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Translating and standardizing metadata: a case study for French social sciences surveys

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ESRA conference Zagreb, July, 18 2019
- Multilingualism as a dimension of **data discoverability**
- Translation **challenges**: controlled vocabularies & cultural issues
- Improving **our practices**
FAIR data and metadata at the Center for Socio-Political Data (CDSP)

How FAIR principles should manifest in reality is open to interpretation*
Consensus on the fact that the ultimate goal of metadata should be to optimize reuse of data
Need for data archives to adapt

Why translate metadata?

⅓ of non French speaking data users at the CDSP
“Metadata translation is often sufficient to support a user’s assessment whether an object is relevant or not.”

What’s special about metadata translation?

Translators of literature often have a great deal of linguistic and artistic freedom. The challenge of translating fiction usually lies in carrying the ambiguities of the source language over to the target language.

Translating technical and informative texts requires clearer, more univocal interpretation, although depending on the text type a translator may have some creative licence.

What is a good (metadata) translation?

Language is built on interpretations
How to create a neutral translation?
Priority: relaying the idea of the original text clearly and intelligibly Can full equivalence be achieved?

Striving for fidelity and clarity
(Not) Controlled vocabularies

**French:**
Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po
CEVIPOF
Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF)
Centre d'études de la vie politique française

**English:**
Center of political researches of Sciences Po (CEVIPOF)

Importance of CVs!
Cultural expressions (1)

Source language:
"punaiset tuvat ja perunamaat"

Target language 1:
"red cottages and potato fields"

Target language 2:
"typical Finnish countryside"

Cultural expressions (2)

Source language: L'Obs > Politique > Municipales 2014

Municipales : le PS coulé par la vague bleue

Target language: “right-wing parties”

Errors in the original text
Ideal situation

In-house translator

And in real life?

Translation process at the CDSP
Professional translator
Proofreading
Review of the original source language version
Going back and standardizing and harmonising metadata. Using controlled vocabularies. The initial cost quickly amortised.
Conclusion

Should we translate variables metadata?

CESSDA Euro Question Bank (EQB) for inspiration.

Translating metadata allowed us to reasses them and improve our processes.