*Øivin Andersen, dr.art. associated professor, University of Bergen, Norway*

# Translation Problems in some LSP-sectors of the lexicon of a Norwegian-Vietnamese dictionary for Vietnamese refugees in Norway

It is a well known, but very crucial fact that the process of translation becomes more difficult with a greater distance between the source language and the target language as regards genetic, typological and cultural differences. This is true on the level of grammar, style and lexicon. These levels are not autonomous modular levels, but interact in sublte ways in the process of translation. In this introduction, however, I will focus on problems related to lexicon in a Norwegian-Vietnamese dictionary.

In international terminology work the problem of distance between languages is to some extent overcome by standardisation and terminology planning. Still, major differences of grammatical structure of the source language and the target language may cause interference problems on the lexical level. There is a growing awareness in modern syntacic theory that syntax and lexicon have a close and complex relationship.

Some years ago I came across an English-Chinese dictionary of oil terms relating to the off-shore activity in the China Sea. I made a quick check on some entries containing the word *platform*. I found several entries of the form: *at the platform* listed as one single main entry under the letter *a, by the platform* under the letter *b, over the platform* under *o*, and so on.

This is, of course, a violation of basic principles of lexical entry processes of dictionaries. But I wondered how this could happen. I found out that this dictionary was made entirely by Chinese petroleum engineers without experience of lexicographical and terminological work. An English engineer would never have made such entries, not because he is a better terminologist or lexicographer than his Chinese collegue, but because the grammatical structure of English is significantly different from that of Mandarin Chinese at this point.

The fact is that Mandarin Chinese does not posess a word class corresponding to prepositions, a type of words which is very typical of the indo-european languages. As you know, the use of prepositions are highly idiosyncratic, very language specific and notoriously difficult to aquire for the foreign learner. English prepositions correspond partly (very partly!) to Chinese nouns: Instead of saying *at the platform* in Mandarin you say *the platform´s topside* or *the topside of the platform*.

Of course, it is easy to insist that the principles of lexical entries in the source language must be determined solely by the linguistic structure of the source language, but in practical work the principles have a notorious tendency to create problems.

Vietnamese is like Mandarin Chinese in many respects: It is an isolating language with a fairly complex tone structure, and, as I gradually learned, with a lexical structure quite different from Norwegian.

In the autumn semester of 1979 an initiative was taken by the linguistic Department and the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature at the University of Bergen to start up the project of a Norwegian-Vietnamese Dictionary. The project ran for five years and the dictionary appeared in 1983. A group of Norwegian lexicographers worked with the Norwegian part of the dictionary, especially the principles of selection of the Norwegian lexical entries and the basic macrostructures of the Norwegian lexicon articles.

But the most time consuming part of the project was of course the actual translation process from Norwegian into Vietnamese. At that time none of us had any knowledge of Vietnamese. So we had a sinologist, professor Henry Henne sent over from The Department of Asian languages at the University of Oslo to give us a crash course in Vietnamese.

Then we established a translation group consisting of Norwegian lexicographers and well educated Vietnamese, who were given a basic course of practical lexicography work. The Norwegian lexicon articles formed the point of departure for the translation process. As I hope to demostrate it turned out to be advantageous to form the lexicon articles in such a manner that the translation process was made as smooth as possible.

As the practical work in the translation groups proceeded, we fairly soon saw the need for specialized groups. Two LSP-oriented fields were especially important in the dictionary: the field of medicine and the field of law.

We managed to compose groups with both Norwegian and Vietnamese medical experts. The groups were lead by lexicographers/linguistists of the main group. The group worked its way through the typical Norwegian deceases (including the flew, which the Norwegians have all the time), and then through the list of tropical deceases and the list of basic types of medicines associated with the different deceases. The process of translation went very smooth. The reason is of course that the international nomenclature of medical terms to a large extent is based on latin terms. Vietnam has been through a fairly long period of European (especially French) colonization, so western medicine was well known in Vietnam.

Encouraged by our success with the medical group we established a similar group to work with legal terms. We had two Norwegian MA students of law plus a Norwegian lexicographer, and two Vietnamese lawyers graduated from Paris. Although the field of legal terms in Norwegian had been well analysed in advance, the translation process was much more difficult and time consuming than the work in the medical group. The reason, as we found out later, was that the Vietnamese legal system is largely based on the French system (which is quite different from the Norwegian system in many crucial respects), with some influence still remaining from the Chinese system (after all

Vietnam has been under Chinese administration for more than one thousand years).

Instead of the numerous one-to-one correspondances that we had in the medical field, we had many one-to-zero corresponances in the legal system. Although we had no knowledge of the Wüster theory of terminological systems at that time, we realized that we had to work with legal conceptual systems and decompose it into smaller sectors which we could manage one at the time.

Translation work in bilingual dictionaries can be seen as an attempt to compare the lexicon of two languages. Basically, three areas of linguistics are involved in the process, two interlingual ones: contrastive linguistics and theory of translation, and one intralingual one: lexical semantics. In contrastive linguistics we investigate the language structure of two (or several) languages across the languages involved and evaluate the influence of crosslinguistic contrasts on second (or foreign) language learning. Contrastive problems relating to differences of the language system (thought of as Saussurian langue) may give us a diagnosis, a tool which can help us to predict which part of the lexicon is going to give us translation problems (e.g. culturally specific words which Norwegians take for granted because they are so familiar).

Contrastive linguistics is to some extent langue-based, whereas translation theory will tend to be parole-based, i.e. based on spatiotemporally given utterances in specific types of situations (as Werner Koller has pointed out). The two areas are connected, however. The denotatum of a lexical item can be defined as the total collection of situations which elicits the use of that lexical item.

Consequently, we are dependent on simple, illuminating examples of sentences, illustrating basic, prototypic aspects of the actual situation type. If this analysis is carried out properly, the translation process is made easier and more precise.

The basic elements of lexical semantics: synonymi, antomymy and hyponomy have also proven to be fruitful in some cases, but can only be applied fruitfully in certain sectors of concrete lexical items. Various subtypes of ontological relations (especially partitive and temporal ones) have also proven to be helpful in the translation process.

When the denotatum of lexical items is translated from one language to another various types of correspondences are found:

The most welcomed one from a translators point of view is the one-to-one correspondence, which means that the denotatum of a lexical item in the source language covers that of the target language:

(Confer your handout)

SL=Source Language, TL=Target Language

a) One-to-one correspondence:

| SL | TL |
|---|---|
| A | A' |
| måned--------------------- tháng | |
| (month) | |

This type of correspondence is quite rare between two languages which are distant and unrelated.

b) One-to-many correspondence:

| SL | TL |
|---|---|
| | A' |
| A | B' |
| | C' |
| | hôm (referring to present and past) |
| dag | bữa (in a series, present and past) |
| (day) | ngày (in a series, future) |

This is a very common type of correspondence in our dictionary. If a Norwegian lexeme has two or several meanings (allosemes) and one or several of these has a one-to-many correspondence with Vietnamese, it can be illustrated like in b1):

b1) One-to-many correspondence with allosemes:

| SL | TL |
|---|---|
| meaning 1-------------------a.b.c.d. | |
| meaning 2-------------------e.f. | |

This means that a given Norwegian lexical item has two meanings. Meaning 1 corresponds to four items in Vietnamese: a, b, c and d, and meaning 2 corresponds to two items in Vietnamese e an f. One important problem here is to pin down the Vietnamese meanings as accurately as possible. This type of correspondence structure was very

common in our dictionary, and many items were much more complex. The verb *ta* (take) had up to 30 different meanings with one-to-many correspondences in all of them.

c) Many-to-one correspondence

| SL | TL |
|---|---|
| A | |
| B | A' |
| blå (blue) | |
| grønn (green) | xanh |

This correspondence type represents a problem for the Vietnamese learner of Norwegian. Specification in Vietnamese can be made in terms of similarity constructions: green/blue like grass, meaning "green", and green/blue like the sky, meaning "blue".

d) One-to-zero correspondence

| SL | TL |
|---|---|
| A | zero |

blåbær (blueberry)

This correspondence type represented the biggest challenge to translation. All the culture specific Norwegian lexemes belong to this type. Many of them do not even have corresponding terms in English, like *skiføre* (condition of the snow seen from the point of view of skiing) and *gammaldans* (popular Norwegian traditional dances). Many legal terms belong here too: *sorenskriver* (a kind of magistrate or country court judge), *ombudsmann* (ombudsman), *stortingsproposisjon* (a type of parliamentary bill) etc.

These words are registered with Norwegian definitions and explanations, which are in turn translated into Vietnamese. Some words, especially zoological words, like *blueberry* are very difficult to define. Functional definitions and explanations are necessary (we use it to make jam and lemonade), and of course the size and type of vegetation must be given (small, growing on small bushes or shrubs).

Finally, I will say a few words on translating via a third language. In the process of translating both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries were used: monolingual Norwegian dictionaries, Norwegian-English dictionaries, monolingual English dictionaries, bilingual English/French/German-Vietnamese dictionaries and several

monolingual Vietnamese dictionaries. We also had dictionaries going from Vietnamese to English, French and German.

In many cases we had to make indirect translation, i.e. by using English, French and German as reference languages. Because one-to-one correspondences between two languages are relatively rare, the risk of mistranslation will increase by using indirect translation. I have tried to make a model for this, based on lexical field analysis, as shown in e):

e) Indirect translation

III = Vietnamese
II = English
I = Norwegian

| Denotata/lexical fields | | | lexemes |
|---|---|---|---|
| III   z" | x" | y" | B"A"C" |
| II | x' | | y'    A' |
| I            [ | x | ] | A |

I, II and III are are lexical fields in Norwegian, English and Vietnamese. The denotatum of the lexical field x in Norwegian is represented by the lexeme A in field I. The denotational ranges of the lexemes are indicated by brackets in the three fields. The task is to translate lexeme A into Vietnamese. In Vietnamese The lexemes B", A" and C" covers the field z" x" and y" (field III). We can se that the denotata of the equivalence candidates of A in field I (i.e. A' in field II and B", A" and C" in III) only partially overlap: A' in English covers the denotatum of A in Norwegian, but also contains a denotatum area outside that of A's, namely y', and the denotata covered by the lexemes B", A" and C" in Vietnamese have different field borders.

I will not go in further detail here, but this model illustrates the complexity of a typical translation process in our dictionary. A major point is that careful and elaborate lexicological analysis must be carried out before indirect translation can be carried out with success. In ideal this applies to the entire lexicon. But it is a very time consuming task and it requires some linguistic and lexicological skill to carry it out successfully.