

## Disposal: A loaded word

This post was prompted by an e-mail exchange I had last week with a project manager at a translation agency. The PM had previously assigned me a job to edit the translation of a brochure that a waste management company intended to use at trade fairs and industry events. The text was fairly straightforward, but raised an issue that I have had to deal with on a number of occasions, namely how to translate the German verb 'entsorgen' when the target audience is industry insiders. For those of you whose working languages do not include German, 'entsorgen' means nothing more than to manage waste. The noun, 'die Entsorgung', is typically rendered much more easily as waste management.

In this instance, the translator chose to use the verb 'dispose of'. For instance, company ABC disposes of more than XYZ tonnes of waste each year. My contention was and is that this linguistic choice falls short, especially given the target audience and purpose of the translation. To find out why, we need to delve a little deeper into the definition of disposal in a waste management context.

Waste management processes fall into two categories: recovery operations and disposal operations. A joint questionnaire on waste conducted by the OECD and Eurostat defined recovery as "any waste management operation that diverts a waste material from the waste stream and *which results in a certain product with a potential economic or ecological benefit.*" The primary methods of recovery are recycling, energy recovery, composting and re-use.

Conversely, waste management operations are considered as disposal operations *only when the material and energy resources contained in the wastes are not used.* The main disposal operations are landfilling and other methods of permanent storage as well as incineration without energy generation.

From these definitions it should be clear that any waste management company that, like the business in question specialises in recycling and composting services, will not want their name and brand associated with landfilling and incineration without energy generation. I suggested that the agency might want to consider 'handle', 'process', 'manage' or even 'take care of' instead.

Notwithstanding these comments, it is important to note that 'dispose of' might be a sound translation for 'entsorgen' in some settings. This is

especially true when translating texts destined for the general public when the meaning of 'entsorgen' is to 'get rid of' waste.

Another anecdote: In my former life as a journalist for a recycling and waste management journal I visited a number of trade fairs and received a large number of brochures like the one that I was editing. One that sticks in my mind over seven years later was a glossy, colourful brochure from an organisation that provides collection and recycling services for scrap electrical and electronic goods. Its slogan was "Wir entsorgen Ihre Abfälle" in German. The translation into English? "We dispose your waists" (sic). Ouch.