

Translation as a negotiated event: A case of South Africa

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The process of translating from one language to another is always rife with challenges and this reality is compounded when specialised translations are brought into the mix. The translation of specialised texts in fields such as Law, Education, Health, Technology and many others, into African languages is like walking through a mine filled – heart wrenching, adrenaline filled and plain reckless. This is because translators who work in African languages (most of whom are not trained) translate crucial and at times sensitive information with little or no resources to support them. Terminology scarcity is also rife which means the translators have to also create new terms in order to pass on the information from one language to another. The existing translation environment in South Africa has led to the production of translations in African languages that are characterised by misinterpretations, mistranslations and at times plain incoherent. In a bid to produce ‘acceptable’ translations, some companies, especially in the health sector now control the translation process by involving many stake-holders – forward translators, back-translators, language experts, text reconcilers and editors among others. The final product therefore is usually a result of lengthy negotiations and this presentation explores (1) the process of translating specialised texts in the health sector between English and Zulu/Xhosa from initiation to the final product; (2) the different forms of negotiation and the main players in the negotiations; (3) the views of translators on the negotiation process and (4) the benefits and limitations of this approach. Functionalism was used to illuminate the issues under discussion and data was collected from a selected translation agency and from Xhosa and Zulu translators. The research found that a ‘team approach’ is better suited to tackle the translation problems that are faced by translators who translate specialised texts in African languages.