

## Similarities and Differences between Written Translation and Oral Translation

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### Abstract

*A translation that involves bilingual languages may occur in written and oral forms. They have their own characteristics respectively. This paper tries to explore the similarities and the differences between those written and oral translations. Both translations are similar in terms of translation principle and process. The main difference is the immediacy. Written translation has more time to be done than oral translation which should be conducted as soon as the speaker starts the speech. As the conclusion, such differences are classified based on (1) time, (2) environment, (3) culture, (4) texts, and (5) subjects of translations factor.*

**Key Words:** immediacy, oral translation, written translation

### Introduction

Translation is the general term referring to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language to another, whether the languages are written or in oral form (Brislin, 1976: 1). This paper attempts to explore the similarities and the differences between written and oral translations. Generally, the translations between two languages will involve texts; called the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). The first problem arising in this discussion will be defining the written and oral text. Text, as Halliday and Hasan (1985: 13) define, is the language that is doing a certain task in a certain context of situation. This can be written or oral forms as the medium used to express what people think. A board with bold letter "High Voltage", when it is attached to an electricity pole, does the task to convey message of a hazardous warning not to be close with the pole.

The medium is then a written text. This, however, can be ambiguous when the message on the board is read to a blind man passes near the pole "high voltage! Stay away from the pole at your right side" since this can be said as a spoken text. An English printed scientific journal can be translated carefully to another language in a printed one also. This may be said as a purely written translation. However, when the English printed journal is read orally and translated immediately to non-speaking English audience, one may say that this is an oral translation.

Oral translation is to happen when a translator is to translate spoken text between two persons who speak different languages. It can be also a written text that is read to a certain audience, then a translator transfers its message to another language. Furthermore, Riccardi (2002: 75-90), Alexieva (1992: 179-186), and Pöchhacker (1992: 169-178) use the term of interpretation to refer the oral translation. Riccardi specifically defines interpretation as the act of interpreting; a mental process and communicative act of reproducing orally in a target language what a speaker is expressing in a source language. However, the term of interpretation itself may inflict ambiguity as some experts consider that a translation is also an interpretation; either in written or oral form. Meanwhile, Buhler in Riccardi (2002: 56) recites Gadamer's statement underlining that every translation is interpretation, and basically the situation of the translator and the situation of a person making an interpretation are the same. For the sake of agreement for a fixed term to refer what is to be an oral translation in this paper, it is defined as an act to interpret and to transfer the oral text from source language to the target language orally and immediately. The clear limitation of the terms can be seen in the following chart.

<i>Written translation</i>	written text of SL →	written text in TL
<i>Oral translation</i>	written text of SL → to be read orally in SL →	Oral text in TL
	oral text of SL →	Oral text in TL

## Method

This paper avoids the ambiguity by not focusing only to the medium of the text; written or spoken but also by trying to make a clear limitation whether a translation is said to be written or orally. Seleskovitch in Riccardi (2002: 81) uses the term *written translation* as the transfer from one written source text to another written text in target language.

## Discussion

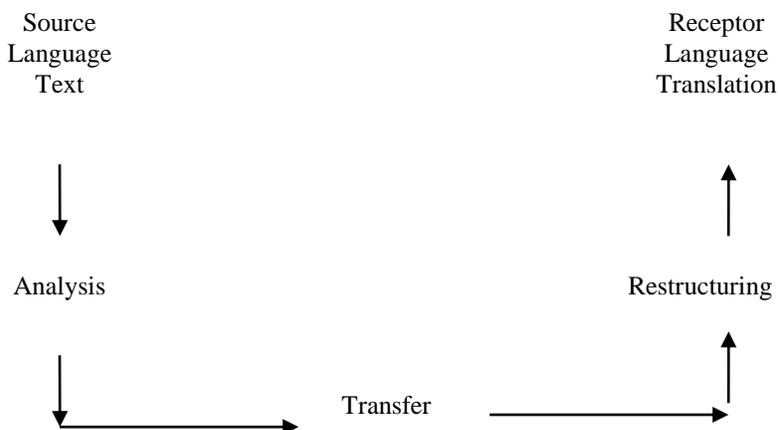
### Similarity Based on Principle

As long as one views a translation as a transfer of idea and thought from SL to TL, then all kinds of translations bear the same principle; originality. Many statements are similar to Theodore Savory's (1969: 50) statement that a translation must give the words and the idea of original. More carefully, Newmark (1981: 10) considers that the main aim of the translator is to produce as nearly as possible the same effect on his reader as was produced on the readers of the original. Newmark emphasizes *as nearly as possible* because there are difficulties to fully transfer cross culture meanings, stylistic language – poetry for instance, contexts where the source language belong to, and so forth.

These statements imply that the job of both written translator and oral translator is only mediation between the SL texts to TL texts. The translator duty is only to transfer message, meaning of the SL into TL by producing the same effect of the SL to TL as nearly as possible eventhough to some extents of both written and oral text natures, there will be some difficulties in their respective translations.

### Similarity Based on Process

Basically, both written and oral translation will take the same process. The translator first will face the original source, and then he will do the translation to the target language. While in written text, the translator gets the source written text, the oral translator listens to the speech that he will translate into speech also. Bassnet (1991: 16) uses Nida's model to illustrate the translation process as (1) Analysis, (2) transfer, (3) Restructuring.



As the translator deals with the SL text, he does analysis on lexical meaning and syntactical structure of the text to catch the text content. The translator then transfers the text content he has understood to the target text by restructuring the content so that the content can be fully accepted and be understood in the target language.

In the analysis stage, the translator will deal with verbal signs; either words, phrase, and clauses in written text or utterance and syllables in oral one. While the translator will catch non-verbal signs or supra-segmental elements such as punctuation, exclamation and question marks, full stop, comma and so on in written text, he will catch intonation, pitch, or gesture in oral text. Besides transferring verbal signs correctly, the translator should also be able to transfer those non-verbal signs to the target language.

Transferring and restructuring both verbal and non verbal languages require not only a good understanding but also good knowledge background of both languages involved in the translation. He must also master the knowledge backgrounds of cultures belonging to both SL and TL and even science on certain texts to produce well accepted translations. Hence, Bell (1991: 38-41) suggests three competences; ideal bilingual competence, expertise, and communicative competence. A translator must master all these three competences at once along his translating process.

Bathgate in Widyamartaya (1989: 40-41) adds more procedures after the restructuring stage as *checking* and *discussion*. Checking is needed in finishing translation as it will decrease errors probably made by translators in the previous stages. In this case, the translator may also consult and make discussion with experts related to special knowledge background they have which may related to the text. A translator may find specific terms to a certain science background that he may so difficult to decide whether he would create a new equivalence to TL or let the original terms. Then, he is to make explanation to his reader about the terms. A professional lawyer, for instance, will know much about the term in law field than a translator who is not a lawyer. When a translator has finished his translation on law topics, then it will be very ideal procedure if he consults the final translation to the lawyer. The lawyer may give suggestion for revising some parts of translation when it is necessary.

The last two procedures proposed by Bathgate will be useful to make written translation be accurate and appropriate to read by TL audiences. These, however, will meaningless in oral translation. There will be no enough time to conduct those checking and discussion since oral translation should be made to the listener of TL as soon as the speaker of SL starts his speeches. A revision is assumed to be impossible. Consequently, an oral translator must well prepare his related knowledge background to certain subject before he does the job. Eventually, any supplementary knowledge, Baker (2001: 41) sums up, can be acquired *during* written translation has to be acquired *prior to* interpreting.

The translation is a process and a product. As the process of translation is going on, then there are some problems raising from technical analysis both in grammar or meaning of SL to transfer to TL, equivalence in the lexical term or cultural one, immediacy of translating; live oral interpretation between two persons who speak different languages for example, to the accuracy and the possibility how a text can be fully translated into TL. Furthermore, as written text and oral text are naturally having distinctions in the way they are produced, there will also be some characteristics that are similar and different when the translation is to conduct until the translation process results the translation products; written and oral translation. Riccardi (2002: 85-88) tries to reveal the differences between the written and oral translation, in which he prefers to use the term *interpretation* for oral translation, based on factor of (1) time, (2) environment, (3) culture, (4) texts, and (5) subjects of translations.

#### **Difference Based on Time**

1. Written text of source language can be translated into target language in enough time to make revision before the translation product can be published. Any difficulties based on grammar, language style, expression, diction and so on, can be examined, corrected and revised before a decision on how the source text is to transfer to target text can be made. There will also enough time to consult with dictionaries.
2. Oral translation must be occurring in real time; at the time the original speech of the SL is uttered, and then the oral translation to TL is immediately to be done. Decisions are made immediately, sometimes automatically as the result of the input message which is made up not only of the text but also of the impact of the voice, intonation and prosody of the speaker. The translator has only short time to transfer the message to TL. The accuracy on how the SL text is interpreted to TL depends greatly on the translator background of knowledge to the SL text he translates, since he has no time to look up to the dictionary or to the literary source to find the proper meaning and understanding of TL text he translates.

#### **Difference Based on Environment**

1. Written text translators rarely meet their readers or the authors of the SL text. Ideally, the translators may consult the translation to the author of SL text before the finished translation can be made. The author of SL text, the translator and the reader may act in different time and place. There is no contact among them. The translation, then, is conducted to those general audiences; regardless the audience background of knowledge on the SL text being translated.
2. In oral translation, speaker of the SL text, the translator and the audience are present in the same time and place. Snelling in Snelling in Riccardi (2002: 86) delineates that while the speaker of SL is presence, he can influence the oral translation directly with his presence, his voice and gesture. The target language text must be targeted upon a specific audience and it is necessary to consider the audience and the specific qualities of the audience. Therefore, an interpreter needs to master the features of oral languages and be a good speaker (Baker, 2001:41). Finally, interpreter may adjust his translation based on the background knowledge of the audience directly.

### **Difference Based on Culture**

1. A written text to be translated is originally written for the target reader who belongs to the culture where the SL text is published. As a translation is to be made cross culturally, the translator deals with problem of cross cultural problems. These problems may be language expression or a situation where the text occurs. Translation in written form may influence the way in which a culture is transmitted and perceived culture in a target culture. Translation may imply that a power of a culture can exert over another culture; on the target text. Alvares and Vidal in Riccardi (2002: 87) states that translation is not the production of one text equivalent to another text, "but rather a complex process of rewriting that runs parallel to the overall view of language and of the 'other' people have throughout history; and to influence and the balance power that exist between one culture and another". However, as the author of the SL text, the translator and the audience are apart by time and place, there will be very little possibilities to make clarification to cultural misunderstanding, when it is to happen.
2. In oral translation, cultural differences are not necessarily become big problems. In an international conference, for instance, the community meets together to discuss the common topic on a subject that is decided prior to the meeting. Oral translator becomes a more effective in intervening or overcoming possible culture-bound difference because he is tied closer to both speaker and listener. Interpreter may change the register if he believe that the style of the speaker is unsuitable for the audience, may omit some portions of text where there are unnecessary repetitions. Whenever culture-bound discrepancies arise, the oral translator may make clarification of possible misunderstandings, cultural interpretations.

### **Difference Based on Text**

1. A written text is a well-arranged text and may be revised and edited prior to publication. As the translation process is done to the text, the translator can make repetitive overviews on lexical and syntactical choices. The translator surely has more time to conduct restructuring of SL text to TL, and he knows exactly what kind of text he is working.
2. Oral text is dynamic and not fixed. The text is developed at the speech decided by the speaker. The oral translator must adapt himself to the type of text, delivery, pronunciation and intonation of the SL speaker. The translator may also wait longer to get the whole idea, but he must take the risk of overloaded short term memory of what the speaker has said. There some possibilities to miss details. Furthermore, as the translator takes attention too much on listening and understanding of SL speech, there will be defect of output translation. When the translator takes attention too much on producing good translation, he is risky too loose SL text portion.

### **Difference Based on Subjects**

Translation corresponds with knowledge. Written translation may take all subjects to establish communication between political, economic and legal institutions, business firms and industrial enterprises. Translations could be literary, philosophical, historical, and cultural works. They may subsequently have a great impact on the target culture, may signal idea, innovation, different point of views. In this case, Alvarez and Vidal in Riccardi (2002: 88) say that translation creates an image of the original, particularly for those who have no access to the reality of that original. Oral translation may take all subjects but its main objective is the multilingual communication where people from different languages discuss the same topics. They want to gain deeper understanding and compare their positions.

### **Conclusion**

In this section, this paper is to draw the line between similarities and differences of written and oral translation. Being a translator, whether in written or oral forms, the translation principle is a basic requirement to hold; to fully transfer content and all language factors related to the source text to the target one. As this principle is kept as a standard in doing translation process, problems in translating can be understood.

Time will be the basic source of difficulties to differentiate written from oral translation. If the written text translator should produce high quality of translation, he may have enough time to analyze, reconstruct, revise and edit the translation. If necessary, translator may consult his translation to experts who have related background knowledge to the text content he translates. The translator of written text will have more time to make effort in understanding the author style of source language text, the culture background of the text, and then he will decide the best way he can do to transfer them into target language text.

In oral translation, a translator should understand the content of the speaker, his style, his cultural background which may influence the style and the content of his speech, and then he will reconstruct them into the target language in short time. The translator may get difficulties in revising or editing his translation, and often it is impossible while the source language speaker keeps on speaking and his audience keeps on listening.

A speaker of source text language does not merely produce content of the text verbally. He also produces non-verbal signs such as intonation, pitch, and gestures while he is speaking. These non-verbal signs may differ from one country or culture to another. Obviously, these non-verbal signs also have certain meanings. The oral translator should have also more capabilities to understand those non-verbal signs in the culture of source language text, so that he is able to transfer the non-verbal signs to the target text culture properly. Eventually, this will much more difficult to transfer non-verbal signs of live speaker than to transfer the same signs of written text.

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