For example if a customer buys a washing machine from a reputed company then she/he is only given the English manual with some tips from the salesman in the retail shop. If a customer is unable to understand the language in the manual then they tend to seek advice from other people who are competent in that language.

Technical Terminology/Lexicon/Register

A manual or a user guide is commonly stuffed with technical terminology which is also called as the lexicon or registers and this terminology differs from one subject field to another. A key to a good user guide translation is the usage of correct terminology. On the other hand he or she should have a sound understanding of the related technical terminology in both the source and target language.

If a translator is unable of finding equivalent terms then she/he will be in a quite problematic situation and at this point it is recommended to consult an expert of the related domain. On the other hand if a translator is incapable of understanding the exact meaning of a term then also she/he is recommended to consult a responsible professional of the related field. While paying attention to Sinhalese it is quite noticeable that the Sinhalese lexicon, specially the terminology related to the technical field has not been expanded. As mentioned earlier, since translating manuals is a novel experience to the Sinhalese translators it is quite likely for them to face problems in finding the equivalent terms.

Safety Words

Safety words are frequently used in a user guide especially to notify the do not's which will be harmful for the users. Before translating the safety words the translator should get familiar with the usage of these safety words in the source country and the target country. Being familiar only with the source or target language will not be enough and it is the duty of the translator to be aware of the usage of the safety words both in the target and source culture. In a user guide one can find different safety words such as:

- Danger

- Warning
- Caution
- Notice

On the other hand if a translator wants to find equivalent terms for the safety words from a source language to a target language then she/he definitely should not look in to a dictionary because it has the possibility of misleading the meaning as well as the translator. In that sense a translator should be fairly vigilant in finding equivalent terms for the safety words.

For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines the safety words as:

- Danger - The possibility of suffering harm or injury
- Warning - A statement or event that warns of something or that serves as a cautionary example
- Caution - Care taken to avoid danger or mistakes
- Notice - The fact of observing or paying attention to something

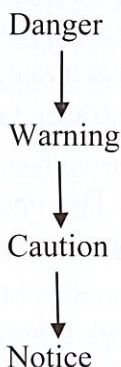
By looking at these definitions it is quite apparent that the safety words are used with a different connotation in a different context. Similarly, if a translator tries to find the equivalent terms for these from Sinhalese then also she/he has to face the same difficulty.

For example, the Malalasekara English Sinhala Dictionary defines the safety words as:

- Danger - wk;=r
- Warning - wk;=re yeŌùu
- Caution - wdrĒdj .ek wjOdkh
- Notice - oekaùu

Considering the above examples it is quite obvious that a translator should not 100% rely on the dictionaries though some terms among them can be used in the translations. Especially regarding the safety words it is advisable to pay attention to the context and find equivalent terms. On the other hand, a translator should be aware of the hierarchy of the safety words. If she/he is aware of this hierarchy then it will be rather easy in finding equivalent terms from the target language. In the hierarchy of the safety words the most hazardous can be considered as 'danger', then 'warning, caution and notice'.

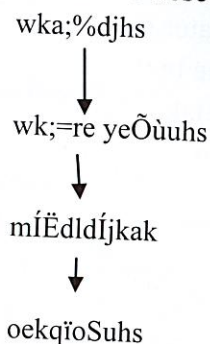
The hierarchy of the safety words in the descending order:



Normally 'Danger' is used to denote a life threatening situation while 'Warning' is used to express a less dangerous situation. On the other hand, 'Caution' is used to denote minor bodily injury and damage to the equipment which is less hazardous than 'Warning'. 'Notice' is considered to be lesser hazardous among these four words which actually denotes 'keep in mind'.

In the same manner there are some terms which can be replaced in Sinhalese, but one may find other equivalent terms for these safety words as well.

The hierarchy of the safety words in the descending order:



Target Audience

When a translator is provided with a manual to be translated then she/he should pay more attention in identifying the target audience. Though the manual writers also have paid attention to the target audience it is advisable for the translator also be vigilant on this factor since translation deals with two different languages of two different cultures.

For example translators should be aware whether this manual is written for the consumer or the manufacturer. If it is for the consumer then they should identify the consumer types such as;

- General public
- Academic Personnel and etc.

There are numerous types of technical manuals which are written for different audiences, and a translator should take this matter in to consideration.

Translating Words Related to Buttons, Dials and Displays

In manual one may always find terms related to buttons, dials and displays and in an instance like this, a translator might face

difficulties in deciding whether to translate them or not. In almost all the cases the translator should ask the client or the source author whether to translate the buttons and dials. In most cases these kinds of translations do not take place and if it happens by mistake then it definitely will confuse the consumer of the product.

Conclusion

Technical manuals or user guides are a technical document which assists people in using electronic goods, equipment, computer hardware and software and other related machinery. When a translator is provided with a technical manual to be translated then she/he might face great difficulties related to different areas. Before translating a manual, it is recommended to get a basic idea of a manual, its characteristics, use of language, style of language and etc. After acquiring knowledge of what a manual is, it is advisable to pay attention to the translation process where the translator is asked to read the manual more and more times till she/he understands every bit of information given. If the translator fails in understanding certain sentences then it is advised to consult the source author or the manufacturer.

On the other hand a translator should pay more attention in identifying the target audience and it is by this task that she/he is able to determine the terminology that is to be used in the translation. At the same time translating safety words is also discussed in this article and it is advisable for a translator to pay more attention to these words since they are given much importance in a manual. To recapitulate, it is proven fact that finding 100% equivalent terms from one language in to another language is impossible, but regarding user manuals, the responsibility of the translator will be to use language in a way that

the consumer can grab the same message which was in the source manual.

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