

**Preparing for the Institute of Linguists'
Diploma in Translation
Examinations**

**A seminar aimed
at
candidates
and
course-providers**

December 2004



Preparing for the Diploma in Translation

The attached file contains a seminar which was delivered in London in November 2004. It focuses on the criteria used for assessing translation quality; the use of resources, both when preparing for the exam and during the exam, and common pitfalls when doing a translation in exam conditions. The languages used for illustrative purposes are English and French; however all the excerpts and examples are presented in such a way that they can be approached without any detailed knowledge of French.

We hope this seminar will be of interest both to tutors and to candidates preparing for the examination in any language combination.

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PREPARING FOR THE DIPLOMA IN TRANSLATION

As with any other professional exam, the Diploma in Translation requires focused preparation. Two essential aspects are involved:

1. learning how to translate to the appropriate level
2. passing the exam successfully

The techniques involved in the preparation for the two aspects are related; they are not identical however. No one can expect to pass the exam if they are not good translators. The converse however is not true, and a good translator will not necessarily pass the exam, or perform to the best of their abilities. It is essential therefore to consider the two different aspects when preparing for the exam.

Learning how to translate to the appropriate level is a fundamental requirement for success. This involves a clear awareness of the nature of the criteria used to assess translation quality. The following documents provide a detailed analysis of the criteria used, both in terms of general principles, and in terms of the specific criteria used to award a Pass or a Fail, and also a Merit or a Distinction.

It is important to appreciate that a competent / good translator is not simply one who understands and can handle all of the grammatical features of source and target languages. Linguistic knowledge is a fundamental requirement. It is not enough however, and must be supplemented by sound cultural knowledge, as well as general subject area knowledge for the semi-specialised options. Many candidates have difficulties because their background knowledge is inadequate. Preparation for the exam therefore must involve:

1. the building up of detailed knowledge of all of the linguistic features of both source and target languages
2. the building up of sound cultural and general subject area knowledge

The latter can be achieved in at least three ways:

1. reading newspapers / magazines / specialised publications regularly
2. reading books written as guides to specific countries such as John Ardagh's France in the New Century (Penguin) for French
3. carrying out detailed research on any cultural / background points when doing practice translations (using dictionaries / encyclopaedias / reference books / the Internet / informants)

Improving translation skills is a gradual process: starting with easy materials, and gradually moving on to more challenging material; working slowly and thoroughly at first (overchecking rather than underchecking). If time is limited, doing 30% of a translation thoroughly is much more productive than trying to struggle through the whole text, and producing a poor translation. Only good translators can work at speed and under pressure.

Passing the exam successfully is something which should be considered only when the candidate can systematically produce quality translations. Candidates who always try to produce their practice translations in the official time allocated stand little chance of improving. For the exam, a number of points need to be taken into consideration:

1. working in unfamiliar surroundings and conditions
2. working at speed
3. working in a stressful situation

The problems of stress and speed are very like the conditions encountered in a professional situation, where clients can make quite unreasonable demands regarding speed and quantity of work produced. Speed combined with quality comes with practice. But the basic principle should be: aim for quality first, then aim for speed.

The unfamiliarity of the surroundings and conditions will affect the stress levels (no opportunity for a coffee break, or for a quick run round the block to clear the brain). It will also affect the approach to the translation, because of, in particular:

1. the limited space available for working (small desk, no shelves etc)
2. the restrictions on resources
3. the non-availability of computers
4. the production in many cases of a handwritten paper

Candidates need to be well-prepared for working in these conditions, by practicing working in exam conditions (and this includes doing a translation with pen and paper, using only the resources which will be allowed).

For both learning to translate to the appropriate level, and for exam-specific preparation, candidates will find many useful tips in Douglas Robinson's Becoming a Translator (1997: Routledge) (even though the author does not discuss preparation for translation exams as such).

The following material is divided into several sections:

- The criteria for assessing translation quality: General Principles
- The criteria for assessing translation quality: What leads to a Fail?
- The criteria for assessing translation quality: What is required to earn a Merit?
- The criteria for assessing translation quality: What is required to earn a Distinction?
- Using Resources
 - During the exam
 - When preparing for the exam
- Translator's Notes
- Pitfalls

A number of passages follow, analysed to illustrate pitfalls, problems and their solutions:

1. Paper 3D: Science, French to English
2. Paper 1: General translation, English to French

The criteria for assessing translation quality : General Principles

The Diploma in Translation assesses and rewards basic professional competence in translating from any language into English or from English into any other language. Examinations in other combinations not using English are also possible.

The underlying assessment principle recognises, in practical terms and in the context of the texts set for the examination, what constitutes a professionally acceptable standard of translation.

“Professionally acceptable” is generally taken to mean of a standard acceptable for submission to a commercial client. For a translation to be deemed ‘professionally acceptable’, it should be functionally accurate and stylistically appropriate and should faithfully render the style and meaning of the original piece of writing. It should, therefore, have the intended effect on the target audience, as the original did on the source audience.

Candidates need to use analytical language skills and be able to handle specialised and semi-specialised terminology in both the source and target languages. They should bear in mind the differences in the relevant norms of the two languages in question. Where appropriate, they should respect any originality of syntax, vocabulary, etc in the source text and find equivalents for the connotations, the cultural significance of any facets of civilisation (local custom, manners, food, clothing, etc.), natural usage, colloquialisms, phatic language, routine formulations, common metaphors and technical terms in the target text. Candidates are expected to write in their target language at mother tongue level, reaching a high standard of accuracy.

What is basic professional competence?

What is a standard acceptable for submission to a commercial client?

- A faultless translation is not expected
- Some editing is expected
- Position envisaged : reasonably competent junior translator
- The seriousness of errors: absolute v. relative / the seriousness of an error in relation to a specific context (the same error can be serious in one context, minor in another)
- Approaches ruled out: gist translation, broad/loose semantic translation, adaptation

What does writing at mother tongue level mean?

- Not all native speakers write well / some native speakers write better than others
- Native speakers who normally write well do not necessarily write well when translating
- Native speakers may write well some types of text, and others badly
- No native speaker is beyond problems of interference from the SL
- Non-native speakers can write at mother tongue level – though many can’t

What is a high standard of accuracy when writing in the mother tongue?

- Using all grammatical features correctly (including tenses, grammatical words such as articles, agreements etc)
- Spelling words correctly
- Using punctuation correctly
- Respecting TT textual conventions

What does similarity of effect involve?

- Establishing the function of the text
- Establishing the style of the ST
- Establishing the register of the ST
- Seeing the ST from the ST reader's point of view

How important is specialised / semi-specialised terminology?

- Text function/type dictate the importance of terminology
- Terminology and accuracy (using either *arteries* or *veins* instead of *blood vessels* to translate *vaisseaux sanguins* is a fairly serious inaccuracy in a scientific text discussing the effects of diabetes)
- Terminology and appropriateness (using *higher blood pressure* instead of *hypertension* in a medical text with a target readership of health professionals is inappropriate)
- Terminology and tone (some subjects are highly sensitive and using the wrong term can cause serious offence/be considered offensive; for instance using *handicap* instead of *disability*; or using *les vieux* instead of *les anciens* to describe a group of old people)
- Terminology and availability of resources (being able to trace the appropriate terminology is dependant on having the appropriate resources)
- Terminology and Translator's notes

How important are cultural aspects?

How should candidates deal with cultural aspects?

- Item and/or text function/type dictate translation solution
- Using a TC equivalent (Number 10 / Matignon)
- Explaining / amplifying / using a translator's note
- Quoting the item as in ST / importing foreign item into TT

Abbreviations used

ST : source text	SL : source language	SC : source culture
TT : target text	TL : target language	TC : target culture

Some key terms

Collocation : one of the more difficult notions for a language learner to come to grips with, this refers to the specific environment within which a particular word or group of words normally functions. The adjective *red* for instance can be used to describe many things, including hair. In French however, the word *rouge*, though it is the exact equivalent, is not normally used to qualify hair. If *cheveux rouges* is found in a text therefore, the reader will make a number of assumptions: the hair is red, but this is not a natural colouring, and it is highly likely to be bright red; or a child is talking, or perhaps a foreigner, who has not mastered fully the rules of language use; or some satirical or humorous effect is intended.

Colloquialism : this does not necessarily refer to familiar language, but rather to set expressions which are often (though not always) impossible to translate literally. In the French / English combination, *Donner le feu vert* / *give the green light* is an example of a colloquial expression with a direct / word-for-word equivalent. *Il a du pain sur la planche* / *he has his work cut out* is an example of a colloquial expression with an equivalent. *Nos chères têtes blondes* is an example of a colloquial expression which is specifically French, with no obvious equivalent in English.

Faux-ami : this describes lexical items which are identical / very similar in two different languages, but have meanings which are either entirely or partially different. Many words fall into this category, and there are dictionaries of faux-amis available for specific language combinations. For the English-French combination, *Évidence/evidence*, *exploit/exploit*, *éligible/eligible* all fall into this category.

Metaphors : where a word or expression is used in a sense other than the literal, or in an unusual setting (*he is a tiger*; *the rocket ploughed the stars*). These can cause particular difficulties when trying to understand the ST. The French *Un soutier* is a coal trimmer (*on a ship*). The word however does not have this meaning in *Les immigrants portugais, ces soutiers des banlieues*, where the word is used in a metaphorical sense, describing any kind of job which is very poorly paid and physically extremely hard, where the workers are seen as the lowest of the low.

Phatic language : this refers to those features in a text which are meant to establish / maintain communication. Some greetings for instance are simply used to acknowledge someone's presence, without a reply being expected (as is often the case with *How are you?*)

The criteria for assessing translation quality : What leads to a Fail?

General principle

Translations with **5%** or more of the source text missing will automatically be awarded a **Fail** mark.

General Paper (600 words) : 5% = 30 words

Semi-specialised papers (450 words): 5% = 23 words

A Pass is required for **each** of the 3 aspects of performance assessed

Aspects of performance

Aspect of Performance 1: Comprehension, Accuracy and Register – the correct transfer of information and evidence of complete comprehension.

Fail

The translation shows an inadequate grasp of the informational content. There are a number of inaccuracies, both major and minor, leading to information being conveyed wrongly at several points. There may also be serious omissions. The translation contains a number of clumsy or inappropriate renderings, which impair or distort the message. There may be some incorrect choice of register and terminology, and some idiomatic usage may not correspond to the intention or sense of the original.

Aspect of Performance 2: Grammar, Cohesion, Coherence and Organisation of work

Fail

The translation does not read like an original piece of writing; it may be stilted and incoherent with little attempt to modify the sentence structure of the original to the target language. There may be over-elaboration and excessive paraphrasing.

Aspect of Performance 3: Technical points relating to spelling, accentuation, punctuation and the transfer of dates, names, figures, etc

Fail

A considerable number of technical faults are present which would render even an otherwise good translation unacceptable in professional terms.

Note: Serious errors which may lead to a Fail

In a professional context, there are errors which are quite simply unforgivable. These are errors which could lead to serious consequences, for instance cause a company to lose a lot of money; cause a serious accident because the wrong figure was quoted; cause a machine to overload and break down because the wrong connections have been given; render experimental results meaningless because of incorrect information about the cohort; cause a death because the wrong dosage was quoted etc. Such errors can be the result of one simple error: a punctuation problem; a

missing digit; a missing letter (10g instead of 10mg); a mistranslated preposition; an incorrect pronoun, etc.

For instance: in a text reporting the results of a study on the effects of passive smoking, the novice translator who rendered *âgées d'au moins 40 ans* with *aged under 40* completely falsified the results of the study, just by mistranslating the preposition and adverb. In a scientific context, this is a very serious error. In an exam situation, a similar view would be taken, and the result is likely to be a Fail, regardless of the quality of the rest of the translation. Note that the seriousness of an error depends on the context, and the same error can be serious in one context, but minor in another.

The criteria for assessing translation quality : What is required to earn a Merit?

Aspect of Performance 1: Comprehension, Accuracy and Register – the correct transfer of information and evidence of complete comprehension.

Merit

The translation shows a good command of the subject matter although at times there is some under or over translation or a slight lack of clarity. The vocabulary, terminology and idiom chosen are appropriate throughout, though occasionally a more appropriate rendering than that given in the translation may be found. The register chosen is faithful to the register of the source text.

Aspect of Performance 2: Grammar, Cohesion, Coherence and Organisation of work

Merit

The translation is well organised, with good sentence structure and overall coherence. While not perfect, it has clearly been written as if it were an original piece of writing in the target language, with appropriate reorganisation of the information contained in the source text where necessary.

Aspect of Performance 3: Technical points relating to spelling, accentuation, punctuation and the transfer of dates, names, figures, etc

Merit

There are only minor technical lapses.

The criteria for assessing translation quality : What is required to earn a Distinction?

Aspect of Performance 1: Comprehension, Accuracy and Register – the correct transfer of information and evidence of complete comprehension.

Distinction

The translation shows an excellent command of the subject matter with accurate transfer of information throughout. The choice of language and register are entirely appropriate to the subject matter and to the spirit and intention of the original.

Aspect of Performance 2: Grammar, Cohesion, Coherence and Organisation of work

Distinction

The translation reads like a piece originally written in the target language. The sentence structure, grammar linkages and discourse are all entirely appropriate to the target language.

Aspect of Performance 3: Technical points relating to spelling, accentuation, punctuation and the transfer of dates, names, figures, etc

Distinction

The spelling, accentuation, punctuation, and transfer of dates, names and figures in the translation are faultless.

Using resources

During the exam

Candidates may use dictionaries and other reference works, including their own glossaries (Candidate Handbook)

Only **paper** dictionaries / reference material are allowed.

Amount / quantities / type allowed in: no restrictions - **but**: limited time available for checking / looking things up.

Essential requirements for accuracy:

- Always use bilingual **and** monolingual sources together
- Never rely on the bilingual dictionary alone
- Never use the bilingual dictionary to check the meaning of a lexical item
- Always use the monolingual dictionary to cross-check unfamiliar equivalents suggested in the bilingual dictionary
- Use sources which provide a context whenever possible

Essential requirements for speed:

- Familiarity with all resources used (no two dictionaries are presented in the same way)
- A high level of linguistic competence
- A high level of cultural / background knowledge
- Sound basic specialist knowledge (for science for instance, a sound knowledge of basic scientific procedures and processes is essential)

Minimum requirements:

- 1 SL monolingual dictionary (one which includes proper names)
- 1 general bilingual dictionary
- 1 TL monolingual dictionary (one which includes proper names)

Supplementary resources:

- thesaurus
- dictionary of idioms (for instance for English Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable ; for French Dictionnaire des Expressions et Locutions (Le Robert – Les Usuels)
- encyclopaedia type works, general and specialised (for instance for French Le Quid; for English Philip's Science and Technology Encyclopaedia etc)
- Specialised dictionaries, monolingual and bilingual (NB: not just for the relevant specialisations. A business dictionary is often useful for the General paper for instance)
- Grammar books (SL for comprehension of less usual structures and features; and TL for points such as verb endings and forms, rules of agreement, word formation, punctuation etc)

When preparing for the exam

Always keep in mind two essential aims:

- Preparation for carrying out a translation in exam conditions
- Developing professional translation skills (translation quality and speed)
For success at the exam, both aims are important, and justify the use of extensive resources, many of which are not available during the exam.

Paper sources

As for the exam:

- Monolingual dictionaries, for SL and TL
- Bilingual dictionaries, general and specialised
- Encyclopaedias, general and specialised

These have drawbacks:

- No dictionary / encyclopaedia can be comprehensive
- None is totally accurate
- Entries can be rather misleading
- These resources can get outdated very quickly

There are other paper sources:

- Textbooks
- Manuals
- Catalogues
- Newspapers, magazines, journals

These have a number of advantages:

- They present lexical items in context, and related items will be presented together, therefore speeding the translation process
- They are much more likely to be up-to-date
- They are more likely to be accurate, as they will use the language of the specialisation, rather than the language that linguists feel to be correct

Non-paper resources

- Dictionaries and encyclopaedias on CD-ROM
These have the same advantages / drawbacks as paper dictionaries and encyclopaedias, with the added advantage of speed and flexibility.
- Human sources, i.e. client, fellow translators, specialists for the subject area
- On-line dictionaries and terminology banks
- Internet-based sources, including parallel texts and material in TL and SL on the same topic from specialist sources

These have some drawbacks:

- Availability is never guaranteed (some online dictionaries are often down; the technology can fail)
- Accuracy is variable, as anyone can put material up on the net, whether they are specialists or not (but dictionaries are often compiled by non-specialists, general dictionaries in particular)
- It can be quite difficult / time-consuming to get precise information from an informant

- Informants may give the information they feel they should give, rather than the information that is correct

They also have advantages:

- When on-line resources are working properly, searching and cross-checking is very quick
- The material is much more likely to be up-to-date (some on-line dictionaries are updated on a monthly basis)
- It is very easy to get material in context, and therefore obtain correct information
- Human resources are invaluable for clarifying ambiguous structures, culture-bound notions, puzzling references etc

For the purposes of developing linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge of the SL and specialist knowledge, sources other than standard monolingual and bilingual dictionaries should be used extensively. There is a clear correlation between linguistic, cultural and specialist knowledge, and translation skills, including accuracy and speed.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

The use of translator's notes is permissible for all three papers, reflecting their use in a professional context.

- Translator's notes are the exception rather than the rule. They should be used sparingly, and only if absolutely necessary.
- Translator's notes are not meant to be an opportunity for the translator to display their knowledge. Unnecessary translator's notes are likely to be penalised.
- Not every translation will require translator's notes.
- Translator's notes may appear at the bottom of the page as footnotes, at the end of the translation, or on a separate sheet. They do not need to be preceded with the heading 'Translator's note' (although this is standard practice in a professional context) since standard footnotes do not feature in the exam papers, and there is therefore no risk of confusion between author footnote and translator's note.
- Translator's notes may be used to indicate that there is / may be an error in the Source Text (spelling error; error in dates, figures or units quoted etc). The tone of the comment needs to be diplomatic, remembering that the assumed error may not actually be an error (*Get off of my cloud* may look like ungrammatical English; it is however the correct title for the Rolling Stones song).
- Translator's notes may be used to indicate an ambiguity in the text which cannot be clarified (in a real-life situation, the translator would need to consult the client / the author of the Source Text). Translator's notes may be used when a needed equivalent cannot be traced, given the resources available at the time. The translator / candidate then needs to indicate the specific sources that could be consulted in order to solve the problem (an online 'dictionary'; a website; a specialist etc).
- Translator's notes may be used to provide necessary information for the reader (for culture-bound notions for instance) if this information cannot be provided within the body of the translation (because it would be too cumbersome, or because it would break the flow of the text).
- Translator's notes are **not** meant to explain a translation problem, and to justify the solution opted for. This is the function of an *annotation*, a former component of Paper I (the general translation) and no longer a feature of the Diploma in Translation.

PITFALLS

1. Time management and organisation
 1. Assuming there will be time to write a neat copy
 2. Leaving gaps unflagged
 3. Leaving alternative renderings unflagged
 4. Spending too long choosing the option for papers 2 & 3
 5. Changing options half-way through

2. Approach to ST
 1. Failing to establish function/style/register of ST
 2. Failing to use context of word / group of words / sentence to clarify meaning
 3. Failing to use background knowledge (cultural, technical etc) to clarify meaning
 4. Adopting a strictly linear approach / tunnel vision when reading the ST
 5. Failing to understand a syntactic structure
 6. Failing to understand less common grammatical words
 7. Failing to understand processes described
 8. Failing to see the importance of a particular item
 9. Failing to consider that a familiar lexical item may have a meaning other than the familiar one(s)

3. Use of resources
 1. Using the bilingual dictionary to clarify the meaning of an item
 2. Grabbing the first equivalent suggested
 3. Failing to consider that the source used may be incomplete / erroneous / misleading / out-of-date
 4. Failing to confirm the equivalent suggested in an appropriate monolingual source
 5. Relying exclusively on the bilingual dictionary

4. Approach to TT
 1. Leaving parts of the ST untranslated
 2. Adopting a strictly linear / tunnel vision approach
 3. Guessing inappropriately, either a meaning or an equivalent
 4. Avoiding the closest equivalent systematically
 5. Failing to see the TT from the TT reader's point of view
 6. Failing to stand back from the TT
 7. Attempting to translate into FL when writing skills are not of native speaker standard
 8. Failing to consider issues of style / register / text function
 9. Failing to address issues of cultural transfer
 10. Failing to convert figures / units of measurement when required
 11. Failing to edit out spelling and grammatical errors
 12. Failing to use punctuation and TT conventions appropriately

PITFALLS (explanation)

1. Time management and organisation
 - i. For all 3 papers, time is at a premium. Doing the general paper in 3 hours, doing the semi-specialised papers in 2 hours, is challenging, particularly if things need to be looked up and resources need to be used. Producing the translation as a rough copy which is too rough to be presented as a professionally usable document (scruffy/illegible handwriting, crossing items out, using arrows, including various options for a particular rendering etc), on the assumption that there will be time to produce a neat copy is a risky gamble. Candidates regularly get caught out in this way because they run out of time. A useful definition for a professionally usable document is one that can be handed to a secretary with minimal/no knowledge of the TL for typing.
 - ii. When translating, it is perfectly reasonable to leave difficult problems till later, and to get on with the rest of the translation first, as spending too much time on a tricky item can lead to the candidate being unable to finish the translation. It is vital however to flag all such gaps, otherwise they may well remain as permanent gaps (always remember the 5% rule leading to an automatic Fail)
 - iii. When translating, it is perfectly reasonable to note alternative renderings which come to mind, leaving the final decision till later if the solution is not immediately obvious. However, it is vital to flag these, so that only one rendering remains. It is up to the candidate to choose the final rendering, not the examiner. If alternative renderings are offered, candidates are always penalised.
 - iv. 2 hours is not a lot of time for tackling the semi-specialised options. Spending more than 10 minutes choosing between the 3 options is highly likely to mean that the candidate will run out of time. Very able candidates have been known to fail a semi-specialised option for this reason.
 - v. Once the choice is made, it is extremely risky to change half-way through. Again, time is at a premium. The option should be chosen before the exam, or within the first 10 minutes.

2. Approach to ST
 - i. In order to produce a TT which is accurate, and which achieves the same effect as the ST, it is essential to look at factors such as style and register, and to determine the function of the text, and of particular elements within the text
 - ii. The meaning of words/groups of words/sentences is rarely black and white, and often depends on the context, both immediate and broader. It is also wise to remember that words can be used metaphorically rather than just literally
 - iii. Background knowledge (subject matter, but also cultural) can play an important part in the interpretation of the meaning of words/groups of words/sentences. This can be particularly important when trying to work out what particular pronouns refer to.

- iv. No text is made up of separate units which would be contiguous, and independent from each other. Using tunnel vision when trying to understand a text is bound to lead to serious misinterpretations.
- v. Texts are not just an assemblage of words. Syntax and word order are all vital features.
- vi. A frequent problem is the mishandling of less usual grammatical words. Many candidates would benefit from a thorough study of more sophisticated grammatical features of the SL.
- vii. Problems are often caused in the semi-specialised options because candidates fail to understand processes described or referred to, including very basic processes. It is essential to acquire a basic understanding of the fundamental notions of particular specialisms before attempting to do the exam.
- viii. Some items/elements/aspects are vital within a specific text, and their mistranslation is likely to lead to a serious misrepresentation of the ST, and to a Fail (figures in a business text, the name of the precise species being studied in a scientific text, style in a literary text etc)
- ix. It is always wise to assume that one's knowledge of the ST is imperfect, and in particular that a familiar item may have a meaning which was hitherto unfamiliar to the translator – and which may not be listed in the bilingual dictionary.

3. Use of resources

- i. No bilingual dictionary is perfect, and the only safe way to use bilingual dictionaries is to look upon them as a source of suggested equivalents, and this only when the full meaning of the item being looked up is absolutely clear
- ii. Where a particular word/entry is divided into sub-entries, it is wise to check each of these, even though the exercise may be tedious and time-consuming. Choosing the first equivalent suggested may be a sound idea – it is more likely than not to be unsound though.
- iii. Bilingual dictionaries are never perfect. They quickly get out-of-date, the entries may be incomplete (a particular meaning of a particular entry may have been left out), the equivalents suggested may be incorrect, or they may be correct in one context, but not in the context at hand.
- iv. Unless the bilingual dictionary has triggered a memory, and the translator is absolutely certain the equivalent suggested is the one needed, it is essential to crosscheck in a monolingual source.
- v. It is essential to combine monolingual and bilingual resources, and to combine dictionaries with other resources (such as encyclopaedias, which give lexical items in a broad context)

4. Approach to TT

- i. It is remarkably easy to leave parts of the ST untranslated, whether words, groups of words, titles, or even whole lines or sentences. 5% or more left untranslated means a Fail – so it is worth checking and double-checking

- ii. Translating the ST one bit at a time may be satisfying (good – I've done this bit, I can forget about it, let's move to the next one), but it invariably leads to inaccuracy, and to problems of cohesion and coherence, as the translator fails to take into account what came before the current bit, and what comes after the current bit
- iii. Working things out from the context and on the basis of background knowledge is very important. There are however situations where guessing without checking will lead the translator into serious difficulty, whether it is the meaning of an item, or an actual equivalent
- iv. The problem here is being able to distinguish between faux-amis and the best equivalent. Some people systematically assume that if an equivalent is very close, it must be a faux-ami. This is true in some cases, but not invariably so. There are situations where the best equivalent is the one that is the closest in form to the ST item.
- v. The most common problem faced by novice translators is the difficulty involved in seeing what they are writing from the point of view of the TT reader. Novice translators know what they are trying to say, and they cannot see that the reader will understand something different.
- vi. Distancing oneself from the TT is a vital skill, and it takes much practice.
- vii. The standard expected when writing in the TT is that of a good native speaker. Those candidates whose skills are not of that standard are bound to fail.
- viii. Candidates are expected to render the source text accurately. This relates to the semantic content, but also to issues of style, register and function, as defined in the task brief. The importance of each of these aspects will vary according to the type of text, and where it is not possible to render all aspects, the candidates will need to demonstrate that they are able to prioritize. In a literary text for instance, issues of style may take precedence over issues of semantic content (if this is the only way to preserve the rhythm which is an essential feature in the ST for instance)
- ix. Candidates need to demonstrate that they are aware of problems of cultural transfer, and that they can deal with these as the context demands, using equivalents, amplification and so on as appropriate
- x. Depending on the text type, failing to convert figures and units of measurement where appropriate may well lead to an automatic Fail.
- xi. a small number of spelling and grammatical errors will be tolerated. This includes the use of accents as well as the use of upper and lower case, and the correct use of agreements etc.
- xii. Candidates are expected to use punctuation appropriately, remembering that punctuation can alter the meaning of a sentence/text, and that some rules of punctuation are compulsory, though others are optional, and that these rules are not identical from one language to the other. The appropriate TT conventions must also be followed (for the presentation of dialogue in a literary text for instance).

An analysis of potential difficulties in a source text (ST)

PAPER 3D: SCIENCE (French to English)

For information only, not to be translated: The following article on the secretion of insulin in liver cells appeared in the June 2003 edition of 'La Recherche', a scientific magazine in France. Translate into your target language for reprinting in a similar magazine.

TRANSLATION TO BEGIN HERE:

Près d'un diabétique sur cinq souffre d'un diabète insulino-dépendant ou diabète de type I. Cette maladie est due en effet à la destruction irréversible de cellules du pancréas – les cellules bêta des îlots de Langerhans –, qui sont les seules de l'organisme capables de produire l'insuline, hormone indispensable à la régulation du métabolisme du glucose. En l'absence de celle-ci, ce sucre ne peut pénétrer correctement dans les tissus dont il constitue le carburant majeur, son taux sanguin (la glycémie) augmente et la survie se trouve rapidement menacée.

Malgré les grands progrès réalisés en quelques années pour mettre à disposition des diabétiques des insulines plus pures et d'utilisation plus aisée, le traitement actuel reste finalement assez rudimentaire comparé au réglage fin de la glycémie qu'assure à chaque instant un pancréas en bon état. Conséquences : des à-coups, dégénérescence des petits vaisseaux sanguins, avec un risque accru de cécité, d'insuffisance rénale et de pathologies vasculaires, que seul le respect scrupuleux du traitement permet de différer.

Toutes les recherches actuelles visent donc à reproduire au mieux le fonctionnement normal du pancréas. La voie de la thérapie génique utilisant le gène de l'insuline se heurte à un obstacle majeur : la protéine formée ne devient active qu'après d'autres transformations. Egalement explorée, la greffe d'îlots de Langerhans bute sur l'insuffisance de donneurs et la lourdeur du traitement anti-rejet.

Reste une troisième voie : la genèse *de novo* de cellules bêta, qui court-circuiteraient toutes les difficultés des deux autres approches. Lawrence Chan et ses collègues du Baylor College of Medicine à Houston, aux Etats-Unis, ont travaillé sur des souris aux cellules préalablement détruites – le meilleur modèle du diabète type I humain. A l'aide d'un vecteur viral, ils ont transféré aux cellules hépatiques de ces animaux deux gènes : *NeuroD*, indispensable à la différenciation des cellules bêta, et *Btc*, le gène de la bêtacelluline, une hormone qui favorise leur développement. Résultat : certaines cellules du foie ont acquis les mêmes capacités que celles du pancréas à sécréter de l'insuline et à corriger « en temps réel » la glycémie. C'est suffisant pour guérir, pour la première fois, totalement et durablement le diabète de ces souris.

Ces nouvelles cellules sont groupées en îlots, comme les cellules bêta du pancréas, et produisent comme elles l'insuline sous forme de granules de sécrétion. Mieux, elles produisent aussi plusieurs autres hormones pancréatiques. Mais de quelles cellules s'agit-il ? de cellules bêta différenciées à partir d'hypothétiques cellules souches hépatiques, ou de cellules matures du foie transdifférenciées en cellules bêta ? Seules d'autres études pourront le dire, reconnaissent les auteurs. « C'est indéniable, les souris diabétiques au début de l'expérience, ne le sont plus après », admet

prudemment Raphael Scharfman, l'un des rares chercheurs français en diabétologie fondamentale. « *Mais entre les deux c'est la boîte noire : on ne comprend pas ce qui se passe.*

Problems of terminology : xxxxxx

The dangers of linear translation : xxxxxx

Problem of background knowledge / interpretation : xxxxxx

(NB: the list is not an exhaustive one)

Problems of terminology

This refers specifically to lexical items which must be translated via the accepted equivalent (note that sometimes two versions are possible) – either for reasons of accuracy, or because the intended reader will fail to understand if the specialist accepted terminology is not used, or because the use of other renderings will come across as entirely inappropriate or unprofessional to the target reader.

Diabète insulino-dépendant (insulin-dependent diabetes)

Diabète de type I (type I / type 1 diabetes)

Cellules bêta (Beta cells)

Îlots de Langerhans (Islets / Islands of Langerhans)

Glycémie (glycemia / glycaemia)

Vaisseaux sanguins (blood vessels)

Cécité (Blindness)

Insuffisance rénale (Kidney / Renal failure)

Thérapie génique (Gene therapy)

Donneur (Donor)

Traitement anti-rejet (Anti-rejection treatment/therapy)

Vecteur viral (Viral vector)

Cellules hépatiques (Liver / Hepatic cells)

Bêtacelluline (Betacelluline)

Cellules souches (Stem cells)

All of the above items need to be checked in monolingual sources. If the exact equivalent cannot be traced, a translator's note may be used, showing that the candidate is aware of the necessity to provide the exact equivalent, and to indicate where s/he would turn for reliable sources (BMA dictionary; information packages for diabetics in doctor's surgeries / on the Internet etc)

The dangers of linear / word-for-word translation

Les seules de l'organisme...

**the only ones in the organism...*

organism/organisme is a partial faux-ami, and the reader is bound to ask: what organism? Use *body* instead:

the only ones in the body...

En l'absence de celle-ci...

**in the absence of this..*

**in the absence of the latter...*

In the ST, it is clear that *celle-ci* refers to *l'insuline, hormone*. Using *this* however will lead to confusion, as the reader will assume that it refers to *the regulation of the metabolism of glucose*, which will come just before and is a process. Using *the latter* will create serious confusion, as the referent must then logically be the last noun, likely to be *glucose (a hormone essential for the regulation of the metabolism of glucose. In the absence of the latter...)*. The solution here is a repetition, ie

Without this hormone...

As there is no problem working out the logical structure of the paragraph.

Ne peut pénétrer correctement dans les tissus...

**cannot penetrate correctly the tissues...*

this rendering is understandable, but both verb and adverb are inappropriate in the context. Compare with:

cannot enter the tissues properly...

or cannot be absorbed properly by the tissues...

Le carburant majeur...

**The major fuel...*

major is inappropriate, and should be replaced with *main*.

The main fuel

La survie se trouve rapidement menacée...

**survival is quickly threatened...*

this rendering is very awkward, and is best described as translationese. A solution is a modulation: *drastically reducing life expectancy...*

mettre à disposition des insulines plus pures et d'utilisation plus aisée...

**dispose of purer insulins and easier to use...*

is not grammatically coherent. It is also inaccurate: *mettre à disposition / dispose of* is a faux-ami. Compare with:

provide insulins which are both purer, and easier to administer...

Note that *use* was replaced by *administer*, which describes the action more accurately, and more clearly – thus improving the ST.

le traitement actuel reste finalement assez rudimentaire...

**actual treatment is finally rather rudimentary...*

Both *actual/actuel* and *finally/finalement* are faux-amis, and *rudimentary* is not appropriate in this context. Compare with:

Treatment (of the condition) is still rather crude...

Where *actuel* is clearly conveyed via *still*, and the *finalement* is contained within *rather* without being stated explicitly.

Un pancréas en bon état...

**A pancreas in good condition...*

A healthy pancreas would be much more natural.

Un risque accru de cécité...

**A bigger risk of blindness...*

Using *increased* would be much more natural:

An increased risk of blindness...

Que seul le respect scrupuleux du traitement permet de différer...

**which only scrupulous respect of the treatment can differ...*

Here the meaning is more or less conveyed, but the phrasing is both awkward, and somewhat unclear. Compare with:

which may only be delayed by following the prescribed treatment very closely...

l'insuffisance de donneurs...

**the insufficiency of donors...*

insuffisance / insufficiency is a partial faux-ami. Compare with the accurate *the lack of donors...*

Mais de quelles cellules s'agit-il?...

**But what cells are these?...*

Again, the meaning of the rendering is different to that of the source. Compare with:

But what kind of cells are these?...

Conséquences: ...

**Consequences: ...*

This particular structure, quite common in French, cannot be transposed directly into English. Instead:

The consequences are...

Or: *There are several consequences:*

Reste une troisième voie: ...

**Remains a third path: ...*

**Remains a third way: ...*

The literal way is inappropriate here; so is the reproduced structure. Instead:

There is a third alternative / solution: ...

Or: *A third solution / alternative is...*

The need for some background knowledge: problems of interpretation

When working from English into French, scientific, technical and business texts often present interpretation difficulties, due to word order problems, and in particular the frequent use of compound nouns, which provide no clues as to the relationship between the individual components. In the compound *a large tile centraliser*, does *large* qualify *tile* (*un centreur pour grands carreaux*), or does it qualify *centraliser* (*un grand centreur pour carreaux*)? Working this out is vital, as there is no similarly ambiguous construction available in French. There are no such problems when working from French to English – though problems of interpretation do occur, for a variety of reasons.

Ce sucre: what does this refer to? The sentence is well-constructed and entirely coherent, but the demonstrative adjective *ce* follows the demonstrative pronoun *celle-ci*, and the referents need to be worked out for both. Knowing that glucose is a sugar clearly helps to interpret the sentence.

Son taux sanguin: this rather elliptical phrase requires some interpreting. What does the *son* refer to? And what is the relationship between *taux* and *sanguin*? Does it mean quantities of blood? In the patient? Working the relationship between the three elements of the phrase, and with the rest of the sentence implies both careful linguistic analysis, and some knowledge of the processes described. With this, it is possible to see that *sanguin* stands for *dans le sang*, and that *son* refers to *ce sucre*, and therefore *glucose*. An accurate, clear and coherent rendering therefore would be:
Its levels in the blood.

Des à-coups: the phrasing again is rather elliptical, and interpretation is helped quite considerably by background knowledge, which leads to *sudden dips or highs*.

La lourdeur du traitement anti-rejet: two interpretations are possible for *lourdeur* (1. qui met en oeuvre des moyens importants; 2. difficile à supporter). The parallel with *chirurgie lourde* listed in the Petit Larousse Illustré suggests that 1. is the correct interpretation, and a possible rendering would be *the complexity of the anti-rejection treatment*. A translator's note could be used to explain the alternative interpretation.

Lawrence Chan et ses collègues: is *ses* masculine or feminine? In this case, almost certainly masculine, though not necessarily so. In such situations, the his/her decision is best avoided, using for instance *The team led by Lawrence Chan*, instead of the literal *Lawrence Chan and his colleagues / Lawrence Chan and her colleagues*.

An analysis of problems encountered when producing the target text (TT)

PAPER 1: GENERAL TRANSLATION (English to French)

For information only, not to be translated: this short biography of Mick Jagger, the front man of the Rolling Stones, was taken from the following website: <http://www.sing365.com>. Translate into your target language for a music website.

TRANSLATION TO BEGIN HERE:

The celebrated singer of the Rolling Stones, Mick Jagger – born Michael Philip Jagger on 26 July 1943 in Dartford, Kent, England – has become less a pop star than a media icon. Initially a shy, middle-class student at the London School of Economics, his love of blues, distinctive vocal style and charismatic stage persona marked him out as an original. The image of Jagger has arguably been as crucial to the ultimate long-term success of the Rolling Stones as the quality of their songwriting and music. The antithesis of the pretty-boy lead vocalists of the era, Jagger's demeanour, rubber lips and scarecrow body were initially greeted with bemusement by the pop magazines of the time. What Jagger did was to reinforce those apparent pop star deficiencies and, with remarkable effect, transform them into commodities. The lascivious stage presence was emphasized to such a degree that Jagger became both an appealing and strikingly odd-looking pop star. His self-reconstruction even extended as far as completely altering his accent.

Jagger's capacity to outrage the elder members of the community in the 60s was perfected in his highly energetic dervish-like stage persona, anti-authoritarian stance and unromantic song-writing. In songs such as "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction", "Get Off Of My Cloud" and "19th Nervous Breakdown", Jagger was irreverent about sex, women, religion and even life itself. He was, undoubtedly, one of rock's most underrated and nihilistic lyricists. The force of his negative catechism was, of course, complemented by the musical contribution of Keith Richards, the architect behind the Rolling Stones' most memorable melodies. Jagger was also assisted by the quality of his players, especially Bill Wyman, Charlie Watts, Brian Jones and, later, Mick Taylor. From the mid-60s onwards the rebellion implicit in Jagger's lyrics was reflected in increasingly bizarre real life situations. From urinating against an East London garage wall to drug sessions and short-term imprisonment, Jagger came to embody the changing social values and bohemian recklessness that characterized the rock culture of the 60s. It must also be said that he performed a similar role in the 70s when his broken marriage, jet-set romances and millionaire seclusion in exotic climes typified the complacency of the musical elite of the period.

The barometer of his time, Jagger yet resisted the temptation to branch out from the Rolling Stones into too many uncharted areas. An appearance in the movie *Ned Kelly* revealed that he was unable to come up with a convincing Australian/Irish accent. The experiment was not repeated. Jagger was even less concerned about expressing himself in a literary form, unlike others of his generation. The most articulate of the Rolling Stones has frankly admitted that he could not even remember sufficient details of his life to pen a ghosted biography.

That peculiar combination of indolence and disinterest may have kept the Rolling Stones together as a performing unit, for Jagger studiously avoided customary rock star solo outings for virtually 25

years. When he finally succumbed to the temptation in the late 80s, the results were insubstantial. Apart from a small handful of tracks, most notably the driving “Just Another Night”, the albums “She’s The Boss” and “Primitive Cool” proved disappointing. Jagger’s third solo album, 1993’s “Wandering Spirit”, left his critics once again unmoved.

Jagger once stated that he would retire before middle age for fear that the Rolling Stones might become an anachronistic parody of themselves. These days such fears appear to have been banished as the band are still recording and undertake regular **high-grossing** US and European stadium **tours**. Away from the band the new millennium saw a blitz of Jagger-related stories, including his high profile separation from Jerry Hall, his production debut on the movie “Enigma”, and a credible new solo album, “Goddess In The Doorway”.

The dangers of linear translation

This approach tends to see the ST as a succession of more or less disconnected bits, and often leads to:

Problems of **emphasis**, because the TT inappropriately **follows the clause order** of the ST:

The celebrated singer of the rolling Stones, Mick Jagger...

**Le célèbre chanteur des Rolling Stones, Mick Jagger...*

Compare with the more natural clause order, where the name is given first:

Mick Jagger, le célèbre chanteur des Rolling Stones...

Problems of **cohesion**, again because the TT inappropriately **follows the clause order** of the ST:

The antithesis of the pretty-boy lead vocalists of the era, Jagger’s demeanour

**L’antithèse des chanteurs principaux jolis garçons de l’époque, le comportement de Jagger...*

Compare with

Jagger était l’antithèse des chanteurs principaux jolis garçons de l’époque. Son comportement ...

Where the two incoherently juxtaposed clauses have been turned into two separate sentences which naturally follow each other.

His self-reconstruction even extended as far as completely altering his accent

**Son auto-reconstruction est même allée jusqu’à complètement changer son accent...*

Compare with the properly coherent:

Pour reconstruire son personnage, il a même adopté un accent complètement différent...

Where a transposition (change of grammatical category) has been effected in order to provide the logical subject (the singer) for the action described (change the accent).

Problems of **cohesion**, because the TT inappropriately **follows the word order** of the ST:

Jagger became both an appealing and strikingly odd-looking pop star...

**Jagger est devenu à la fois une pop star attirante et à l’air extrêmement bizarre...*

Compare with the much more natural

Jagger est devenu une pop star qui attirait malgré son air on ne peut plus bizarre...

With a relative construction combined with a modulation (opposing the two characteristics rather than combining them).

Problems of **style**, as the linear rendering, using the same grammatical categories and word order as the ST, comes across as awkward or cumbersome:

What Jagger did was to reinforce...

**Ce que fit Jagger fut de renforcer...*

Compare with

La réponse de Jagger fut de renforcer...

Where the relative construction is replaced by a much more natural nominal one.

The dangers of using a close lexical equivalent

Opting for an equivalent which is very like the source lexical item may be the right decision. It is important to be aware of potential difficulties though:

Problems of **accuracy** may follow:

The most articulate of the Rolling Stones...

**Le plus articulé des Rolling Stones...*

This is a classical faux-ami, and the only solution is amplification, given the lack of an obvious single word equivalent:

Celui des Rolling Stones qui s'exprimait avec le plus de facilité...

His players

**ses joueurs*

This should be

Ses musiciens

As joueur never means *musician*. A partial faux-ami.

Disinterest

**désintéret*

**désintéressement*

The only accurate translation for this is:

Manque d'intérêt

Lyrics

**lyriques*

**chansons lyriques*

This should be:

Paroles

High-grossing tours

**des tournées hautement grossières*

This should be:

Des tournées extrêmement lucratives

Keith Richards, the architect behind the melodies...

**Keith Richards, l'architecte derrière les mélodies...*

Architecte is another partial faux-ami, and the French sentence tells the reader that KR was an architect – which he wasn't. There is also a problem of **appropriateness**, as *derrière* is not normally used in this context. Compare with:

Keith Richards, qui créa les mélodies...

Where a simple transposition to a verb, modulating from the action to the person, provides a neat and accurate solution.

To such a degree

**à un tel degré*

Much more appropriate would be:

A tel point.

The resulting TT may also come across as translationese, or even nonsense:

His unromantic song-writing...

**ses paroles non-romantiques...*

Ses paroles on its own (as opposed to *Les paroles de ses chansons*) is very misleading, and the reader is likely to understand this as meaning “the things he said”, rather than “the words of his songs”. More seriously, *non-romantiques*, which attempts to replicate the English structure, is very awkward, and therefore inappropriate.

Compare with:

Ses chansons, aux paroles dénuées de tout romantisme...

The dangers of avoiding the closest equivalent

Avoiding at all costs / systematically an equivalent which is very like / identical to the source lexical item can lead to inaccuracy, inappropriateness, and even nonsense:

A pop star

**une star du pop*

**une star de la pop*

**une star de pop*

**une étoile pop*

are all very clumsy attempts to avoid the well established

Une pop star

Lascivious

The exact equivalent is *lascive*, and equivalents such as *grossière* or *choquante* are all inaccurate.

The dangers of careless reading of the ST

It is very easy to miss important words in the ST, or to add some in order to fit with a rushed interpretation. It is also very easy to misinterpret the ST because of the word order.

19th Nervous Breakdown

**Dépression nerveuse du 19^e siècle*

The English title is normally used in French, and should therefore be reproduced as such. However, the source title has nothing to do with centuries, and means *19e dépression nerveuse*.

a convincing Australian/Irish accent

**un accent convaincant australien ou irlandais*

This should be:

Un accent australo-irlandais convaincant

The movie Ned Kelly

**le film de Ned Kelly*

This should be:

Le film Ned Kelly / Le film «Ned Kelly»

His jet-set romances

**ses idylles en avion*

**ses idylles à la vite fait*

**ses idylles à travers le monde*

these inaccurate renderings are all the result of careless reading of the ST, and perhaps a refusal to believe that the jet-set and la jet-set mean the same thing in English and in French. An accurate rendering would be:

ses aventures amoureuses avec des membres de la jet-set.

The dangers of sticking to the literal meaning of a word/group of words

This can result in serious misinterpretation:

His rubber lips...

Can be rendered accurately as

Ses lèvres pneumatiques...

Or, rather plainly,

Ses grosses lèvres...

Renderings such as

**ses lèvres en caoutchouc...*

**ses lèvres caoutchouteuses...*

**ses lèvres caoutchoutées...*

**ses lèvres molles et noires...*

are all nonsense, because of the literal interpreting of the word rubber.

The dangers of inappropriate guessing / lack of checking

This is a common trap for the unwary, and particularly so in an exam situation, due to stress / pressure of time:

To pen a ghosted biography...

Candidates relying on their knowledge that *a ghost* is *un fantôme* produced nonsensical renderings such as:

**pour écrire une biographie fantômatique...*

**pour écrire une biographie de revenant...*

Careful checking would have revealed a hitherto unfamiliar use for the word *ghost*, and led to an accurate rendering such as :

Pour faire écrire sa biographie (par un nègre)...

To branch out into too many uncharted areas...

Rendered as

** lors des moments hors du hit parade...*

is the result of extrapolation from the more familiar *the charts*. Careful checking would have revealed the hitherto unfamiliar meaning:

se lancer dans trop de domaines inexplorés...

Failure to consider the local context often leads to inappropriateness, due to the use of unsuitable collocations. It can also lead to serious problems of cohesion

**incapable de prendre un accent...*

where *de prendre* should be replaced by *d'adopter*.

**ses lèvres exorbitantes...*

Failure to consider the register leads to both inappropriateness and inaccuracy

The antithesis of the pretty-boy lead vocalists...

**l'antithèse du chanteur à la belle gueule de l'époque...*

is inaccurate, as *à la belle gueule* is of a familiar/register, whilst the ST uses a neutral/slightly recherché register. Using *beau garçon* / *beau gosse* would both be suitable alternatives.

Failure to consider the TT from the reader's point of view can lead to serious inaccuracy

Those apparent pop star deficiencies...

Rendered as

**ces défauts apparents de pop star...*

does not mean the same as the ST. Compare with an accurate rendering, for instance:

ces caractéristiques a priori problématiques pour une pop star.

A middle-class student...

**un étudiant de classe moyenne...*

does not mean the same as

un étudiant de la classe moyenne / issu de la bourgeoisie

*la longue vie de ce groupe performant...

does not mean the same as

the long-term success of the Rolling Stones...

as the word *performant* cannot be used to describe successful performance for a group of musicians.

The answer here was to use the word *succès*, or *popularité*, with the literal *à long terme*.

Poor handling of technical aspects of the text

This includes spelling and grammatical errors:

**Un group*

**Le sex*

**Nonchalence*

**Biografie*

**Ses chansons manquantes de romantisme*

**Une université londonaise*

Translating titles / proper names where this is not appropriate:

**19e dépression nerveuse*

(songs by the Rolling Stones are known by their English titles in France)

**L'école d'économie de Londres*

The London School of Economics is a very prestigious institution, and would be unrecognisable under the translated French version suggested. The solution here is to simply use the English name, or even the common acronym LSE, as the word *étudiant* in the sentence makes it clear that this is a university-type establishment:

Issu d'un milieu bourgeois, il était au départ un étudiant timide à la prestigieuse London School of Economics / LSE

Inserting the word *prestigieuse* further contextualises the sentence, providing information which would be familiar to the ST reader.

Misquoting titles:

**Get off my cloud*

instead of

Get off of my cloud

Inappropriately using ST conventions

Born in Dartford, Kent, England...

**né à Dartford, Kent, Angleterre...*

instead of the appropriate textual convention in French

né à Dartford, dans le Kent, en Angleterre...