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Intercultural interferences in technical translation: a glance at Italian and German technical manuals

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a corpus-based study, the aim of which is to define translation-relevant, culture-bound features of Italian technical manuals and their impact on translation decisions. Italian texts are found to be distinguished by a 'high', somewhat 'scientific' register which in turn is characterised by markedly explicit formulations. Distance between writer and reader is underlined by certain linguistic markers and bureaucratic expressions. The specific stylistic and pragmatic features of the source texts may cause difficulties to translators, if they fail to take into account the different text-type-bound conventions in source and target culture. The quality of the German translations in our corpus appears at times to be compromised by cases of intercultural interference which could be avoided, if translators were trained better. The paper includes a series of examples, comparing adequate and inadequate translation solutions.

KEYWORDS

Technical manual, cultural difference, style, register, Italian, German, technical translation, distant communication.

1. Introduction

Nowadays the concept of cultural adaptation in the translation of non-fiction texts is widely accepted. Similarly, the need to respect the text type conventions of the target culture is considered to be one of the principal factors in translation quality. This tendency is expressed in Werner Koller's (2004) concept of *textnormative Äquivalenz* and in Juliane House's influential pragmatic model (1981; 1997) by the so-called *cultural filter* which should be adopted, if a *covert* translation strategy is chosen. Even the supporters of functional approaches like *Skopos theory* (who often consider technical translation to be a subcategory of *technical writing*) usually emphasise that translation should be not only *adressatenorientiert* but also *textsortengerecht* (Schmitt 1998), i.e. respecting both the receiver's needs and the conventions of the relative text type.

1.1. Previous research

Specific studies of cultural differences are still lacking for most text classes and language combinations, and thus translators find little hard data on which to base their decisions. Technical manuals belong to the most frequently translated texts and are a valid example of covert translation, but linguistic research has long focussed mostly on their specific pragmatic features (e.g. Grosse & Mentrup 1982; Serra Borneto 1992a;

further references in Nickl 2001) or on readability problems (e.g. Lassen 2003). Studies stress the fact that texts should be used together with the respective product (e.g. Saile 1982), but may also contain passages without procedural or operative functions. As form and style depend on a series of factors like the category of the product or the reader's and writer's relative levels of technical knowledge, the text type as a whole appears not to be very homogeneous (Ciliberti 1992: 50-52). Thus, most studies propose a distinction between more and less specialised texts, in German normally described as *fachintern* and *fachextern* (e.g. Gläser 1990: 241-242), even though the difference could perhaps be defined better as *industrial* vs. *non-industrial* (Hempel 2006: 236 n.2). Furthermore, technical manuals may be instructive or directive (Hoffmann 1998: 568) and in German they should have different text titles, if the text producer is authorised to issue directives to the reader (Schmitt 1998: 209).

Cross-cultural research has concentrated so far on a few linguistic areas only, providing however a series of interesting results. Most existing contrastive studies propose comparisons between manuals in English and German (e.g. Kußmaul 1990; Göpferich 1995: 273-294; 1996; Baumgarten 2003) or between German and some Romance languages (Ebert & Hundt 1997; Brumme 1999; Schreiber 2004). The differences among languages in the realisation of directive speech acts are particularly relevant for translation practice (e.g. Kußmaul 1990; Göpferich 1996; Schreiber 2004) as is the more or less marked tendency to highlight the distance between text producer and reader (Baumgarten 2003). Diverse communication conventions may influence the form of the illustrations in the text (Göpferich 1995: 181-182; Schmitt 1999: 194-196), while certain cultural areas (Japan, Finland) show a propensity for comic strips which would be unsuitable for other cultures (Schmitt 1999: 168-169; Spillner 2002: 150-152). Localisation often explains the absence or presence of certain text sections in accordance with different technical or legal systems (Göpferich 1995: 288-289; Schmitt 1999: 186-187; Fleischmann 2001). Measurements must be adapted to the target culture, as must the wording of warnings or warranty declarations (Schmitt 1999: 127-256; Dias 2004). The macrostructure however depends on fixed conventions such as European norms (Göpferich 1998: 357-366) and should normally remain unchanged in translation (Schmitt 1998: 210).

A relatively complete discussion of cultural diversity in technical manuals has recently been presented by Brigitte Horn-Helf (2003a; 2003b; 2007). In her exhaustive corpus-based study of English/American, German and Russian manuals she considers a series of linguistic categories such as the realisation of declarative text parts (e.g. titles), digressions and directive speech acts, and some stylistic features (e.g. reference to the writer/reader, use of passive tense, complexity of syntactic structures). Other aspects discussed by Horn-Helf are typographical conventions, as

well as the macrostructure and relation between written text and illustrations.

1.2. Research on Italian manuals

Little contrastive research has been conducted on Italian user manuals (and other Italian technical texts) and, where it exists, the importance of specific cultural features seems to be underestimated. The principal study in this area – and perhaps the most complete text-linguistic analysis of technical manuals in general (Serra Borneto 1992a) – refrains from discussing any cross-cultural aspects, even though it is based mostly on translations from German (for a brief contrastive study see Serra Borneto 1996). The only comprehensive article on the topic (Ebert & Hundt 1997) examines German and Italian manuals together with Portuguese ones and reaches the conclusion that linguistic features currently show a tendency to converge, while cross-cultural differences are decreasing. We will discuss these observations in greater detail later in this article, but for now we may venture that such tendencies are due to interlinguistic influences which are supposed to be particularly present in frequently translated text types. For languages from less industrialised cultural areas, such as Portuguese (Ebert & Hundt 1997: 178 n. 5) or Catalan (Brumme 1999: 265), it is quite difficult to collect original technical manuals.

On the other hand, the idea of cultural convergence seems, to a certain extent, to contrast with the results of some other studies which bemoan the overblown *technical* (Rega 2004) or even *bureaucratic* style (Crivello 1998) of Italian texts, thus confirming general observations on the cultural differences between Italian and English writing conventions (Katan 1997: 61; 64-65). As Italy has its own industrial production, but imports goods too, it may be interesting to analyse the actual impact of intercultural contact on technical manuals, as well as the possible difficulties in translating them.

1.3. Approach and text corpus

This article will consider the most striking features of Italian technical manuals from an intercultural point of view, and these manuals will be contrasted mainly with German ones. At the same time we aim to find possible cases of interference in German (and sometimes English) versions and to assess their possible impact on translation quality. The research is based on a corpus of 42 Italian texts (see bibliography), which are mostly drawn from internet sites, but also from purchased products or my own translation portfolio. For most of the manuals, translations in other languages are available. For comparison, in addition to the Italian-German parallel corpus we compiled a reference corpus of 28 texts in German.

In order to maintain a certain balance, the corpora included manuals belonging to different producers and microcultures (household appliances, electronic devices and other). Due to the reluctance of industrial firms to give out information that may be useful for competitors, it was not easy to obtain permission to use manuals for industrial machines. Consequently, this study focuses on texts relating mostly to consumer goods for home (and sometimes professional) use. We were able to find only five industrial-product manuals (all in Italian: see the bibliography), while all of the German texts consist of manuals for non-industrial goods.

Much attention has been paid to cultural 'authenticity': In the Italian corpus, for instance, we have included only manuals where, on the basis of extra- and intratextual evidence (location of the manufacturer's headquarters, sequence of languages in the manual), we were able to judge that the Italian version was the source text. As our discussion will show, most Italian examples can reasonably be seen as "innocently monolingual texts", as Baumgarten calls them (2003: 18 n. 2), i.e. not written for an 'international' context and not adapted to a 'neutral' cultural model.

The fact that the possible language combinations in the translation of technical manuals are numerous may present problems for the assessment of translation quality, as it cannot be excluded *a priori* that some of the translations are *indirect*, i.e. based on one or more intermediate versions in international pivot languages. However, our stance on target text quality remains justified, because intercultural interferences from the source text are obvious in our examples and can be explained, only if direct translation is presupposed.

2. Discussion of some intercultural differences and translation difficulties

In this section, we will start by making some observations regarding cultural differences, mutual influence and translation difficulties in declarative text segments such as titles (2.1.). Then we will discuss problems regarding the different degrees of distance between writer and reader, as expressed in Italian and German texts, which can be observed above all in the formulations of directive speech acts (2.2.). Finally, we will analyse a series of examples of the typical syntactic and stylistic features of Italian manuals, discussing the translation difficulties that they present and the possible intercultural interferences (2.3.).

2.1. Declarative text parts

According to Horn-Helf's typology (2003a; 2007:73-75), the declarations of technical manuals may be classified according to the number of

constitutive functional text elements mentioned. The categories of title formulations are:

- *focussed* on the text function (e.g. "Operating Instructions").
- *integrative*, i.e. describing the content analytically (e.g. "Installation, Operation and Maintenance Manual").
- *abstracting* from the text function (e.g. "User's Guide").
- *undeclared*, i.e. no title or only the name of the product/producer.

Applying the scheme to Italian and German texts, the classification is the following:

	German	Italian
<i>focussed</i>	Bedienungsanleitung Gebrauchsanweisung	Istruzioni per l'uso libretto [di] istruzioni
<i>integrative</i>	Montage- und Betriebsanleitung	Manuale di [installazione,] uso e manutenzione
<i>abstracting</i>	Handbuch	Manuale d'uso
<i>undeclared</i>	(no verbal title or only the name of the producer)	

Figure 1. Examples of title formulations in German and Italian technical manuals.

As for the Italian texts belonging to the corpus, it can be observed that manuals for industrial machines usually employ *integrative* titles (e.g. *manuale di installazione, uso e manutenzione*), whereas in German, according to Horn-Helf (2003a: 136; 2007: 74), there is a preference for *focussed* formulations. Comparing Italian and German manuals for non-industrial products (Fig. 2), it can be noted that Italian instructions are always declared, usually by a *focussed* title, while German texts sometimes lack a title (*undeclared*), something which concurs with Horn-Helf's observations. From these observations it seems clear that there is a general bias to more explicit formulations in Italian than in German, with explicitness increasing with higher degrees of specialisation.

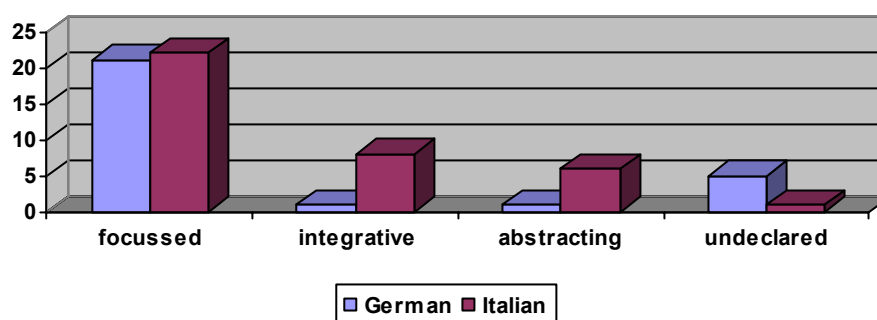


Figure 2. Italian and German technical manuals (non-industrial products). Quantitative distribution of text titles into categories.

Unlike German texts, Italian manuals frequently use *abstracting* declarations (above all *manuale d'uso*) which seem to be typical of electronic devices, while instructions for household appliances or cars have more conventionalised titles like *libretto di istruzioni*, unless they mention the text function only (*istruzioni*). The stronger Italian bias towards *abstracting* (and *integrating*) formulations which include the word *manuale* 'manual' may be due to English/American influence (for similar observations about Anglicisms in Russian texts, see Horn-Helf 2007: 74-75).

As for translating from Italian into German and English, *focussed* declarations seem to require no particular effort (e.g. in German *Bedienungsanleitung* is the unmarked choice) and translators seem less at ease rendering the quite unfamiliar *integrative* formulations as in the following examples:

Translation examples of Italian integrative text titles:

- (1) Istruzioni ed avvertenze (Imetec 2003)
Instructions and Warnings
Anleitungen und Hinweise
- (2) Istruzioni per l'installazione e l'uso (Merloni year unknown b)
Instructions for installation and use
Informationen für Installation und Gebrauch

The English and German translations seem to be less clear than the original titles and show intercultural interference because they are oriented to the source text linguistic structure and not to the text type conventions of the target cultures. A more appropriate title would be *Bedienungsanleitung* or *Gebrauchsanweisung* in German and "User's Guide" in English.

2.2. Distance to the reader

As has been pointed out with regard to texts in German and in some Romance languages (Ebert & Hundt 1997: 173-174), technical manuals appear to be written in a *distant* communicative situation, which is expressed by the fact that explicit mention of the writer (and reader) is quite infrequent. The manufacturer normally appears solely in warranty declarations or in some optional metacommunicative text parts expressing gratitude to the costumer for having purchased the product. Italian texts refer to the writer as *costruttore* 'manufacturer', *ditta costruttrice* 'manufacturing business' or *rete assistenziale* 'customer service', if they prefer not to use the name of the product or brand directly. The reader is called *cliente* 'client' or *utente / utilizzatore* 'user' and may be indirectly referred to by impersonal formulations like *Se si desidera* [...] 'If one

wishes [...]'. Most scholars agree that in German manuals there is a tendency for more personal formulations (Horn-Helf 2007: 104).

Addressing readers directly is frequent only in instructive or directive text segments. Unlike in English, in both Italian and German the relative speech acts can be expressed by 'true' imperative forms, by infinitives functioning as imperatives or by deontic expressions (modal verbs and so on), with the diverse options corresponding to various degrees of constraint (the so-called *forza dell'operazione*, s. Serra Borneto 1992b: 89-93). The most frequent ones are directives in procedural or operative passages, i.e. in text segments telling the reader how to operate the product (Ciliberti et al. 1992: 32-40). As has been rightly observed (Ciliberti et al. 1992: 27), these are not 'real' directives because the reader is collaborating on a voluntary basis.

Existing studies often argue that imperatives and infinitives in Italian technical manuals are found in approximately equal measure or that imperatives even predominate (Ciliberti 1992:119; Serra Borneto 1996: 176; Ebert & Hundt 1997: 177-178), a tendency which may be explained by the fact that previous corpora were frequently based on translations. From our text corpus (fig. 3), however, it seems to be clear that infinitives are the preferred option, while the reader is rarely addressed by imperatives, but rather either by the non-committal plural of the second person, or very rarely by the courtesy form (third person plural) or by the familiar singular of the second person.¹ The occurrence of infinitives or imperatives in the procedural/operational passages of every single text is usually to be expected and can be considered as a result of conscious decision by the writer. Some manuals which opt for the imperative (e.g. Gaggia year unknown a) are even characterised by other receiver-oriented features such as the use of certain verbs which highlight the role of the reader (Puglielli 1992: 167), while texts where the singular of the second person is used have an exceptional layout, with numerous illustrations (Merloni year unknown b). On the other hand, the infinitive which in Italian does not affect sentence structure and cannot therefore be justified by 'economic' considerations, is described as *impersonal* in linguistic studies and expresses the *tenseless* nature of the described actions (Berrettoni 1992: 160).

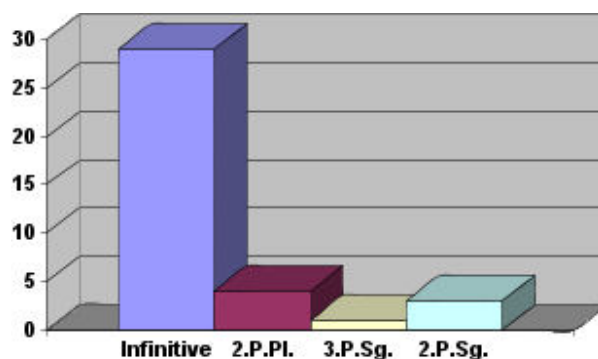


Figure 3. Italian technical manuals (non-industrial products). Realisation of 'directive' speech acts in procedural/operative text segments.

As for German manuals, according to previous studies (Göpferich 1998: 156; Horn-Helf 2007: 93-96) infinitives predominate only in certain text types and are used especially in manuals for industrial products or in certain microcultures such as computer science, while instructions for consumer goods show a marked bias to the third person subjunctive, normally considered as the courtesy form. This trend to a more reader-oriented style is even recommended by experts (e.g. Göpferich 1995: 396) and actually seems to be increasing, as can be observed in our German corpus of *non-industrial* manuals (fig. 4), where the imperative is indeed the prevalent choice of manual writers.

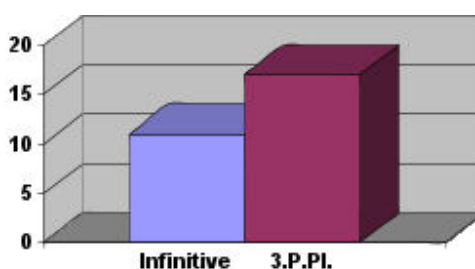


Figure 4. German technical manuals (non-industrial product use). Realisation of 'directive' speech acts in procedural/operative text segments.

Regarding translations from Italian into German (fig. 5) we note that in about half of the manuals infinitives are transformed into imperatives. The translators' decisions seem to be conscious, with inconsistency being limited to few examples (Merloni year unknown d), but imperatives in translated texts are proportionately fewer than in the corpus of original German manuals (fig. 4). Obviously we do not know, if imperatives have been chosen for stylistic reasons such as an adequate reader orientation or simply because of their stronger explicitness. Furthermore, as infinitives in German must be placed at the end of the sentences, it cannot be excluded that translators preferred them in order to adhere to original syntax or word order. Be that as it may, it can be concluded that intercultural adaptation of directive speech acts is merely a tendency in professional translating, but not an established translation norm.

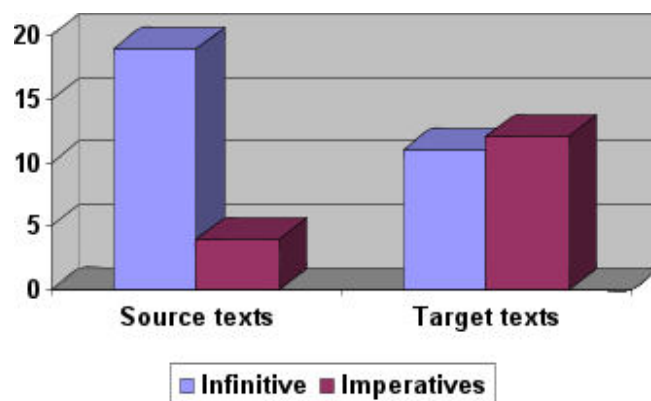


Figure 5. 'Directive' speech acts in procedural/operative text segments of technical manuals (non-industrial products). Translation from Italian into German.

2.3. Stylistic and syntactic features

In a recent typology of Italian specialised texts (Sabatini 1999) the criterion chosen for text classification is the so-called *communicative agreement* (*patto comunicativo*) between sender and receiver which establishes which *interpretative constraint* one should (*vincolo interpretativo*) refer to when decoding the message. In other words, according to this typology, the degree of specialisation of a text or text type determines the extent to which the sender is obliged to use more or less exact formulations. A distinction is made between high, medium and low *constraining* texts (*testi molto – mediamente – poco vincolanti*), and it is interesting to see that technical manuals (together with legal texts) are classified in the most specialised category (Sabatini 1999: 150).

The style of Italian texts with interpretative constraint is characterised among other things by the following features, with the aim being to formulate unambiguous, explicit, coherent texts consisting of sentences with a clear functional structure (Sabatini 2001: 103-104):

- presence of all verbal *actant*;
- no dropping of subject;
- expression of the rheme by passive constructions, in order to place the theme to the first position;
- stressing of the theme by focussing expressions (e.g. *per quanto riguarda [...]*);
- use of complex nominal expressions (*sotto il profilo di [...]*, *relativamente a [...]*) instead of simple adverbs.

Our Italian text corpus contains many examples of these characteristics and their influence on German translations. Obviously German technical manuals should also be explicit and clear, but the bias towards nominalisation and explicitness is expressed by other means and may

create translation difficulties. An example of a typical nominal expression is *per quanto riguarda* 'as far as... is/are concerned' / 'as for':

Examples of German translations of Italian nominal expressions:

- (3) *Per quanto riguarda i fogli etichetta, caricate un foglio la volta.* (Olivetti 2000: 25)
 ['As far as the label sheets are concerned, insert them separately.']
Bitte führen Sie Etikettenbögen einzeln zu. (Olivetti 2000: 22)
 ['Please insert the label sheets separately.']
- (4) *Per quanto riguarda la pressione di rete, se essa è al disopra di 5 bar, si consiglia di installare un riduttore di pressione [...]* (Saeco 2003: 8)
 ['As far as the grid pressure is concerned, if it is superior to 5 bar, you are advised to install a reducer.']
Bezüglich des Leitungsdruckes, d.h. wenn dieser mehr als 5 bar beträgt, wird empfohlen einen [...] Druckreduzierer zu installieren [...] (Saeco 2003: 7)
 ['With regard to the grid pressure, if it is superior to 5 bar, you are advised to install a reducer.']

Example (3) shows a correct adaptation of the Italian register to German conventions. The nominal expression is unnecessary in German and has been omitted, while the (re-)formulation of the whole sentence is simple, clear and reader-oriented. In example (4) the translator has opted for a complicated literal translation. The German expression *bezüglich* 'with regard to' is typical of official texts and gives the impression of a bureaucratic style which is ill-suited to the text type.

Typical features of Italian technical texts are the frequent, standardised participles (*posto* 'put', *situato* 'situated', *applicato* 'fixed') which (together with prepositional propositions) indicate the precise location of the product's various components or parts. Such participles increase textual cohesion by explicitly expressing the link between the antecedent noun phrase and the preposition which follows it. In German, text cohesion is assured by word order, and in translations the participle can usually be omitted like in example (5):

Examples of German translations of Italian participles:

- (5) *Assicuratevi di afferrare la macchina dalle cavità poste sui lati della stessa [...]* (Olivetti 2000: 38)
 ['Be sure to grasp the machine by the holes situated on its sides.']
Fassen Sie bitte in die dafür vorgesehenen Griffmulden an beiden Seiten der Einheit [...] (Olivetti 2000: 38)
 ['Put your hands into the holes on both sides of the unit.']

- (6) Per collegare il decodificatore al ricevitore utilizzare l'apposita presa scart *situata* nella parte posteriore (Fenner 1999: 3).
 ['To connect the decoder to the receiver, use the appropriate scart socket situated on the back.']
 Um den Decodierer an den Empfänger anzuschließen, die entsprechende, auf den Heckenteil des Gerätes *gesetzte* Scart-Buchse verwenden. (Fenner 1999: 8)
 ['To connect the decoder to the receiver, use the appropriate scart socket situated on the back.']

In example (6) the participle has been retained, but is redundant. Furthermore, in German there are no equivalent standard formulations and the translator had difficulties in finding a suitable correspondent (which in my opinion may be considered a mistranslation). The same applies to the lexicalised participle *apposito* ('appropriate'), which in the Italian sentence increases cohesion in the first part, but should be omitted in the translation.

The strong nominalisation trend of the Italian texts is enhanced by the use of semantically abstract nouns (*operazione* 'operation', *azione* 'action', *fenomeno* 'phenomenon', *condizione* 'condition') which classify concrete actions or processes according to somewhat scientific categories and are used for creating coherence with the preceding sentence (the so-called *encapsulation* in specialised text). This is a stylistic feature which underlines the high degree of specialisation of Italian technical manuals. For the translation into German a more concrete expression, normally with the substantive omitted as in example (7), may be recommended:

Examples of German translations of Italian abstract substantives:

- (7) [...] una permanenza prolungata d'acqua salata all'interno della vasca di lavaggio può provocare *fenomeni di corrosione*. (Smeg year unknown b:11)
 ['[...] an extended presence of salt water in the dishwasher may cause corrosive phenomena.']
 [...] bleibt die Salzlösung längere Zeit im Spülraum, kann es zu *Korrosion* kommen. (Smeg year unknown b:11)
 ['[...] if the salt solution remains for a long time in the dishwasher, there may be corrosion.']
- (8) Spegnerendo la macchina [...] può accadere che la leva, da sola, si alzi verso l'alto. Il *fenomeno* è causato dalla depressione che si crea all'interno della caldaia stessa. (La Pavoni 2002: 24)
 ['(When) switching off the machine, [...] it may happen that the lever rises on its own. The phenomenon is caused by the depression which forms inside the boiler itself.']
 Wenn die Maschine abgeschaltet wird, [...] kann es passieren, dass sich der Hebel von selbst nach oben bewegt. Dieses *Phänomen* wird

durch den Druckabfall bewirkt, der im Inneren des Kessels entsteht.
(La Pavoni 2002: 90)

['If the machine is switched off, [...] it may happen that the lever rises on its own. This phenomenon is caused by the depression which forms inside the boiler.']

On the other hand, in translation (8) *Phänomen* does not have the required register and may be considered a case of intercultural interference. The word is absent from our text corpus of German original technical manuals and seems to be restricted to the scientific field (such as physics) and text types (such as scientific articles).

Typical for the Italian manuals is also the frequent use of semantically 'void' pro-verbs (*effettuare* 'to carry out', *avvenire* 'to happen', *eseguire* 'to perform', *ricorrere a* 'resort to'), which acquire meaning only if combined with a nominal expression, sometimes with abstract nouns. These constructions, which give the text a process-oriented character (Berrettoni 1992: 161-164) can be translated in German by one single verb, while the abstract substantive is omitted as in the examples (9-10):

Examples of German translations of Italian constructions with functional verbs and abstract nouns:

- (9) Quando necessario, *eseguire l'operazione di caricamento* del sale prima di avviare il programma di lavaggio. (Smeg year unknown b:11)

['When necessary, carry out the operation of adding the salt before starting the washing programme.']

Nötigenfalls das Salz vor dem Start des Spülprogramms *einfüllen*. (Smeg year unknown b:11)

['If necessary, pour in the salt before starting the washing programme.']

- (10) Per rimettere in funzione la macchina *eseguire le seguenti operazioni*: [...] (Isomac year unknown: 7)

['To restart the washing machine, carry out the following operations: [...]']

Zur Wiederinbetriebnahme *wie folgt vorgehen*: [...] (Isomac year unknown: 7)

['To restart the machine, proceed as follows: [...]']

- (11) Sostituzione della lancia cappuccinatore o vapore / ATTENZIONE! Per effettuare *questa operazione* è necessario: [...] (Smeg year unknown c: 84)

['Replacing the cappuccino or vapour nozzle / ATTENTION! To carry out this operation it is necessary: [...]']

Auswechseln der Aufschäum- oder Dampfdüse / VORSICHT! Zum Ausführen *dieser Operation* sind folgende Schritte notwendig: [...]

(Smeg year unknown c: 84)

['Replacing the froth or vapour nozzle / ATTENTION! For the performance of this operation the following steps are necessary: [...]]'

Translation (11) is less idiomatic, because *Operation* is normally used with reference to a medical or military context and in technical manuals it might describe for instance the actions of a computer program (however, the expression is not present in our German corpus).

In Italian manuals there is a frequent use of certain verbs (*permettere*, *consentire* 'permit', 'allow') which can be considered as grammatical metaphors of modality and are used for functional descriptions, with the product component placed as subject (and theme) at the beginning of the sentence. Translation of modality into German is done best by modal verbs or other formulations such as in the following examples (12-13):

Example of German translations of Italian constructions with grammatical metaphors:

(12) Il comando #14=5 *permette di richiamare* in blocco il set dei parametri di default. (Elettronica Santerno 1998: 52)

['Command #14=5 permits calling up en bloc the set of the default parameters.']

Mit #14=5 können alle Default-Parameter zusammen *abgerufen werden*. (Elettronica Santerno 1998: 52)

['By #14=5 all default parameters can be called up together.']

(13) La lavastoviglie è dotata di un dispositivo che *consente di personalizzare la regolazione* del dolcificatore in funzione della durezza dell'acqua di rete. (Smeg year unknown b: 13)

['The dishwasher is equipped with a device which permits personalising the setting of the softeners in accordance with the hardness of the tap water.']

Der Geschirrspüler enthält eine Vorrichtung zur *Anpassung* des Enthärters an die Härte des Leitungswassers. (Smeg year unknown b: 79)

['The dishwasher contains a device for adapting the softener to the hardness of the tap water.']

(14) Il SI *consente* di smorzare l'effetto di eco nella comunicazione internazionale. (Olivetti 1996: 61)

['YES permits weakening the echo effect during international communication.']

JA *gestattet* es, den Echoeffekt eines interkontinentalen Anrufs abzuschwächen. (Olivetti 1996: 62)

['YES permits weakening the echo effect during an international call.']

The literal translation (14) is not convincing from a stylistic point of view. In general *gestatten* 'permit' may be used as a grammatical metaphor like in Italian, but in German manuals it is mostly restricted to permissive or prohibitive speech acts. Furthermore, product components in German are not normally used as subjects of active verbs.

Some last considerations concern the tendency of Italian technical manuals to resort to somewhat bureaucratic expressions which highlight the stylistic relationship between technical manuals and other 'official' text types. In our corpus there are many examples which are reminiscent of legal texts or wordings used by officialdom (*il presente manuale / le presenti istruzioni* 'this manual', *in oggetto* 'with reference to', *congiuntamente* 'conjointly', *fermo restando* 'without prejudice', *ai soli fini* 'to the exclusive ends'). Some expressions (e.g. *tassativamente* 'peremptorily') are strongly associated to prohibitions and underline the directive character of certain dispositions. Difficulties may arise, if translators fail to adapt formulations to the target culture as in the following example (15):

Example of the German translation of an Italian bureaucratic expression:

- (15) *E' obbligatorio* effettuare il collegamento ad un impianto dotato di un efficiente messa a terra [...]. (Clay Paki year unknown: 2)
 [*It is compulsory to carry out the connection to installations with an efficient earth.*]
Es ist Pflicht, das Gerät an eine Stromversorgungsanlage anzuschließen, die mit einer leistungsfähigen Erdung ausgestattet ist. (Elettronica Santerno 1998: 52)
 [*It is a duty to carry out the connection to installations with an efficient earth.*]

The sentence would be better translated by means of a modal verb, because prohibitive or commanding acts in German do not require the same degree of explicitness as in Italian.

3. Conclusions

From the present study it is clear that technical manuals in Italian are a specialised text type with a 'high' register and a fairly impersonal style which underlines the distance between the writer and the reader, similar to a certain extent to official texts. A glance at the German translations provides, for some of the texts, evidence of limited cultural adaptation and an occasional lack of respect for target-culture bound text-type conventions. For all discussed parameters (title formulation, reference to the reader in operative text parts, stylistic features), cases of intercultural interference could be found, which may affect translation quality.

All in all, translation practice seems so far not always to take into account the recommendations of translation scholars about cultural adaptations. In the case of technical manuals, the language combinations needed by translation agencies (or rather by clients) are many and often require the use of pivot languages. Time is typically scarce and the translators employed are not always trained professionals. In my opinion, however, translation quality can reasonably be improved if specific knowledge on technical translating is diffused in easily accessible resources like web sites.

But what about facilitating the translation process by simplifying or standardising the source texts? There is a recent tendency towards the use of culturally neutral formulations in technical texts (e.g. Göpferich 2002: 333-414). As for the features of the Italian manuals, it should be considered that *technical writing* in Italy is probably often done by non-specialised text producers such as technicians, engineers or secretaries. Furthermore, existing texts may often be the basis for 'new' technical manuals, while reference in written Italian is nearly always to traditional stylistic models. Experimental research has pointed out that a 'high' register in Italian texts matches reader expectations (Cortelazzo 2004) and practitioners have observed that Italian readers may even protest if addressed in a too 'informal' manner (Comolli 2001). Indeed in Germany, the institution of the profession of *technischer Redakteur* ('technical editor') has had no immediate impact on text quality (Nickl 2001). Under these circumstances, national writing practice changes slowly and cultural adaptation in translating will be necessary for the foreseeable future, whereas reaching the ideal cultural neutrality through the internationalisation of text production still seems a long way off. Until then, the improvement of intercultural communication remains the translator's task.

Notes

1) Diagrams 3, 4 and 5 show the quantitative distribution of technical manuals according to their preference for the imperative or infinitive in procedural/operational text parts (2.P.Sg. = 2nd person singular, 2.P.Pl. = 2nd person plural, 3.P.Sg. = 3^d person singular, 3.P.Pl. = 3^d person plural).

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