Byrne, Jody (2006). *Technical translation. Usability strategies for translating technical documentation.* **Dordrecht: Springer. Pp. xiii, 280. € 99,95. ISBN 1-4020-4652-9.**

This book deals with technical writing and translating. The author's main objectives are (1) to give an introduction to technical translation and (2) to show how to assess and improve the quality of technical texts. For the latter, Jody Byrne conducted an empirical study in order to test the effect of one particular strategy – *Iconic Linkage* (IL) – on the usability of a software user guide. IL, a term coined by Juliane House, is defined as "the repetition or reuse of target language translations for source language sentences which have the same meaning but different surface properties" (164). Example: each of the following three sentences can be used to replace the other two sentences: (1) To close *DigiLog*, click *Exit;* (2) Click *Exit* to terminate *DigiLog;* (3) Select the *Exit* option to close the *DigiLog* program. The assumed benefits of IL are that by using the same constructions, texts obtain a visual consistency that reduces the amount of processing needed by readers, speeds up the retrieval of information and facilitates problem solving and learning.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 deals with technical translation from a practical and a theoretical point of view. The author examines some misconceptions regarding technical translation, discusses its professional context and investigates the applicability of translation theory to technical translation.

Chapter 2 positions technical translation as an activity within the wider field of technical communication. After defining the nature of technical documentation, Byrne focuses on the category of user guides and, more specifically, software user guides. He defines their function and presents the different aspects (language, appearance, content, structure) that allow us to determine a user guide's *usability* – another core concept of his book – i.e., to establish how effective they are at achieving their purpose and how easy they are to use.

Chapter 3 deals with the interaction between humans and user guides. Byrne starts by giving an overview of the human cognitive system before examining cognitive and learning processes as well as memory issues.

Chapter 4 moves on to usability engineering, i.e., the question of how to adapt user guides to suit humans by ensuring that they can work with a given product effectively and efficiently. The concept of Iconic Linkage is introduced here as a means of improving the usability of user guides. A first distinction is made between full IL (see example above) and partial IL (in the following sentences, at least certain units are identical: "You can only view the date and time…" vs. "You can only change the date and time…"). A second distinction is made between latent IL (occurring

naturally in a text) and introduced IL (added during editing or translation, especially through the use of translation memory tools).

Chapter 5 contains the empirical study conducted in order to test the effect of IL in a software user guide. The chapter first presents document usability research before evaluating different methods for assessing usability: video recordings, software logging, verbal protocols, interviews, questionnaires. The author then describes data collection and analysis. Little surprisingly, IL is shown to have a positive effect on the usability of software user guides. Indeed, when comparing the results of a group of participants working with a user guide into which IL has been introduced (experimental group) with those of a group working with a user guide with no IL (control group), it turns out that all in all, participants in the experimental group (1) perform tasks faster, (2) make less errors, and (3) declare themselves more satisfied with the software.

Finally, Chapter 6 contains conclusions and suggestions for future directions. A promising direction mentioned by Byrne is the examination of the role of controlled language on the usability of texts. The author also suggests that technical communication be included as part of translator training programmes. Since technical translation indeed accounts for a very large share of the world's total translation output, this proposal certainly seems worth considering.

The book is a valuable contribution to the literature on technical translation. I can only mention some of its major merits here. It is written clearly and interestingly, and relevant to both translation practitioners and researchers. Thus, Chapter 2 contains a lot of useful information and food for thought for professional translators, as it embeds technical translation in the larger field of technical communication and discusses the legal consequences of inadequate user guides. Chapter 5 is very relevant to researchers: Byrne is exemplary in describing his methodological choices, reporting the data collection procedures and presenting the results of his qualitative and quantitative analyses. By doing so, he allows (junior) researchers to better understand the challenges of conducting sound empirical research. On a more critical note, the bibliographical references contain quite a few inconsistencies: authors mentioned in the text but absent in the reference list; non-matching page numbers in the same article when cited in the text and in the reference list; and works cited with one date in the reference list, and with another – or even two different ones – in text. Still, these are minor flaws in an inspiring and instructive book. I can warmly recommend Jody Byrne's book to anyone who wishes to better understand the challenges of successful technical communication or to reflect on his or her own approach to translating technical texts. The book also contains many suggestions that invite further empirical investigations into technical translation.

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