TEACHING TRANSLATION OF SPECIALIZED TEXTS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The paper examines the challenges faced by the instructor when integrating the translation of specialized texts into Business English instruction. The materials, selected from the World Economic Forum articles on emerging technologies, economic growth, and strategic intelligence, aimed to expose students to authentic, domain-specific language. Persuading students to translate such texts, without relying on AI translation tools, proved difficult. Thus, the paper explores the key factors that demotivate computer science students from performing manual translations and considers a pedagogical compromise to persuade them to undertake the translation task, as well as the application of instructional techniques specific to English for Specific Purposes, which can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. As a result, the teacher adopted an experimental approach: students were asked to translate texts both with and without the assistance of AI tools then compare the two versions. The teacher actively participated in the comparative analysis by identifying students' mistakes, guiding their corrections, and providing similar examples to improve comprehension. The findings suggest a blended pedagogical approach — manual translation practice and AI-assisted translation in a complementary manner — may offer an effective balance between fostering language skills and embracing AI technology in translation.

Keywords*: specialized texts, manual translation, demotivation, pedagogical compromise, blended pedagogical approach*

Rezumat

Lucrarea examinează provocările cu care se confruntă profesorul în integrarea textelor de specialitate în predarea limbii engleze de afaceri. Materialele, selectate din articole ale Forumului Economic Mondial despre tehnologii emergente, creștere economică și inteligență strategică, au urmărit să expună studenții la un limbaj autentic, specific domeniului. Convingerea studenților să traducă astfel de texte, fără a recurge la instrumente de traducere bazată pe inteligență artificială, s-a dovedit dificilă. Astfel, lucrarea explorează principalii factori care îi demotivează pe studenți la informatică să efectueze traduceri manuale și ia în considerare un compromis pedagogic, pentru a-i determina să accepte sarcina traducerii, precum și aplicarea unor tehnici didactice conform englezei pentru scopuri specifice, care pot spori implicarea studenților și rezultatele învățării. Prin urmare, profesorul a adoptat o abordare experimentală: le-a cerut studenților să traducă texte atât cu, cât și fără asistența unor instrumente bazate pe

inteligență artificială, apoi le-a cerut să compare cele două versiuni. Profesorul a participat activ la analiza comparativă, identificând greșelile studenților, ghidând corectarea acestora și oferind exemple similare pentru a îmbunătăți înțelegerea. Rezultatele sugerează că o abordare pedagogică mixtă — exersarea traducerii manuale și utilizarea AI într-un mod complementar — poate oferi un echilibru eficient între dezvoltarea competențelor lingvistice și integrarea tehnologiei AI în procesul de traducere.

Cuvinte cheie: *texte de specialitate, traducere manuală, demotivare, compromis pedagogic, abordare pedagogică mixtă*

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of translation into second language (L2) instruction has long been a subject of considerable debate within modern language pedagogy. Critics have argued that translation does not significantly contribute to L2 acquisition and should primarily be reserved for the training of professional translators. Conti analyzes critics' assertions concerning the use of translation in L2 acquisition and explains why translation fell out of favor, as follows: its close association with the outdated Grammar-Translation Method, the belief that the use of the first language L1 in L2 classrooms impedes second language acquisition, and the perception of translation as a noncommunicative, mechanical process of transferring meaning from one language to another (Conti, 2017). Additionally, translation tasks are often seen as monotonous and disengaging, considered separate from the four core language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), regarded as time-consuming, and assumed to be relevant only for those pursuing careers in translation (Conti, 2017).

Despite these considerations, contemporary research increasingly highlights the valuable role translation can play in language learning. For example, Baker offers a comprehensive overview of Koller's classifications of equivalence (i.e. denotative, connotative, textual-normative, pragmatic, and formal equivalences), highlighting their foundational importance in translation theory (Baker, 1998:17–20). Furthermore, Bell emphasizes that translation is not merely a mechanical process of recycling the original text but a creative act involving both technique and deep knowledge of the text, enabling its recreation in the target language (Bell, 1991). In line with this perspective, pedagogical approaches in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) have increasingly embraced translation as a versatile tool. Koletnik (2012) argues that, when applied eclectically and purposefully, translation activities in ESP classrooms can enhance vocabulary acquisition while fostering essential soft skills such as analytical thinking, adaptability, and linguistic creativity. Similarly, Leonardi (2010) illustrates that translation develops learners' critical reading, discourse analysis, and problem-solving abilities — skills that are particularly valuable in professional contexts (p. 29).

Modern ESP instruction extends beyond traditional language teaching by incorporating technological tools that optimize classroom management and student engagement. The integration of AI-driven translation platforms and digital glossaries enables teachers to personalize instruction and encourages learners to engage critically with language rather than passively receiving information. While this use of technology enhances personalized learning, it also has the potential to support Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) assertion that effective ESP teaching depends less on subject-matter expertise and more on the ability to pose informed, strategic questions (p. 163). When integrated thoughtfully, these tools can foster critical thinking and reflective learning, aligning with a learnercentered approach where language instruction connects closely to practical and real-world applications. Additionally, innovative pedagogical models for creative translation emphasize the development of students' creative writing strategies, peer feedback, and revision processes. Such models guide learners in discovering their own voice and poetics within translation work (RobertFoley, 2022).

This paper aims to contribute to the growing body of research on specialized translation within the context of Business English. Although conducted on a limited scale, the study offers insights that may inform language instructors on how to adopt persuasive strategies and targeted pedagogical approaches to support students in translating systematically and ethically from English into Romanian, while upholding academic integrity, particularly regarding the responsible use of AI tools.

METHODOLOGY

In a pedagogical context, I believe a specialized text is defined by three key characteristics: (1) it is a domain-specific document that employs technical vocabulary, structured argumentation, and a formal register; (2) it encourages critical linguistic analysis through comparison between manual student translations and AI-generated outputs (e.g., ChatGPT); and (3) it is aligned with the students' English proficiency level, challenging them while remaining accessible. Incorporating the translation of specialized texts into the foreign language classroom offers a dynamic pedagogical approach that supports both linguistic development and soft skills acquisition.

For students in Computer Science for Business Management, such texts mirror the communicative demands they will face in professional contexts where clarity, precision, and domainspecific language are essential. In this study, ten texts were selected from the World Economic Forum, due to their relevance to contemporary global business and technology trends, as well as their use of specialized terminology, idiomatic language, and complex grammatical constructions. These texts were employed during the first semester, as part of classroom translation activities, from English into Romanian. The translation process was undertaken by students manually, followed by AI-generated

versions, thus providing two comparable outputs for reflection and analysis. Thus, the teacher ensures a flexible and supportive classroom atmosphere, where students are motivated to engage with both manual translation and AI tools without fear of penalization. This approach stimulates students' curiosity and promotes deeper engagement by allowing them to compare their own translations with AI-generated outputs. During this comparative analysis, the teacher facilitates the discussion, listens to the learners, clarifies the use of business terminology, and supports them in paraphrasing and recreating natural-sounding expressions in Romanian once mistakes are identified.

FINDINGS AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY

In my classroom experience, I identified several factors that contribute to student demotivation when translating specialized texts from English into Romanian. Although translating specialized texts into Romanian can significantly enhance language acquisition and professional development, some students may feel discouraged from engaging in the task manually, even if they possess an upper-intermediate or advanced level of English proficiency.

Students' Perception

One common reason is the time and effort it takes to complete the translation task, especially when dealing with complex vocabulary and grammar. Many students also feel that translating English specialized terms into Romanian is unnecessary, as English is widely used and respected in fields like business and technology. For them, keeping the English terms in Romanian conversations or documents seems more professional and modern. In addition, some students believe that AI tools can handle translation instantly, making manual work seem outdated or redundant. They overlook the fact that translating a specialized text involves much more than replacing words. Moreover, many students today engage less frequently with extended written texts, such as academic articles or books. This limited exposure negatively affects their lexical repertoire, reading comprehension, and their overall ability to paraphrase or express ideas accurately and fluently.

Another observation emerging from classroom practice is the students' perception of effort in relation to AI-generated translations. After completing the manual translation of a text and subsequently comparing their work with the AI-generated versions, some students questioned the necessity of spending significant time on manual translation tasks, noting the consistency and apparent reliability of the AI output. Students benefit most when AI is integrated *after* they have attempted the manual translation. While their reaction is understandable, it highlights a fundamental pedagogical opportunity: to demonstrate that working through translation challenges manually before consulting AI

tools, students are better positioned to recognize common pitfalls and appreciate subtle differences in register, tone, and semantic accuracy. Therefore, during the comparative analysis, the teacher help students to understand new terms, phrases or idioms by introducing additional examples and encouraging them to create analogies, which aids in grasping nuanced meanings. This approach helps learners draw connections between concepts and recognize patterns within business terminology more quickly.

Classroom Observations & Teaching Approach

Classroom observations and student translation samples reveal a set of challenges encountered during the translation tasks. The students often struggled with idiomatic expressions, domain-specific terminology, abstract language, and stylistic appropriateness. The following examples illustrate typical translation errors and suggest how each type of difficulty can be addressed pedagogically to support linguistic competence and workplace communication readiness. A frequent mistake, also signaled in a comprehensive study, is the omission of diacritical marks, which negatively affects the academic recognition of Romanian translation outputs, as it reflects students' lack of awareness and disregard for the conventions of the target language (Dejica, 2016). Another challenge involves idiomatic expressions, such as the sentence "Business as usual is not an option anymore." While a literal translation like "Afacerile, așa cum se fac de obicei, nu mai sunt o opțiune" is grammatically correct, it sounds unnatural în Romanian. A more idiomatic rendering like "Lucrurile nu mai pot continua ca până acum… " better captures the intended meaning and tone. This example illustrates the importance of helping students recognize and rephrase fixed expressions in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate in their native language.

Similarly, to acquire business idioms effectively, the use of contextualization followed by strategic translation is essential in fostering students' idiomatic competence. Presenting idioms within authentic and meaningful contexts enables learners to grasp their figurative meanings prior to attempting translation. Providing additional examples, the instructor facilitates the understanding of idiomatic expressions like "to be at the helm", "ballpark figure", and "the bottom line", especially when used in relevant business contexts." Once the meaning is understood, students can be guided to apply one of the translation strategies proposed by Baker, depending on the specific context and the availability of culturally appropriate equivalents in Romanian. These strategies include using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom of similar meaning but different form (for instance, finding an idiomatic expression in Romanian that conveys the same idea or message as the original by using different words and structure), paraphrasing, or omitting the idiom altogether (Baker 1992: 72–78). For example, "to be at the helm" may be rendered as "a fi la conducerea companiei", which conveys the same meaning but uses different imagery and lexical choices. "Ballpark figure" requires a noun such as "o estimare or aproximare", while "the bottom line" can be translated as

“profitul net” in financial contexts or as “în concluzie” in rhetorical ones. This pedagogical approach shows that idiomatic expressions cannot be translated literally but rather adapted in ways that preserve both semantic content and stylistic appropriateness in the target language and culture.

Another common issue relates to domain-specific vocabulary. In the sentence “The productivity-pay gap has been a nagging concern for decades”, students often produced literal translations such as “Diferența dintre productivitate și salarii a fost o problemă enervantă.” While technically accurate, this version lacks the professional tone expected in economic discourse. A more suitable translation is “Discrepanța dintre productivitate și remunerație reprezintă o chestiune îngrijorătoare, care persistă de decenii.” This correction emphasizes the value of introducing specialized vocabulary that aligns with the register, diplomatic language in business and precision required in professional settings. To reinforce students’ understanding of business terminology, the teacher needs to provide additional examples that clarify the specific meanings of frequently misunderstood terms. For instance, students often misinterpret the term “competition” as “concurs” or “competiție”, without recognizing its precise sense of “market rivalry between firms or entities.” Similarly, “expenditure” is sometimes translated as “cheltuieli”, drawing from the general term expenses, though in economic contexts, “expenditure” refers more formally to the act of spending funds by governments or institutions, often tied to budgets and financial reports. Clarifying such distinctions is essential to help students navigate the nuances of business language and produce accurate translations.

Paraphrasing and cohesion also posed challenges. Recent research highlights that adapting a paraphrased text for different audiences or cultural contexts may require more than simple rewording because effective paraphrasing demands sensitivity to cultural nuances and contextual awareness (Santos & Barreiro, 2025). For example, the sentence “businesses will need to balance proactive adaptation with the risk of overextending resources...” was often translated awkwardly, as in “echilibrarea adaptării proactive cu riscul extinderii excesive a resurselor.” A more cohesive and natural Romanian version would be “Companiile vor trebui să găsească un echilibru între adaptarea proactivă și riscul de suprasolicitare a resurselor.” This example highlights the benefit of teaching students to use Romanian linking phrases and create structures in Romanian that support fluency and clarity.

Students also struggled with abstract terms, such as “ubiquitous AI.” Many students chose a literal rendering like “AI pretutindeni”, which is understandable, but it lacks fluidity. A better alternative is “folosirea inteligenței artificiale în toate sectoarele,” which fits more naturally within Romanian academic and professional discourse. However, in this situation, the teacher needs to explain to the students that the word “ubicuu” is listed in the Romanian dictionary, derives from Latin and carries the same

meaning as the English word “ubiquitous” — that is, “something or someone that is everywhere at the same time or present everywhere.”

Stylistic appropriateness was another area of concern. For the phrase “white-collar workers angling ...”, students provided a literal translation like “lucrătorii de la birou care încearcă...” which tends to sound informal and imprecise. A more refined version like “Personalul de birou încearcă....” better matches the tone expected in Romanian academic writing. To further enrich students’ vocabulary and deepen their understanding of related concepts, the teacher can offer examples of terms that frequently appear in similar contexts. For example, alongside “white-collar workers” (“personal de birou”), the term “blue-collar workers” (“muncitori calificați sau necalificați din domeniul industrial și manual”) can be introduced to highlight workers engaged in manual labor or skilled trades. Other related terms such as “service workers” (“angajați din sectorul serviciilor”), or “gig economy workers” (“muncitori care desfășoară activități pe cont propriu, adesea temporare sau flexible”), can also be explained. Presenting these examples not only broadens students’ lexical repertoire but also helps them grasp subtle distinctions and sociolinguistic nuances, enabling more precise and contextually appropriate translations.

Lastly, semantic false friends also presented difficulties. The word “critical” in the phrase “delaying critical decisions” was frequently translated by students as “decizii critice”, which in Romanian often implies danger or crisis. However, in English, “critical” usually refers to importance. Therefore, more accurate translations in Romanian include “decizii esențiale” or “decizii de importanță majoră.” To enhance students’ awareness of such semantic traps, the teacher may provide additional examples, particularly from business-related contexts. One such example is the adjective “sensible”, which frequently leads to confusion. In economic contexts, “sensible spending” refers to prudent and rational financial decisions. In technological contexts, “sensible design” denotes userfriendly and intuitive interfaces. However, in Romanian, “sensibil” typically means “sensitive,” which can imply emotional responsiveness rather than rational or practical judgment.

These findings indicate that when AI is positioned as a pedagogical tool rather than as a substitute for human interpretation, the approach cultivates both language awareness and digital literacy in a business-oriented context.

CONCLUSIONS

The effective translation of specialized texts requires the development of a complex set of linguistic and cognitive competencies. These include not only a solid command of the source and target languages, but also the ability to interpret meaning beyond the surface level, to navigate domain-specific terminology, and to adapt syntactic and lexical

structures in accordance with the communicative norms of the target culture. By integrating specialized text translation into L2 (second language) classrooms, the language instructor aims to support students in understanding subjectspecific discourse that aligns with their field of study. They are trained to recognize the significance of contextual relevance, stylistic appropriateness, and pragmatic equivalence when rendering specialized discourse. The pedagogical integration of AI tools should therefore be framed not as a substitute for human translation, but as a supplementary instrument. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating blended translation practices into ESP instruction ethically, offering concrete strategies to improve learner autonomy and linguistic precision in business contexts. Future studies could investigate how this approach can be scaled and adapted across various proficiency levels to further enhance language learning tailored to professional roles.

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