

Schmitt, Peter (2016). *Handbuch Technisches Übersetzen*. Berlin: BDÜ Weiterbildungs- und Fachverlagsgesellschaft mbH, pp. 713, € 44.00. ISBN: 978-3-938430-83-5

This handbook, written in German, focuses on translation from English into German, but this review is written in English with a view back through a German to English lens. In fact, technical translators who read both German and English can benefit from its many insights, even if they deal with other languages.

What constitutes a Handbook — as opposed to, say, a text book? Encyclopedic coverage, for one thing: Schmitt's *Handbook* comprises over 700 pages, compared to text books averaging 250 pages (Byrne 2012; Olohan 2016). This offering goes beyond good generic advice and selected practical examples to cover a lifetime's worth of concrete insights. In so doing, it mirrors comprehensive handbooks in the technical field, such as Mark's (2006), *The Machinery's Handbook* (2016), or in German, Dubbel (2014).

Macro-level organisation

At the macro level, the book is divided into six major chapters:

- *What a translator needs* with regard to tools (hardware and software, including specialised CAT tools), network environments, research-oriented resources, and professional contacts;
- Basic translation principles involving text types and genres, terms and non-technical words, and a discussion of expert vs. lay registers;
- More detail concerning typical text genres and varieties that occur in both in-house and customer-oriented texts – product documentation, in-house and external documents, technical and performance specifications, operating and maintenance manuals, parts lists, and more, with special treatment of terminological, stylistic, and structural conventions, along with advice on software localisation projects and patent translation;
- Quality assurance principles and procedures, along with legal issues associated with technical translation and an overview of both ISO and DIN standards applicable to the profession;
- To round it all off, an illustrative set of sample texts, complete with detailed analyses of tricky translation challenges involving potential terminological and subject-related pitfalls.

Micro-level information density

Regardless of the overarching topic of any given chapter, the pragmatic detail offered at the section and paragraph level is the real strength of the work. The author, himself the source of the most extensive technical dictionary for English and German (Schmitt 2016), warns the reader not to look for dictionary-like term equivalents in this handbook. Nevertheless, at every turn, one finds highly useful terminological information embedded in

a rich network of examples, background information that could underlie many a dictionary entry, along with a wealth of “transfer comment” style detail, explaining the fine points of conceptual differences between German and English technical terms.

Many examples point to the fact that common usage in one language may be more specific than in the other, and that historical similarities in language evolution do not necessarily equal semantic equivalence. Larded through the primary narrative in any given chapter are significant examples (e.g., a plethora of different context-related German terms, all of which could be rendered by the simple English term *remove*). There are some instances where specificity on the English side of things goes unnoticed (consider, for instance, the multiple, context-specific English options for German *Anlage*, or *aufstellen*), but there is no way every conceivable false friend is going to find its way into a single reference. Potential contrastive etymological wisdom often comes up short when confronted with object-specific realities: *Folie*, *Schrauben*, *Bolzen* (not to be equated with *foil*, *screws*, and *bolts*), *carbon steel*, *washers*, *nuts*, and *hammers* bear witness to non-parallel conceptual organisation in the two closely related languages. Examples of deictic variation, distorted perspective, and real-object localisation factors, such right-hand vs. left-hand drive for British cars as opposed to European or American ones, to name a few issues, cue translators to maintain vigilance to avoid inappropriate choices.

The only real complaint is that some excellent images are reduced to the point of complete illegibility, including, sadly, a reference to Göpferich’s excellent typology of special text varieties, which begs for landscape treatment (Göpferich 1995:124).

A fine index guides the reader back to generic topics of interest, and detailed lists provide reference for the 199 graphic images and 23 illustrative tables with their invaluable terminological and semantic content. One may not always read every handbook from cover to cover, but technical translators would be well advised to do so with this volume, to add their own notes, and to mark critical examples for future reference.

References

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