Inverse translation: the more challenging direction

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ABSTRACT

Despite being common practice in most of the world, translating from the translator's mother tongue (inverse translation) remains a relatively uncharted territory. In an attempt to contribute to an increased awareness of inverse translation, the present paper aims to discuss the difficulties involved in this activity. Drawing on questionnaires administered to translator trainees and professional translators, the paper first explores the respondents' views on the difficulty of this direction. Since inverse translation was considered the more difficult of the two directions by most of the respondents, an analysis was conducted of their English translations of a promotional text written in Czech. The analysis covers five segments reported as difficult to translate by most of the respondents; their solutions are commented on and contrasted with those proposed by the two native speakers of English who assessed the translations, seeking to identify the most frequent challenges specific to inverse translation from Czech into English.

1. INTRODUCTION

In translation studies, the term directionality normally refers to whether translators are working from a foreign language into their mother tongue or from their mother tongue into a foreign or second language (Beeby 1998: 64). The two directions will be referred to in our study as *direct translation* and *inverse translation*[1]. The general public and clients may assume that there is no difference in difficulty between the two directions; translation scholars, on the other hand, have traditionally recognized inverse translation as a more challenging activity, paying limited attention to it or looking down on it as undesired practice. Peter Newmark's often-quoted adage is a true epitome of the disrespect towards inverse translation: "translate into your language of habitual use, since that is the only way you can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness" (Newmark 1988: 3). Newmark goes on to admit that

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1   The practice of translating out of one's mother tongue has been labelled with a plethora of terms (including *le theme, translation A-B, service translation, L2 translation*). Despite reservations by some scholars as to the possibly negative connotations carried by *inverse translation*, this designation has been advocated by Roman Ličko as a "concise and etymologically transparent term to be used in translation theory" (2014: 12). Moreover, it is especially convenient as a complement to *direct translation*, i.e. translating into one's mother tongue; however, the latter term is also used in Translation Studies to refer to texts being translated directly from the ultimate source as opposed to *indirect translation*, whereby translations are made by means of a mediating text (cf. Toury 1995).

most translators translate out of their mother tongue, but hastens to add that this practice generates amusement on the part of many clients (ibid.). It should be noted, however, that there are numerous examples of bad translations done into the translator's mother tongue that cause no small amount of amusement to editors, translation trainers and readers.

Although Newmark, a widely quoted author whose prescriptivist writings long set the trend in the translation profession and training, may have helped cement the general bias against inverse translation, it is, as will be shown below, a frequent practice and fact of life in most parts of the world. It makes, therefore, little sense to banish inverse translation from the market. As Gerard McAlester so aptly puts it, "those who translate into a foreign language are not engaged in some disreputable practice, and they should not be stigmatized for it. They are usually honest professionals attempting to do as competent a job as possible under the prevailing circumstances" (McAlester 1992: 297).

The prevailing circumstances are here presumed to mean that translators are simply forced to accept inverse translation assignments due to a marked absence of native speakers of the target language, most frequently English. This phenomenon has traditionally been associated with languages of limited diffusion, as suggested by recent translation market surveys involving Croatian (cf. Pavlović 2007), Czech (cf. Svoboda 2011), and Slovak (cf. Ličko 2014)[2].

However, the lack of native-speaker translators may equally affect major-language countries where the growing demand for translations into English can hardly be satisfied by the local supply of English native speakers. Thus Peter A. Schmitt, when mapping the market situation in Germany, noted that inverse translation was almost as frequent as direct translation despite regulations in place at numerous businesses and authorities against the former (Schmitt 1998: 8). Similarly, a survey involving Spanish translators revealed in 1998 that most of them practised inverse translation on a regular basis (Kelly et al. 2003: 46). And most recently, Pym (2016: 99) has noted a shortage of native speakers of English to meet market demands in China. The special status of English is explained by Michael Cronin as follows: "the hegemony of English in the fastest-growing areas of technological development means that all other languages become in this context minority languages" (Cronin 2003: 144–146).

Although inverse translation has become such a widespread and visible activity (and is now believed to have been practised since ancient time, cf. Ličko 2014), it continues to be the subject of debate and dispute as to its acceptability and feasibility. In an attempt to shed more light on the complex issue of inverse translation, the present paper will explore — at theoretical and practical levels — what makes this direction different from direct translation in terms of difficulty. First, theoretical contributions on the topic will be discussed, focusing on factors relevant to difficulty such as language competence, text type, audience type and audience expectations. Next, an analysis will be conducted of empirical data related to the personal views of a group

2   I am indebted to Martin Djovčoš of Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica for bringing Ličko's survey to my attention.

of professional and novice translators. Finally, translations done by the same re-
search participants will be analysed to learn more about the types of problems faced
by inverse translators.

2. DIRECTIONALITY IN TRANSLATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Theoretical reflections on directionality in translation rarely fail to discuss the advan-
tages and disadvantages of direct and inverse translations. It appears, however, that
authors writing on the subject have more often pointed to those aspects that make
inverse translation the more questionable of the two directions. Consider the fol-
lowing statement by Cay Dollerup, a Danish translator and scholar, which succinctly
summarizes what appears to be the biggest obstacle in the way of inverse translators:

> "as non-native speakers, we should not fool ourselves into believing that we shall
> ever master English as the natives do. Our command of English will never be
> perfect: There are white spots, uncharted domains in our linguistic and cultural
> mapping of English and, consequently, there are cases where we are incapable of
> producing a good translation in the sense that it sounds like an authentic, native
> text to target language users. It will stand out on account of subtle points concern-
> ing linguistic and cultural integration." (Dollerup 2000: 63)

To learn more about the white spots and uncharted domains in the non-native
speaker's linguistic knowledge, we can turn to other authors. For Peter Newmark,
an insufficient feel for the target language, apparent even after years of living in
the respective country, is the principal hindrance to the inverse translator's suc-
cess. And nowhere is the lack of *Sprachgefühl* more palpable than in collocations.
A foreigner appears to be forever doomed to keep making collocational mistakes
without realizing it. "An educated native will also make mistakes in collocation,
particularly if he is under the influence of interference, but he will correct himself
intuitively. [...] For the above reasons, translators rightly translate into their own
language." (Newmark 1981: 180) Elke St. John concurs that non-native speakers have
less control over collocations but also adds idioms and sayings "as well as the over-
all usage of vocabulary and the general style of a text; the non-native speaker can-
not realistically, or at least very rarely, have the same grasp for the feel of a foreign
language" (St. John 2003: 2).

The above statements provoke more than one question. Is inverse translation so
difficult for the translator as to present an insurmountable problem, meaning that
she is set for the rest of her life to produce, with considerable pains, texts which will
hardly be appreciated by the target audience on account of their not being authentic
enough? And is inverse translation unsuitable for all text types and all types of cli-
ents? Let us now consider these points in more depth.

Indeed, Ahlsvad (1978: 184) argues that while there are good reasons why the rule
of the native tongue should apply to literary translation, it is a mistake to take the
rule over into scientific and technical translating. The purpose of a scientific or tech-

nical translation being merely to present information in a comprehensible way, the quality of language is less of a factor in technical translation than in literary translation. What is, however, of utmost importance in these fields of translation, is the translator's knowledge of the subject matter of the text to be translated; this aspect of the translator's competence is often underestimated and consequently, says Ahlsvad (1978: 186), "what we gain in stylistical beauty we often lose in the correctness of the translation". Similarly, Schmitt (1998: 8) notes that the unarguable advantage of a non-native translator, i.e. excellent comprehension of the source text, becomes a *sine qua non* in technically demanding texts, which native translators may find overly difficult to understand.

Apart from specialised translation, the other area where insistence on native-speaker level quality makes less sense is texts intended for international audiences. McAlester argues that a non-native translator may not only be as competent to translate such texts as a native speaker but sometimes even better equipped for such assignments as she "may write in a simpler language with fewer culture-specific references, and thus one more suited to an audience for whom English is a second language" (McAlester 1992: 293). The very concept of competence is seen here in a new perspective. McAlester (ibid.: 297) proposes, for some text forms, a criterion of communicational competence which, in his view, is a near-native speaker competence that will "ensure the production of translations that are reliable and respectable".

Even though a non-native speaker of the target language may not possess the same repertory of expressions as a native speaker, this does not automatically mean that the language possibilities used by the translator in her translations are inferior to those used by a native speaker. As Schmitt notes, by drawing on a body of texts already existing in the particular domain in the target language, a non-native translator may, over time, develop a repertory of formulations pertaining to a specific topic and text type that is in no way of lesser quality to those used by native speakers. (Schmitt 1998: 8)

This brings us to the concept of translator competence. It was Stuart Campbell who first noted, when researching translators from various linguistic communities in Australia working into English as a second language, that inverse translators had indisputable potential of approximating native speaker level. Therefore, they should be viewed "not as students attempting to mimic target language writers and failing; rather, they needed to be seen as learners constructing their own systems of target language use, with the prospect of developing those systems in the direction of the native-speaker system" (Campbell 1998: 54).

Taking Campbell's view of inverse translators as perpetual learners as a point of departure and adding the aspect of text type, Roman Ličko introduces a *translation type — translation competence continuum* (Ličko 2014: 74f.). While literary translation into a foreign language can hardly be institutionally trained and should ideally be only practised by true bilinguals (ibid.: 76), it is in non-literary translation that institutionalized training can be the most effective. There is, however, a need to distinguish different types within the complex realm of non-literary translation. With highly specialized, technical texts, it is imperative that the translator be able to use digital technology (i.e. CAT tools such as translation memory). By contrast, when

translating semi-specialised and non-specialised texts[3], which — as Ličko's sur-
vey shows — constitute the largest share of Slovak inverse translators' workload,
the translator is more dependent on her "foreign language proficiency and self-
evaluating competence in the target language" (ibid.: 75). And it is these skills, Ličko
maintains, that translator training should focus on if it is to be responsive to current
market needs. More specifically, trainees should be assisted to develop the ability to
produce target texts in a foreign language that are authentic at both microstructural
and macrostructural levels. Ličko suggests that while below the level of the sentence
authenticity can be achieved by means of language-related tools such as Internet
search engines, authenticity above that level can be systematically studied by learn-
ing the core characteristics of target language discourse, i.e. the essential features of
all main types of native-speaker produced texts. (ibid.: 77)

Having discussed the issue of difficulty from the perspective of the translator and
her competence, it may now be interesting to briefly consider other factors that may
be relevant for the difficulty and acceptability of inverse translation. Although the
first market surveys had been done in the late 1990s, it was mainly the 2000s that
brought heightened interest in investigating directionality in translation, resulting
in remarkable findings based on descriptive, empirically-oriented research which
challenged the traditional view of inverse translation fostered by the prescriptivism
of the previous decades, as represented by Newmark. For instance, Nataša Pavlović
(2007) explored the Croatian translation market to find out more about translators'
rates in relation to directionality, preferences regarding the direction of translation
and attitudes regarding the difficulty of inverse translation, laying the methodologi-
cal foundations for similar research in other countries where translation is done
from languages of limited diffusion into a dominant language.

Other surveys dealt with clients, their expectations and their ability to assess
translation quality. For instance, in a pioneering attempt to test empirically the tra-
ditional views about directionality in literary translation, Nike Pokorn (2005) anal-
ysed several translations of short stories from Slovene into English, made by native
speakers of Slovene, English and a third language, Croatian. Indeed, Pokorn's analysis
rendered several of the theoretical assumptions regarding directionality untenable.
Most importantly, it appeared that native speakers of the source language could not
always rely on perfect understanding of the original; next, native speakers of the
target language did not *automatically* produce stylistically impeccable translations;
and perhaps most interestingly, some translators, despite being native speakers of
only one of the languages involved, have excellent skills in both, enabling them to
produce perfect translations.

Moreover, using a questionnaire administered to dozens of native speakers who
were asked to read the translated short stories, Pokorn found that native-speaker
readers are not always able to establish whether a text was translated by a native or

3   Texts from several academic disciplines commonly referred to as humanities (philosophy,
     history, religion, psychology, sociology and cultural studies) and a diversity of areas of hu-
     man activity such as art and entertainment, government administration, the media and
     public relations, tourism, cultural and historical heritage (Ličko 2014: 71f.)

a non-native speaker of the target language, debunking the myth that every native speaker has the ability "of implicit — and very rapid — detection of others as being or not being members" of his/her linguistic community, this ability being one of the basic characteristics of native speakership (cf. Davies 1991: 94).

Marie-Louise Nobs (2003)[4] explored quality expectations among the recipients of non-native translations of tourist-oriented texts. By administering questionnaires to German-speaking students and tourists staying in Granada, Spain, the author found that what potential readers appreciated most in tourist leaflets was the precision and reliability of information. Style, however, appeared to play a lesser role; what is more, most of the respondents said they actually expected they would be reading a translation when given a tourist-oriented text. The same respondents were then asked to evaluate the quality of two texts: one half evaluated an officially published translation and the other a version which was the same translation after some slight improvements (primarily to style) were introduced by the author. Comparing the questionnaires on expectations with the evaluations of the actual texts, the author established, interestingly, that the respondents tended to express more demanding quality standards than they later seemed to apply when conducting the evaluations.

Nataša Pavlović has pointed to other factors that inevitably come to play in the translation market. They include norms regarding acceptability of inverse translation in professional circles in a given culture; the translators' training and previous work experience; the extent to which terminology and terminology-related tools are developed in certain areas of technical translation in a given language, making „translation into a technologically dominant language such as English less challenging than work into one's own language" (Pavlović 2007: 91).

Clearly, inverse translation is a complex issue and its functioning in the professional market is determined by a plethora of factors. Since it appears to be a very common practice in the Czech translation market (cf. Svoboda 2011), a research group was set up at the Institute of Translation Studies, Charles University in 2015 to increase our understanding of inverse translation by exploring a diversity of its aspects.

3. THE PROJECT

The project, conducted at Charles University between 2016 and 2018, aims at investigating inverse translation, including textual and social aspects, between Czech, a language of limited diffusion, and English and French, two major languages frequently demanded in the Czech translation market. The core of the research lies in analysing the quality of translations made under experimental conditions and the data submitted by the participants through a series of questionnaires. A total of forty translators were involved, made up of two homogeneous populations of twenty persons. One population comprised students of an MA programme in translation offered by the Institute, ten studying translation with Czech-English, ten with Czech-French. The

4   I am indebted to Catherine Way of Universidad de Granada for bringing this publication
     to my attention.

students were recruited from Year 2 of the programme and had, by the time of the experiment, participated in advanced translation courses in all the major domains of translation, i.e. non-literary, literary and technical translation; they were, in other words, very advanced translator trainees, shortly before graduating and entering the translation market.

The other population was composed of professionals. Although it turned out to be a challenging task to recruit enough professionals willing to take part in our experiment, we realized that very little research into translation quality has involved professionals and that the participation of professionals would no doubt lead to higher data validity. In order to ensure maximum internal homogeneity within our professional population, we only invited translators who graduated from the Institute's programme eight to fifteen years ago and have had an uninterrupted translating career since, again half of them translating between Czech and English, the other half between Czech and French. The breakup of our translator population was, then, as follows: 10 students CS-EN, 10 students CS-FR, 10 professionals CS-EN, 10 professionals CS-FR.

Data was collected in a number of ways, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The first source of data was translations produced under experimental settings. All subjects were asked to translate a total of four translations; each source text was 1 standard page long and was to be translated within a time limit of 90 minutes. Two types of texts were employed, one promoting a kitchen producing company, the other outlining the terms and conditions regarding the use of a website; comparable texts — in terms of content and difficulty — were assigned in both directions. The translators were allowed to work from home or any other location they preferred, using any tools — printed and online — they considered useful, except for consulting human resources.

The translations were assessed, using standard categories of translation quality assessment, by a panel of evaluators: direct translations were marked by three native speakers of Czech, inverse translations by native speakers (two English, two French). To complement the product-oriented qualitative assessment of the translators' output, a set of questionnaires was deployed to elicit data on the process and sociology of translation. Prior to the experiment, the subjects were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their general attitudes and habits regarding inverse translation, generating valuable psycho-sociological data on the personality of the translators themselves. In contrast, the post-task questionnaires were employed to gain insight into the translating process, helping to identify the categories of problems faced by the translators (and how they differ in relation to directionality and the translators' level of expertise) and shedding more light on the strategies and resources deployed to tackle the problems.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The empirical part of the present paper aims at exploring the issue of difficulty in relation to directionality in translation using data obtained from a population of Czech translators. The objectives are as follows: (1) to find which of the two directions is considered the more challenging and, more importantly, analyse the reasons cited by

the whole population of 40 respondents involved in our research; and (2) to increase awareness of the inverse translation process by considering in more detail several translation problems reported by most of the 20 respondents in the Czech-English group after translating, from Czech into English, a non-specialised text.

4.1 DIFFICULTY: STATISTICS

To open the empirical part of our paper, we will present data regarding our respondents' general attitude to difficulty in relation to directionality. The participants in the translation experiment, 20 professionals and 20 MA students, were asked to indicate in the pre-testing questionnaire which of the two directions they found more difficult.[5]
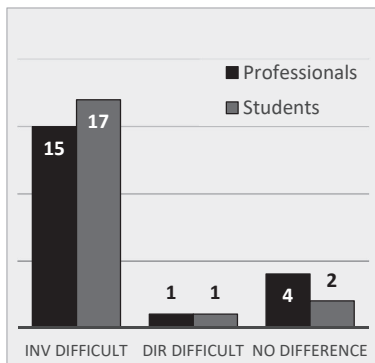
GRAPH 1. Which direction is more difficult? Professionals vs. students.
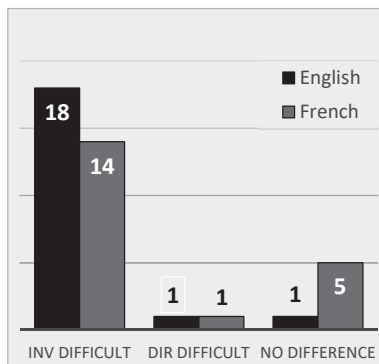
GRAPH 2. Which direction is more difficult? English vs. French.

5   The exact wording of the question was: "In your language combination, do you see any difference between translation into Czech and translation into your foreign language in terms of difficulty? Choose one option: translation into the foreign language is more difficult — translation into Czech is more difficult — both directions are equally difficult" (my literal translation)

Graph 1 outlines our respondents' overall views regarding the difficulty of direct (DIR) and inverse (INV) translations. As is evident from the graph, the vast majority considered inverse translation the more difficult of the two directions. This result can hardly be called unexpected. However, what may be rather surprising is that there was no significant difference between students and professionals. Given the fact that most respondents in the professionals' group regularly translate into a foreign language, with some saying that this direction represents a substantial proportion of their workload, we would have expected more professionals to say they find inverse translation less difficult. It was, nevertheless, interesting to find a significant number of respondents in the French group admitting that both directions were equally challenging (see Graph 2).

4.2 DIFFICULTY EXPLAINED

Besides indicating which direction they found more challenging, the respondents were asked to explain their reasons (with three possible reasons provided by way of example).[6] The question was formulated in a rather general way to allow respondents to express any views and thoughts that have to do with their subjective feelings related to difficulty. In this way, valuable data were obtained that shed significantly more light on the difficulty aspect than can be inferred from the statistics alone.

The reason cited most frequently in the group who found inverse translation more challenging was, perhaps not surprisingly, inadequate language competence. This being a rather broad term, we were interested in what specific components can be subsumed under it. In the respondents' answers, inadequate language competence was related, in particular, to style, a very broad term itself. Presumably, the major challenge to be overcome by a non-native translator is a lacking feel for authentic style, the native speaker's confidence and linguistic agility, as several respondents put it. At the same time, it was suggested that it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to develop these skills (with one respondent who works with English and French suggesting that achieving authentic style in French was an even more impossible task than with English). Answers specifying what constitutes "inadequate feel for authentic style" mentioned deficient knowledge of idioms and terminology and a lower ability to select out of a range of synonyms one that would best fit into the context. Consequently, the translator is required to do more thorough verification of lexical choices, including collocations.

In contrast to style, grammar was mentioned by relatively few respondents. This may have to do with the fact that the respondents have already achieved a level of foreign language competence at which they are almost fully in control of grammar and realize this fact. This is evidenced, at least in the English group, by the respondents' score of grammar and style errors; as reported by Mraček (2017), the 20 students and professionals translating from Czech into English made many more stylistic errors than purely grammar mistakes. This is in line with the observation by Pošta (1999)

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6   The exact wording of the question was: "If you see a difference in terms of difficulty, what makes one of the directions more difficult for you (language competence, terminology, style...)?" (my literal translation)

that most of the mistakes typically made by inverse translators do not fall into the category of errors proper, i.e. qualitative errors violating the rules of the target language system. Rather, they are quantitative errors, examples of divergence from the target language usage. Examples include, but are not limited to, linguistic structures that do exist in both languages, but their usage differs in terms of stylistic value, situational occurrence or frequency.

Two remarkable points were made by several respondents with regard to the special status of English as a lingua franca. First, with English being ubiquitous and so many people from so many domains using it professionally, translators can rely on many more online resources when working from Czech into English, such as parallel texts and terminological sources, than when translating from Czech into other languages (explicit comparisons were made with Spanish and French). The other noteworthy point raised by our respondents is that since English is used so much for communication purposes between native and non-native speakers and by non-native speakers among themselves, many users of it — including native speakers — are apparently more tolerant, when reading a translation, regarding the quality of English as the target language than the users of other languages. What this could mean for translators is that their ultimate goal is not to produce impeccable (British?) English but, more realistically, correct language enabling a successful transfer of the message (cf. McAlester's concept of communicational competence in Section 2 of the present paper); in other languages, by contrast, translations manifesting non-native-speaker quality are more likely to be rejected as suboptimal service. Remarkable as this view may be, it would certainly be interesting to conduct more research into quality expectations in inverse translation in numerous languages to gain a more general perspective, taking text-types and domains into consideration along the way (cf. Nobs's survey exploring German speakers' quality expectations, mentioned in Section 2). It seems, then, that even though inverse translation may be generally perceived to be the more challenging of the two directions, translators working into English may feel that the challenge is made somewhat more bearable by the special status that English has in more than one aspect.

At the other end of the difficulty scale, two respondents considered inverse translation to be less challenging than direct translation. One of them (professional, EN) said she had a better knowledge of the domestic legal system than other systems, and with most of her assignments being inverse translations of legal texts (in fact, this respondent was the only one in the professionals' population who indicated inverse translation made up 81–100% of her total workload), she felt more comfortable working out of her mother tongue. The other respondent (student, FR) says she has more intensive lexical associations in the direction from Czech into French (apparently resulting from the manner in which the respondent learned French as a foreign language), making French equivalents more readily available in written production than when going in the other direction.

To conclude our analysis of arguments associated with the difficulty of direct and inverse translations, let us consider several points made by respondents who indicated that both directions were equally challenging. First, genre appears to be one of the crucial factors when deciding about the relative difficulty of either direction;

while there seems to be an agreement that literary texts and essays full of metaphors and wordplay are more difficult to translate into a foreign language than out of it, with texts that dominate the translation market, i.e. operative and technical texts such as contracts or users manuals, some respondents found no significant difference in difficulty between directions, and some even pointed out that such texts tend to be actually easier to translate into a foreign language.

Similarly, an explicit link was made by one of the respondents between difficulty and text function. Inverse translation may seem less challenging with informative texts that carry little affective impact (a specific example is mentioned of texts relating to EU funds: as this discourse is mostly constituted by "dry" language, stylistic infelicities are not likely to be considered a major flaw by the target user). Persuasive texts, on the other hand, such as those used in advertising, require that the translator possess exquisite writing skills and a feel for the language; consequently, an inverse translator is always at risk of not producing the intended effect on the target user.

For one respondent, the varying difficulty associated with different text types has to do with the fact that she spent part of her life in a country where her foreign language is spoken; consequently, she has a better knowledge of some communication situations in the foreign language than in her mother tongue and vice versa. For another subject, what matters when deciding about how difficult direct or inverse translation seems to her is the amount of experience and expertise she possesses in the particular domain.

It appears, then, that numerous factors influence how difficult either direction is perceived by the translator. These include personal aspects such as the amount of expertise; however, the most crucial factors are apparently the genre and subject area of the text to be translated.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

In order to complement the respondents' general views on the relative difficulty of inverse translation, an analysis will be conducted of their translation process when translating a promotional text from Czech into English (see Appendix for the Czech source text). We will consider in detail the five most challenging segments as identified by the translators in the questionnaires they were asked to fill in after they had produced the translation.[7] Apart from commenting on several versions by the respondents themselves, we will seek to explain the source of difficulty and possible strategies that were employed — or, in most unsuccessful cases, should have been employed, using the sample versions provided by one (or two) of the native speakers who were involved in the evaluation process.

4.3.1 PRAGMATIC FUNCTION

The source-text problem which received by far the most attention in our respondents' comments was a segment near the beginning of the text, in which the use of figurative language (the expression *nejlepší nástroj* being used metaphorically rather than

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7   The exact wording of the question was: "List three segments that caused you the most difficulty and explain why. What was your solution to the problem?" (my literal translation)

implying a specific object, i.e. *tool* in English) combined with a generally rather infelicitous lexical choice to cause translators comprehension problems or, in the least, require substantial effort to produce pragmatically equivalent English formulations.

> ST: *Navštívíte-li jedno z našich studií, budete jednat s odborníkem, který Vám pomůže zrealizovat Vaše představy a který k tomu má díky přímé vazbě na vlastní firemní výrobu <u>nejlepší nástroj</u>.* [If you visit one of our showrooms, you will meet a professional who will help you carry out your ideas and who has the best tool to do this because he has a direct relation to the company's manufacturing.][8]

Remarkably, this segment was mentioned by almost all of the students (9 out of 10) but by relatively few professionals (2 out of 10). The students, who often complained that the segment was difficult to reformulate, tended to adopt a more literal approach, mostly producing solutions that were marked as stylistically inadequate. Some even mentioned that the segment was not easy to comprehend in the first place and, indeed, several shifts of meaning occurred, such as in the following example: *Our studios employ only true professionals that are able to help you to make your kitchen dreams come true; as we manufacture our products on our own, <u>we have the best tools possible</u>.*

Apart from the stylistically questionable phrase *kitchen dreams*, the translator took the words *nejlepší nástroj (best tools)*, clearly used in the abstract sense here, too literally, producing a different idea from that conveyed by the source text.

By contrast, professionals, the majority of whom did not even mention the segment in their comments, generally took a much less literal approach, preferably avoiding the word *tool*. This is best exemplified in one of the comments, with the respondent admitting that the Czech formulation was somewhat laboured and that radical syntactic transformation was needed. This is her solution: *Visit one of our design studios and you will be taken care of by an expert who will help you implement your ideas, <u>being in the best position</u> for this job thanks to the direct connection to own production.*

It is only natural to ask what a native speaker would do to this segment to ensure equivalence of content and, at the same time, authenticity of language. The following is a version of one of our assessors: *If you visit one of our showrooms you will get the best possible advice from our expert sales team, who are in direct contact with our workshops and can give you practical guidance on how to turn your ideas into reality.*

In order to produce natural target-language material that adequately conveys the pragmatic function of the source-text segment, the translator obviously made effective use of a combination of less literal translation techniques, such as transformations (changes on syntactic level) and modulations, more than once changing abstract concepts to concrete ones.

4.3.2 CULTURE-SPECIFIC SEGMENT
The second most frequently identified cause of difficulty was a pragmatic problem which, in contrast to the previous example, pertained to the source-text culture and

8   The literal English translations in sections 4.3.1, 4.3.2, and 4.3.3 are taken from Obdržálková (2016).

was identified mainly by the professional respondents. The final sentence is presumably supposed to increase the client's trust in the company's professional approach:

> ST: *Montáže provádí sehraná dvou až tříčlenná parta montážníků, kteří Vás slušně pozdraví, přezují se, zakryjí si podlahu v místě montáže a pustí se do práce.* [The installation is done by a team of two to three men, who will greet you politely, change their shoes and cover the floor at the site of installation and set to work.]

Looking at the translation products, most of our respondents opted for a literal translation, maintaining all the sense units of the final segment. The questionnaires, however, revealed that many of the translators spent a great deal of time and effort thinking about how best to convey the message. One student (out of ten) and six professionals (out of ten) pointed out that this was a cultural problem deserving a more strategic approach, realizing that what may work for the source Czech audience could be difficult to understand for members of other linguistic and cultural communities. One, for instance, said that members of a culture where shoes are not automatically taken off on entering a private person's house or flat might find the segment confusing. Another dismissed the final segment, where clients are promised something that should be part of the service anyway, as funny, preferring a more general formulation (...*our employees who guarantee not only high-quality workmanship, but also polite behaviour and leaving your home clean.*)

In order to get the full picture, let us consider the solutions by our native-speaker assessors:

> Native speaker 1: *Your kitchen will be installed by our reliable and experienced fitters, who usually work in teams of two or three, and you can be sure that they will go about their work professionally and with a smile.*

> Native speaker 2: *Your kitchen will be fitted by a two- or three-man team who will be both courteous and careful, removing their outdoor shoes as they enter and protecting the floor before they set to work.*

The comment left behind by No. 1 ("taking your shoes off is very Czech; the reader might find it odd that it is even mentioned") suggests that our Czech respondents were probably right when they considered the segment a pragmatic problem. Incidentally, No. 1 only spends a limited amount of time in the Czech Republic every year when visiting his relatives; permanently residing in the United Kingdom, he will have felt more acutely that what he was reading in the source text was not entirely compatible with the norms and habits of the language community of which he is a member.

By contrast, No. 2 has lived in the Czech Republic for several decades. However, the reason why he took the more literal path (although "saying hello politely" is generalized as being "courteous") is probably less to do with the fact that he may have become desensitised to the cultural difference, and more to do with his generally

more careful strategy with less adaptation resulting from the fact that the brief was not specific enough. As he pointed out in his commentary, the brief did not specify the target audience, arguing correctly that texts targeted at non-Czech users based in the Czech Republic would require a different stylistic approach to texts aspiring to appeal to the international market, or perhaps specifically the UK market. We can only speculate that his solution of the final sentence may have been affected by this uncertainty; nor was he sure how much licence he should take to adapt other segments of the source text that he identified as being different from British promotional style.

To sum up, it is clear that this segment would require a more thorough pragmatic analysis, taking into consideration a more specifically defined target audience, if it were to be fully operational as part of the company's website as suggested by the brief.

4.3.3 TERMINOLOGY
Despite being primarily a promotional text, the company presentation does nevertheless contain several specialized terms relating to kitchen design, manufacturing and production. Terminology as a translation problem was mentioned by a significant number of our respondents (5 students out of 10; 5 professionals out of 10). The following is an example of a segment saturated with technical terms:

ST: *Vyrábíme kuchyně z lamina a masivu a kuchyně lakované, dýhované a foliované.* [We manufacture kitchens made of MFC and solid wood and kitchens with varnished, veneer and foil finish.]

When commenting on the translation process, some of our respondents pointed out that the above terms are very specialized, making dictionaries — paper and online — significantly less reliable and the translation of the segment rather time-consuming. In general, the translators relied heavily on online authentic material; sometimes a dictionary provided a term which the translator then felt obliged to verify online, particularly on target language websites promoting similar companies. One respondent added that in a real-life situation, under less time pressure, she would have put more effort into the verification process to ensure the term is the correct one in the context.

4.3.4 FOREIGN WORDS REALIZACE AND ZREALIZOVAT
Consider the following three segments of our Czech source text:

ST 1: *...který Vám pomůže **zrealizovat** Vaše představy...* [who will help you implement your ideas]

ST 2: *...který zajistí veškeré úkony spojené s **realizací**.* [that will handle all the operations related to the implementation process.]

ST 3: *Kvalitně provedená montáž je bezpodmínečnou podmínkou dobrého výsledku celé **realizace**.* [A quality fitting is a crucial condition for a good result of the entire project.]

Mentioned in the questionnaires by a total of four translators (2 students out of 10; 2 professionals out of 10), the presence of the words *realizace* (noun) and *zrealizovat* (verb) in the above three segments of the Czech source text serves well to illustrate at least two points related to translation. First, promotional texts in Czech tend to be full of fashionable foreign words such as these, although it seems fair to admit that *realizace* and words derived from it have by now become an integral part of the discourse dealing with the design and production of products such as kitchens. Second, although the foreign nature of such words may seem to make them lend themselves to literal translation into languages that they were imported from (such as English), some translators feel that this time-saving technique might not produce functionally adequate results. Both of these points came up several times in our translators' comments.

One student respondent, who pointed to the repeated occurrence of *realizace* and its derivatives, admitted he felt the need to find less literal English equivalents than *realize* and its derivatives. Having spent some time thinking about this, he eventually came up with *carry out* and *project*. Another student respondent said she did have her doubts about *realization* offered to her by a dictionary; however, with little time to think of a more suitable equivalent, she resorted to it anyway. One of the two professionals who highlighted these words as a translation problem preferred to use another universal word (*implement/implementation*), while the other chose to use different formulations best fitting the context (*fulfil your dreams, the whole process*). Perhaps not surprisingly, even those translators who did not mention these words in their comments must have felt the context called for a less literal solution, since many of them came up with a diversity of expressions.

Thus, the phrase *zrealizovat Vaše představy* came across as *put your ideas into practice, carry out your ideas, turn your ideas into reality* (also used by both of the native-speaker assessors)*, make your ideas come true, bring your ideas to life* or, much less literally, as *help you create your dream kitchen* and *help you tailor your new kitchen to your specific requirements*. *Realizace*, by contrast, was most frequently translated as *project* and *process* (*the production process* was used by one of the native speakers), and once with the explicit phrase *the manufacturing, designing and assembly process*. Others made the segment less explicit by omitting the meaning carried by *realizace* (e.g. *for a good result* for *dobrého výsledku celé* **realizace**; similarly, one of the native speakers decided for *For the best results, it is…*) or by using a very short but concise formulation such as *A good kitchen requires quality installation*.

4.3.5 DEFECTIVE PUNCTUATION IN THE CZECH SOURCE TEXT

The last of the five sources of difficulty most frequently cited by our respondents was the fact that the Czech source text contained defective punctuation. Three respondents (two students out of ten, one professional out of ten) pointed to a missing comma in the following sentence: *O tom, že se nám to snad* **daří nejlépe vypovídá** *vysoký podíl klientů přicházejících na základě kladných referencí*. The missing comma in the segment marked in bold makes two interpretations possible: (1) *snad daří nejlépe, vypovídá* [That we **are** hopefully **the best is evidenced** by the high number of clients coming on recommendation.], with rather too much emphasis on the company's uniqueness; (2) *snad daří, nejlépe vypovídá* [That we are hopefully successful **is best**

evidenced by the high number of clients coming on recommendation.] — the less boastful and therefore more likely version.

According to one respondent, the segment called for a more thorough reading (which in her case resulted in a successful translation). Another respondent realized she misunderstood the segment, blaming the fact on the time pressure. Her version emphasises the "boasting" in a way that may affect the reader's perception *…the high number of positive references we receive shows that, hopefully, we are <u>one of the best at doing so</u>.* The third respondent who verbalized this problem admitted to having spent unnecessarily much time thinking about how best to convey what appeared to her as inadequately boastful before realizing that the segment was to be read differently and formulating the target version accordingly.

Neither of the two native evaluators explicitly mentioned the segment in their comments, producing the following versions: *The proof of our success is the high proportion of our clients who come to us on the recommendation of other satisfied customers.* (N_1) / *Our continued success is reflected in the number of customers who choose our company from the positive feedback left by our former and existing customers.* (N_2).

Even though it may not seem a major flaw — and will most probably remain unnoticed by ordinary readers — this punctuation defect proved something of a challenge for more than one translator, with three of our respondents explicitly commenting on the problem in their post-translation questionnaires; it seems likely, however, that others, too, found the segment difficult to some extent without feeling the need to verbalize it as such. Translators are, after all, required to analyse their source text carefully to grasp the ideas behind the words. This segment, therefore, may have slowed down the translation process, robbing some of the participants in our experiment of precious time, in addition to resulting in a wrong target-language version in at least one case.

4.4 DISCUSSION

Our investigation into how difficult either direction of translation is perceived by translator trainees and professionals revealed that the vast majority of our respondents found inverse translation more challenging than direct translation, with most citing inadequate language competence (i.e. lack of the native-speaker's feel for the language; lack of control over idioms and collocations) as the principal source of difficulty. Nevertheless, when conducting a little study of the most difficult aspects of a promotional Czech source text that was to be translated into English under experimental conditions, we found that the range of translation problems went beyond purely linguistic issues.

The language-related problems mentioned by the same number of students and professionals included: (a) the repeated occurrence of a foreign-sounding word that has apparently been domesticated into the promotional discourse of the source language yet some of the respondents realized, correctly, that literal translation might not produce results in line with target-language use; (b) technical terms related to kitchen design and production, which turned out to be rather too specific to be found in dictionaries only, with translators having to rely on online parallel texts in the target language.

The most difficult segment pragmatically speaking was a sentence that may look simple enough but, on closer inspection, contains several potential traps: a word used metaphorically whose wrong interpretation may result in shifts of meaning; the overall syntactic structure and choice of words which, if rendered literally, would result in unidiomatic English. Therefore, a less literal approach was needed to produce a similar pragmatic effect on the target-language audience. The fact that this segment was identified as a translation problem by 90 per cent in the student population (vs. only 20 per cent in the professionals group) may point to the students' lower levels of experience as producers of texts in a non-mother tongue. Indeed, the segment turned out to be a source of multiple errors for the students, at grammar, style and meaning level.

The other major pragmatic problem that our translators were faced with was a segment that was apparently intended to produce a reassuring effect on the source-text receiver, yet many of our respondents identified it as a culture-bound item, concluding that a literal translation might sound confusing, or worse, to target-text receivers, here presumed to belong to cultures other than Czech. According to what seems to be the most remarkable finding of our study, this segment was considered worthy of attention (and, consequently, a strategic approach) by the majority of the professionals (60 per cent) but only one translator in the students group. Vanda Obdržálková, who — albeit using only preliminary findings from the present project, with a limited number of respondents — analysed segments reported as difficult in direct as well as inverse translation and put more emphasis than the present paper on analysing the ways our respondents actually tackled the problems discussed here, found that "the points of attention most frequently mentioned by students suggest that they focus on the lower levels of the text build-up, such as lexical elements and syntax" (2016: 324). Professionals, on the other hand, were found to be more concerned with pragmatic aspects; moreover, they are "generally more willing to make major changes to the text structure (transforming sentences, justified omissions) and their decisions are more influenced by pragmatic and functional aspects" (ibid.).

Finally, it has been suggested that the non-native translator generally has the unarguable advantage of excellent comprehension of the source text (cf. Section 2 of the present paper). Nevertheless, our analysis found that our translators also grappled with comprehension problems when translating out of their mother tongue, the principal one being caused by a missing comma. Even though punctuation may be considered a marginal issue by some source text authors, it does have an important role to play and can, when used in a wrong way, make the text difficult to understand, and even lead to shifts of meaning in the target text.

Yet, source text defects are by no means limited to punctuation as texts may contain typographical errors and factual mistakes. Perhaps most frequently, texts suffer from less-than-optimal quality of style. In fact, two of our respondents complained that the Czech source text was badly written; one pointed out the inadequate clarity of expression forcing her to spend extra time interpreting a particular segment, whereas the other found the text lacking in coherent structure, with some details inserted in unexpected places. The fact that both belonged to the professionals group may point to the professionals' higher levels of expertise and self-confidence; while

the students are more than likely to have noticed that the text was not particularly well written, they were, understandably, less willing to openly say so in an experiment administered by their teachers. In any case, many source texts are defective in one of the ways detailed above (or, as often as not, in a combination of these ways!) — in fact increasingly so as more and more texts are being published online without proper editing. Therefore, regular work with authentic defective source texts should be an integral part of translator training to equip tomorrow's graduates with an expanded set of skills that will help them handle most practical translation problems more effectively.

Beyond the five segments discussed above, the other problems mentioned by more than one respondent were almost exclusively related to lexical level (collocations/semi-terms such as *užitná hodnota*, *výrobce kuchyní s tradicí*) or the generally less-than-optimal style (the pleonastic phrase *bezpodmínečnou podmínkou*).

However, looking closely at the typology of difficulties identified by our respondents when translating a promotional text, one thing becomes clear: the types of problems described above do not appear to be in any way unique to the inverse direction. After all, comprehension difficulties, pragmatic problems, lexical choices and the insufficient stylistic quality of the source text are normally associated with most direct translation. Surprising as the similarity may be, it seems to be in line with the results of studies which made explicit comparisons between inverse and direct translations (cf. Pavlović 2010; Obdržálková 2016).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the present paper was to increase our understanding of directionality in translation by discussing in more detail one of its aspects — difficulty. The general agreement among translation scholars that inverse translation is perceived by translators themselves to be the more challenging of the two directions has now been supported by empirical evidence (the project described in the present paper in addition to previous surveys, e.g. Pavlović 2007). On the other hand, it has by now become apparent that inverse translators are able to deliver reliable service to clients in numerous realms of translation as long as they have the ability to make effective use of tools, now available mainly online, and to develop their foreign language competence systematically towards native-speaker authenticity. However, this ability may not be equally easy to apply in all domains of translation, making the text type a crucial factor. Although the present study revealed that the problems faced by inverse translators are diverse and definitely go beyond how best to achieve natural expression in the target language, they appear not to be significantly different from problems associated with direct translation and, therefore, more research is needed to explain how difficulty relates to different genres, text types and translation settings. The growing body of empirical findings regarding directionality can then lead to better informed institutionalised training which can assist the inverse translators of tomorrow in learning to realize their potential and limitations and, ultimately, to provide the best service possible.

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APPENDIX: SOURCE TEXT (FOR INVERSE TRANSLATION FROM CZECH TO ENGLISH)

Jsme český výrobce kuchyní z Prahy s tradicí od roku 2002. Denně projektujeme, vyrábíme a montujeme přibližně tři kuchyně. Navštívíte-li jedno z našich studií, budete jednat s odborníkem, který Vám pomůže zrealizovat Vaše představy a který k tomu má díky přímé vazbě na vlastní firemní výrobu nejlepší nástroj. Snažíme se, aby naši prodejci pouze neskládali jednotlivé skříňky, ale aby dokázali klientům poradit a vymyslet kuchyň tak, aby pro ně byla práce v kuchyni radostí. Pojem „kuchyně na míru" u nás znamená, že klient volně kombinuje materiály a dekory dle svých představ. Udržet vysoký standard poskytovaných služeb při rozmanitosti zakázek je někdy dost složité. O tom, že se nám to snad daří nejlépe vypovídá vysoký podíl klientů přicházejících na základě kladných referencí.

Vyrábíme kuchyně z lamina a masivu a kuchyně lakované, dýhované a foliované. Vhodným výběrem materiálu dokážeme velmi dobře konkurovat prodejcům levných kuchyní, většinou však vyrábíme nábytek střední a vyšší třídy. Náš nábytek je vždy vyrobený z kvalitního materiálu a zpracovaný špičkovou technologií, a proto můžeme zaručit jeho vysokou trvanlivost a užitnou hodnotu. Pro dosažení co nejlepšího výsledku je rozhodující bezvadně fungující tým, který zajistí veškeré úkony spojené s realizací. Proto veškeré úkony provádějí pouze zaměstnanci firmy a navíc celý proces hlídá firemní software. Vedle kuchyňského nábytku naše společnost vyrábí také polymerní pracovní desky a v případě zájmu klientů i vestavné skříně a ostatní nábytek.

Kvalitně provedená montáž je bezpodmínečnou podmínkou dobrého výsledku celé realizace. Proto se nespoléháme na externí pracovníky. Montáže provádí sehraná dvou až tříčlenná parta montážníků, kteří Vás slušně pozdraví, přezují se, zakryjí si podlahu v místě montáže a pustí se do práce.

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