

Title: Assessing Translation Quality at Word Level.

Author: Alexander Burak, University of Florida

The presentation will set out the basic criteria for assessing translation quality at the level of word senses and will show how those criteria can be used to teach first-semester translation to college students.

I single out 9 basic criteria to assess translation quality: 2 in the realm of denotative meaning and 7 in the realm of connotative meaning. I view the denotative meaning of word senses as consisting of two main components: 1) a sense core and 2) a sense periphery (or the specifying/concretizing elements of denotative meaning). I split the connotative meaning of a word sense into seven component parts – those expressing 1) some kind of emotion, feeling, or mood associated with a particular word sense, 2) intensity of emotion, 3) the degree of the speaker's/writer's positive or negative evaluation of or attitude toward what is being expressed by the word sense – evaluative judgment, 4) functional style or register, 5) dialect (regional, temporal as in “time,” and social as in “sociolect”), 6) the frequency of occurrence of a word sense, and 7) pragmatics, or conformity with the aim of communication and the expectations and background knowledge of the target audience – the receivers/receptors of translation.

The system I have developed can be used to achieve replicable results in translating the same material no matter who the translator is. It isn't a set of abstractions purporting to lead to accurate translation but a reliable and readily applicable system that can actually be used efficiently and effectively by any person proficient in English and Russian. I use the approach to teach first-year translation at the university where I work.

I first developed and formulated the general principles of the system to be discussed in a translation manual which was published in 2002 (second edition - 2005). Since then I have considerably refined and revised the methodology. My talk will be based predominantly on examples from the recent respective Russian and English translations of Dan Brown's “The Da Vinci Code” (2004) and Sergey Lukyanenko's “Nightwatch” (2006). I will also share some of my experiences using the system in teaching translation to US students, the last class I taught being in the spring of 2007.