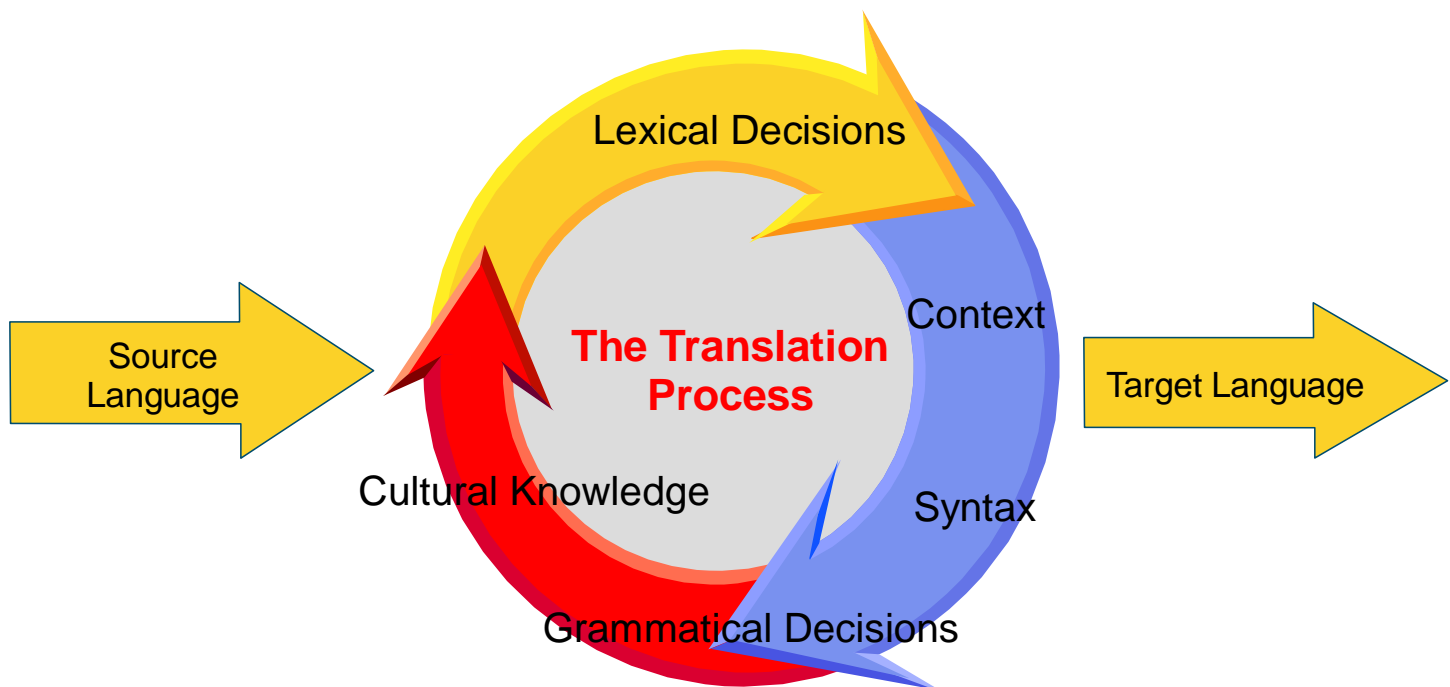# *A Translation Protocol for Speech and Language Therapists*

## Sean Pert & Carol Stow

**5th CPLOL Conference**
**Edinburgh UK, 2003**

**Rochdale Primary Care Trust**
**SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY DEPARTMENT**
**Baillie Street Health Centre, Penn Street, Rochdale, OL16 1XS**

**Department of Education, Communication & Language Science, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK**

| Sean Pert and Carol Stow | |
|---|---|
| seanpert@speechtherapy.co.uk<br>carolstow@speechtherapy.co.uk | A traceable translation protocol |

## Introduction

Most speech and language therapists have at least one bilingual client on their caseloads and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists considers bilingualism to be an advantage. Surprisingly however, little is available on how to actually record client's utterances as a basis for discussion and analysis. The following is a system created and used in the Specialist Bilingual Clinic of the Speech and Language Therapy Department in Rochdale, UK.

## The Translation Protocol

| Target sentence | SAMPLE |
|---|---|
| Client's Sentence | SAMPLE |
| Word-by-word translation | SAMPLE |
| English translation | SAMPLE |
| Comments | SAMPLE |

This protocol considers mother tongue to be the SOURCE LANGUAGE and English to be the TARGET LANGUAGE of the translation process, as this is the most likely scenario in the assessment / therapy situation.

**During the session:**
The bilingual therapist / bilingual assistant writes down the child's utterances in the 'Client's Sentence' box in the language used by the child.

- Use either IPA script or English letters to resemble mother tongue so that the therapy team all have access to the recording (This also overcomes the difficulty of some languages having no written form, e.g. Mirpuri).
- If the child code-switches or uses an assimilated word write this down exactly how the child says it.

**After the session:**
The bilingual therapist / bilingual assistant translates each word (and related grammatical morpheme) in a literal manner, **preserving the word order of the child's utterance**.

The bilingual therapist or bilingual assistant and monolingual English therapist discuss issues arising from the literal translation (comments may be noted at this point). A final translation, which attempts to produce the most analogous English version of the sentence, is agreed and noted in the 'English Translation' box.

## Notation

The notation should try and convey meaning in the target language but not attribute structures or syntactic arrangement, which the child did not produce. Using brackets, the translation produced attempts to make this clear, directing the therapist in further

assessment according to the area of concern, e.g. vocabulary, syntax, grammatical form etc.

The following is a list of notation used in the Rochdale speech and language therapy department:

| **Routine notation** | |
|---|---|
| (f/a) | Forced alternative given. |
| Ⓒ | Copied from the therapist. |
| Ⓟ | Prompt given. |

| **Code Switching / Absorbed Items** | |
|---|---|
| (E) | Child working in mother tongue:<br>English word(s) used by the child in the context of a sentence in mother tongue. |
| (B) | Child working in English:<br>Bengali word(s) used by the child in the context of a sentence in English or other language. |
| (M) | Child working in English (or other contact language):<br>Mirpuri word(s) used by the child in the context of a sentence in English or other language. |
| (P) | Child working in English (or other contact language):<br>Punjabi word(s) used by the child in the context of a sentence in English or other language. |
| (U) | Child working in English (or other contact language):<br>Urdu word(s) used by the child in the context of a sentence in English or other language. |

| **Mirpuri Source to English Target** | |
|---|---|
| + male ➔ (he) | Grammatical element of present progressive agreeing with the gender of the subject of the sentence. |
| + female ➔ (she) | Grammatical element of present progressive agreeing with the gender of the subject of the sentence. |
| + respect ⬅ (they) | Respectful grammatical marker with literal translation of 'they' is not translated literally, but marked for function. |
| (the) or (a) | Articles which are included in the translation to provide a complete sentence and indicate that there is **no omission** in the source language but that determiners and articles **do not exist** in the source language. |
| () | Any item which has meaning marked in the source but has no analogue in the target language. |

## Areas to be Considered During the Translation Process

### Lexical Items (Semantics)
- What's the nearest referent, most commonly used?
- Is the choice of word influenced by other items in the utterance?
- What are the other choices?
- Is the word part of an idiom or phrase where the meaning is best conveyed, e.g. "She put up the picture" / "She put up with the picture"
- Is the word / phrase a religious or cultural formality?

### Grammatical features (Morphology / Phrase level)
- Where are grammatical features indicated?
- At the beginning of words?
- At the end of words?
- As separate words? (Do native speakers perceive these as separate words?)
- Are there variations according to time (tense), gender (of the subject / object etc) and number?

### Context, Social Norms or Acceptability
- Ellipsis and Context – also consider that the source language may also be able to indicate features in different ways
  e.g. Coffee?
  'What's the man doing' - "(he's) eating a banana"
  (Mirpuri speakers would know if it were a male or female who is eating)

  The translation process is not linear – all these levels influence each other.

### An Example of Context and Semantics in a Simple Sentence (Urdu)

| Target sentence | the lady is **brushing** the floor<br>the lady is cleaning the floor | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Client's Sentence | oɾet | nitʃe | bɾʌʃ | maɾ | ɾʌhi | hɛ |
| Word-by-word translation | lady | **floor (down)** | **brush** | **hit (contact)** | do-ing + female | is |
| English translation | (the) lady is brushing (the) floor | | | | | |
| Comments | | | | | | |

| Target sentence | the lady is brushing the floor<br>the lady is **cleaning** the floor | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Client's Sentence** | oɾet | fʌɾəʃ | saf | kaɾ | ɾʌhi | hɛ |
| **Word-by-word translation** | lady | **floor** | **clean** | **do** | do-ing + female | is |
| **English translation** | (the) lady is cleaning (the) floor | | | | | |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |

| Target sentence | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Client's Sentence** | oɾet | nitʃe | saf | kaɾ | ɾʌhi | hɛ |
| **Word-by-word translation** | lady | **down (stairs)** | **clean** | do | do-ing + female | is |
| **English translation** | (there is a) lady down(stairs) cleaning | | | | | |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |

## Examples of the Translation Protocol in the Clinic Situation

Female, Age: 6 years 10 months, Language: Mirpuri, Diagnosis: Language disorder

| **Target sentence** | the man is laughing |
| --- | --- |
| **Client's Sentence** | hasna. (P) Jana hasna |
| **Word-by-word translation** | laugh-ing + male.<br>[Prompt: Who's laughing?] man laugh-ing + male |
| **English translation** | (the) man laughing |
| **Comments** | • Correct use of gender agreement on the present progressive<br>• Omission of the auxiliary verb 'is' (and the gender agreement) - [pija] |

### Translation issues:

- [ʌsna] cannot be directly translated – is it 'laugh' or 'smile'? [Semantic choice]
- Articles and determiners do not exist in this sentence in Mirpuri so there is no 'omission'. To signal this, the word 'a' or 'the' is placed in brackets in the final translation.
- Is the omission of 'is' and the subject of the sentence an acceptable form / language acquisition issue / situational?

**Page 5 of 7**

Male, Age: 3 years 10 month, Language: Urdu, Diagnosis: Language delay, phonological delay, non-fluent speech.

| Target sentence | the girl is hopping |
|---|---|
| Client's Sentence | bagh raha he.(f/alt) lerki |
| Word-by-word translation | run do-ing + male is [Forced alternative given: Is it a **boy** or a **girl**?] girl |
| English translation | (he) is running |
| Comments | • Incorrect lexical verb<br>• Incorrect gender agreement? |

**Translation issues:**

- [tʃəlãŋ legã] is difficult to translate (no synonym)

- it may mean simply 'jumping'

- the literal translation, 'jump' + 'put on' does not map onto English,

- [legã] in the context of 'put on wallpaper'

- some speakers may choose to use the English word 'hop' in this context

- The male gender ending does not really take the subject slot, i.e. the child used a Verb Phrase, not a Subject + Verb Phrase. The final translation therefore shows this in brackets. Similarly, if casually translated as 'he's running', this may appear a more complex utterance involving contraction. The full translation protocol avoids such confusions, separating semantic, morphological and syntactic decision making.

Male, Age: 3 years 10 months, Language: Urdu, Diagnosis: Language delay, phonological delay, non-fluent speech.

| Target sentence | the lady is cooking rice |
|---|---|
| Client's Sentence | handi bana rehi he (E) aunty |
| Word-by-word translation | pan make doing + female is (English) aunty |
| English translation | (she) is making (a) meal aunty |
| Comments | Word order error? using the Subject sentence final |

**Translation issues:**

- [handi] literally means 'pan' but has a wider semantic usage, e.g. 'meal', 'curry'.

- Subjectivity and context are crucial – is the child having genuine word order difficulties or has he simply remembered the subject, e.g.

- making a meal – (it is) aunty

- making a meal aunty
Further assessment is therefore indicated to clarify this issue.

## References

Bell, R. T., 1991, *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice* (London: Longman)

Crystal, D., 1997, *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language (Second Edition)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

ed. Danks, J.H., Shreve, G.M., Fountain, S. B., McBeath, M.K., 1997, *Cognitive processes in translation and interpreting* (London: SAGE publications)

Pert, S. and Stow, C., 2001, *je zindegi, An Expressive Language Assessment of Early Sentences for Bilingual Children (Research Edition),* (Rochdale: Pert)

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 1996, *Communicating Quality 2: Professional Standards for Speech and Language Therapists.* (London: RCSLT)

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Specific Interest Group in Bilingualism, 1998, *Good Practice for Speech and Language Therapists Working with Clients from Linguistic Minority Communities, Guidelines of the Royal College of speech and Language Therapists* (London: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' Special Interest Group in Bilingualism)