Medical English translation into Italian: the case of Netter’s work
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Abstract

Of the various specialized languages, that of the medical sciences undergoes, perhaps, the fastest changes. Medical innovations, whether new drugs or devices, therapies or advanced technologies, are quickly shared at a global level. For this reason, there is constant activity of medical translation. The latter is generally associated with the concept of terminological accuracy. However, if lexical precision is a fundamental feature in medical discourse, a good translation is also the result of compliance with the stylistic and syntactical rules that are typical of the language of medicine in the target language (TL). This paper investigates the linguistic characteristics of a 151,121-word corpus of medical English texts included in The Netter Collection of Medical Illustrations, and compares it to the corresponding 157,016-word corpus of Italian translations. Netter’s texts were chosen for a twofold reason. They have been fundamental reference tools for generations of medical specialists for about thirty years worldwide; the texts of the Italian version are produced by doctor-translators, and therefore they stand out for terminological accuracy, content precision, and obedience to the lexical, syntactical and stylistic conventions of Italian medical discourse. The anatomy, physiology, traumatology – including sports-related injuries – and metabolic disorders of the musculoskeletal system are the topics selected for investigation. In this respect, the analysis of the main linguistic features that emerge from comparison of source and target texts is intended to offer both a contribution to research on medical translation and useful suggestions for EMP (English for Medical Purposes) teaching, with particular reference to courses for Italian sports sciences undergraduates.