

Research on Translation Assessment Procedures: Back Translation and Expert Review



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Outline



- Research goals
- Key definitions
- Literature review
- Use of previous research
- Research design
- Research tools
- Preliminary findings

Research goals



- To gain insight into advantages and disadvantages and cost/benefits of different approaches to assessing translations
- Two approaches discussed here
 - “Expert review” and Back translation

Back translation (BT)



- A text already translated into language B from language A is translated back into language A.
- The two language A texts are compared to try to decide on the quality of the text in language B.
- Language B itself is *not* reviewed in this process.
- (Much written on BT not discussed here.)

Expert review



- (Source) text in language A is compared to text translated into language B to try to decide on the quality of the text in language B.
- Comparison made by an “expert” that knows both languages (and ideally cultures and surveys).
- Language B itself *is* reviewed in this process.

Evaluation process



- We asked people with experience in designing surveys to evaluate the products (outputs) from two different translation assessment strategies.
 1. Source questions and their back translations
 2. An “expert” (bilingual) review
- [We call the experts in the current study “evaluators” and people who made the reviews “reviewers”]

Literature review



- 17 Bibliographic Databases + Internet search
- Keyword: “Back translation”
- 4,000+ hits (Refworks)
- 2,422 articles in database currently

- Selection of articles
 - Most relevant abstracts 2005-2008
 - Most relevant titles 1970-2004
 - All articles 1937-1969 and **most cited**

- Creation of Data Entry Protocol

Previous research on these questions



1. Translation quality assessments for WMHI and ESS
2. Oral translation research on ESS questions
3. Interpreting research on WMHI and ESS
4. Interviews with translators on ESS questions

Research design



- Used ESS and WMHI questions already assessed
- Spanish and German
- Translators and evaluators with different backgrounds
- Compare comments on BT output with comments on reviews of translations

Research tools



- **Briefing docs**
 - Translators
 - Evaluators
- **Templates**
 - Translators
 - Evaluators

BT Evaluation Templates



Source	Back-translation	Evaluator Comments
<p>Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.</p>	<p>Please place on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'you can never be too careful' and 10 means 'the majority of people can be trusted'</p>	<p>Comparable - no changes to Spanish</p>

Review Comments Evaluation Templates



Source	Reviewer Comments	Evaluator Comments	Translation
How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?	Meet socially is translated as "how often do you meet with friends, relatives or privately with work colleagues"	Change, if necessary add 'for social activities' or some other expression. Otherwise there is no sense of social activities.	Wie oft treffen Sie sich mit Freunden, Verwandten oder privat mit Arbeitskollegen?

Findings 1) first findings on BT



Our findings corroborate points often made

- BT will reflect some *possible* issues
- NB: Review of *translated* text still needed to decide what has happened (work beyond BT)
- BT contains mistakes
- BT may seem to signal mistakes that are not mistakes
- BT disguises mistakes

First findings on BT



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- BT will reflect some *possible* issues
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First findings on BT



- BT contains mistakes

Source: You were **in a bad mood**

BT: You were **moody**

Translation: You were **in a bad mood**

- BT may seem to signal mistakes

Source: Gain weight without **trying** to

BT: Gain weight without **wishing** to

Translation: Gain weight without **wishing** to

First findings on BT



- BT disguises issues

Source: your **emotional** problems

BT: your **emotional** problems

Translation: your **psychological** problems

(lowkey euphemistic translation “seelische Probleme”)

- Limited options to describe “emotional problems “
in German
- BT does not reflect these challenges and differences

Preliminary findings on BT



- **BT will not find resolutions**
 - (Strong contrast to what happened in bilinguals reviews)
 - Means further analysis and resolution work
- **No evidence that BT is more efficient or better than other approaches**

Apart from what goes wrong

- **Anything flagged calls for further work with people who can translate (time effort costs)**
- **Flagging done on basis of what matters for English**

Evaluator review findings



- Evaluators (and reviewers) commented on more than BT comparisons produced
- Evaluations (and reviews) found things not reflected in BT
- Evaluators (and reviewers) often suggested solutions or possible causes of problems

Evaluator review findings



- Bilingual evaluators focus more on the translations than on the reviewer's comments
- Agreed, disagreed, and added to reviewer comments on basis of their view
- No indication from bilingual review if reviewer comments ALONE more useful
- [However, comments alone would not be recommended practice for evaluation]
- More evaluations to come including monolingual English

In sum



- Work in progress
- Evaluators (and reviewers) “missed” things in both projects
- (We also missed things)
- BT less good than review and evaluation
- But cost/benefit issues for review/evaluation not resolved
 - Specific instructions needed but also room for things “missed”
 - Iterative practice catches more but optimal minimal approach is goal
 - More research

Thank You



- Questions