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The Impact of Misinterpreted Translations in Buyer Comments on Sample Execution in the Pattern and Marker Department

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how mistranslated buyer comments affect the accuracy and efficiency of sample making in the Pattern and Marker Department of a garment factory. In global fashion, English is the main language between buyers and suppliers. However, unclear translations caused by incorrect word choices, unfamiliar vocabulary, or poor sentence structure often lead to mistakes in sample making. These issues can slow down production, increase workload, and also reduce the quality of the final product. The research aims to find out what kinds of translation errors happen in buyer comments and how they affect the sample-making process. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study is based on real work experiences and interviews with staff from pattern, merchandising, and sample teams. Due to confidentiality, actual buyer documents aren't shown, but the examples reflect real cases. The results show common problems include pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and lexical errors. For instance, measurement notes are sometimes seen as change requests, terms like "clean finish" are misused, and words like "drop" are taken too literally which leading to wrong patterns and wasted time. The study highlights the need for translators to understand both English and garment-making terms. To reduce errors, it suggests creating internal glossaries, training staff on buyer comment styles, and improving teamwork across departments.

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INTRODUCTION

In the global garment industry, clear and accurate technical communication is very important to make sure products are high quality and delivered on time. Accurate translation of technical documents is essential for international trade

effectiveness" (Araghi et al. (2024). One key part of the production process is revising samples, where buyers give written feedback on prototypes. This feedback needs to be understood and applied correctly by technical teams, especially in the Pattern and Marker departments. Since the industry works across different countries, English is often used as a common language. However, this can cause problems, especially when buyer feedback is translated by non-native English speakers or by local staff who may not be familiar with technical terms. Such case can lead to misunderstandings.

Such challenges highlight a broader issue in translation studies: "Translation is not merely changing words but involves conveying meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries" (Putri (2019). "Many translation students struggle with formulating target-language sentences that match the structure and style of the source due to cultural and structural differences" (Alluhaybi (2024). "Errors such as misinterpretation and inappropriate term usage often originate from the failure to understand the target communicative function" (Zhang (2016).

Translation misinterpretation, particularly in technical communication, can result in significant consequences such as incorrect sample execution, material waste, and production delays. Radetska (2024) highlights the complexity of translating scientific and technical terms, emphasizing issues such as "false friends," polysemy, and the lack of equivalent terms in the target language. These issues underscore the need for translators to possess deep knowledge of both terminology and context to ensure message accuracy and consistency.

Lexical inaccuracies in translation have been explored by Ramli (2019), who categorizes errors into omission, mis-selection, and mis-ordering. His findings indicate that mis-selection is the most dominant type of error, often distorting the original message. These errors stem from insufficient understanding of the source language and a failure to select appropriate equivalents in the target language, which may hinder accurate communication in professional settings.

In addition to vocabulary issues, syntactic structure also plays a critical role in translation clarity. Mizowaki et al. (2023) examined the cognitive load involved in reading linear vs. non-linear translations. Their study found that non-linear translations, those with a word order significantly different from the source text can cause more regressions and longer reading times, thus increasing the likelihood of misunderstanding. These findings are particularly relevant in the garment industry, where speed and accuracy in interpreting buyer comments are crucial.

Moreover, Pietikäinen (2020) explored language use in multilingual interactions, focusing on English as a lingua franca (ELF). While ELF users often tolerate minor language deviations for the sake of mutual understanding, the study emphasizes that such flexibility may be problematic in professional environments requiring precision, such as technical departments in manufacturing. Misunderstandings due to linguistic ambiguity or cultural assumptions may lead to operational inefficiencies.

In garment manufacturing, precise interpretation of buyer feedback is vital. Misinterpretations in buyer comments often trigger incorrect sample modifications, wasted resources, and disrupted timelines. Tornado Taufan et al. (2024) emphasized that unclear texts hinder the translator's ability to interpret accurately and may delay the next translation stage. "Translation of product terms without context leads to ambiguity, often requiring visual or domain-specific confirmation" (Song et al. (2021).

"Mistranslation in industrial or fashion settings occurs frequently due to lack of term equivalence or inaccurate lexical choices" (Silalahi et al. (2018).

Therefore, this research narrows its focus to two central objectives. First, it seeks to identify the most common types of translation errors, such as semantic confusion, syntactic misinterpretation, and misuse of technical garment terms that occur in buyer comments and influence the sample revision process. Second, it aims to evaluate the impact these misinterpretations have on sample execution accuracy and overall production efficiency within the Pattern and Marker Department. By delving into real-world case studies and staff interviews, this study not only maps out specific error types but also links them directly to on-the-ground consequences like repeated sample rework, production delays, and also heightened operational cost. Understanding the exact nature and ripple effects of these errors will allow garment manufacturers to craft targeted strategies, such as developing a bilingual glossary or organizing focused training, which can improve communication, reduce error rates, and optimize production flow.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, aimed at exploring how misinterpreted translations in buyer comments impact sample execution in the Pattern and Marker Department of a garment company. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture rich, detailed descriptions of real-world communication problems that cannot be quantified easily. It aligns with similar research such as Tornado Taufan et al. (2024), who used document analysis and interviews to examine translator responses to flawed or ambiguous texts. The study focused specifically on identifying four main types of translation errors pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and lexical and understanding how each type contributes to confusion, errors, or inefficiencies in the sample development workflow.

Research Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with key personnel who regularly interact with buyer comments, including pattern makers, industrial engineers (IE), merchandisers, and sample room staff. Due to the confidential nature of buyer documents, actual texts were not used. Instead, participants were encouraged to recall and paraphrase confusing or problematic comments, describe how they interpreted them, explain what changes were made, and discuss the consequences. This flexible interview format allowed respondents to provide insights while protecting brand confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis. Interview transcripts were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns and categorized into the four error types based on Radetska's (2024) theory of technical translation errors. This theory emphasizes that translation mistakes in technical contexts often result from ambiguous phrasing, unfamiliar terminology, or lack of domain-specific knowledge. The analysis focused on identifying the language features involved in each error and its practical impact on the sample-making process. To maintain confidentiality, all examples cited were paraphrased or anonymized. This analysis method enabled the researcher to understand translation problems in a practical, industrial setting and

generate actionable recommendations for improving communication between international buyers and factory teams.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Common types of translation misinterpretation

3.1.1 Misinterpretation of measurement comments: a case of pragmatic mistranslation

In the context of technical communication between buyers and garment manufacturers, comments such as:

Fit/Measurement:

Back length -2 cm
Sleeve length -0.5 cm
Waistband width -2.5 cm

are often misinterpreted by the receiving team. These comments are not instructions to adjust the measurements but rather the results of the buyer's evaluation of the received prototype. In this case, "Back length -2 cm" means that the back length of the sample is 2 cm shorter than the expected measurement, not a request to shorten it further by 2 cm.

This kind of misunderstanding is known as a pragmatic mistranslation. The problem does not come from the exact meaning of the words, but from not correctly understanding what the speaker or writer actually meant. As Cummins (2021) explains, language should not be treated merely as a system for exchanging coded messages, but as a context-driven act shaped by shared assumptions, social norms, and communicative purpose. Ignoring this context, as often happens in fast-paced production environments can result in interpreting descriptive measurement feedback as a prescriptive command, which causes sample alterations that were never intended.

3.1.2 Misunderstanding technical terminology: a case of semantic mistranslation

Workmanship:

Change the topstitching at front cutline to be 3F
Hemming overlock change to clean finish

These comments contain specific technical instructions related to garment construction. For instance, the first line instructs the sample maker to change the decorative topstitching on the front cutline, such as the chest seam to a stitch type known as "3F". The second line asks to replace the hemming overlock with a clean finish method.

If the person reading the comment does not understand garment-related terms, especially those about stitch types and finishing methods, the sample made might not match what the buyer wants. This problem doesn't come from grammar mistakes, but from semantic mistranslation, misunderstanding the meaning of certain technical words.

As Song et al. (2021) explain, product-oriented machine translation struggles with industry-specific terms such as "tank" or "checks," which require contextual understanding to avoid ambiguity. "Lexical errors in translation often stem from unfamiliarity with industry jargon, resulting in distortion of technical instructions" (Silalahi et al. (2018)). "Even with a technically accurate translation, failing to match the communicative intent of the buyer comment may lead to sample rejection" (Zhang (2016)).

Semantic mistranslation happens when the translator or reader does not know the specific terms used in the field, which leads to a wrong or incomplete understanding of the message. For example, not knowing what terms like "3F" or "clean finish" mean can cause mistakes in making the sample.

3.1.3 Syntactic (grammatical) mistranslation

Syntactic mistranslation happens when a sentence's structure or the grammatical relationships between its elements are misunderstood by the reader. This often arises from difficulty in grasping how certain clauses, exceptions, or modifiers shape the sentence's overall meaning.

Workmanship:

"Cutlines, excl. front left, should be move down by 3 cm."

This sentence uses a non-standard but commonly used format in technical communication. The phrase "excl. front left" is short for excluding front left, indicating that all cutlines should be moved down by 3 cm except for the front left part.

However, due to the placement of the phrase and the use of abbreviation, the sentence can easily be misread. A reader unfamiliar with the term "excl." or who fails to recognize it as an exception might apply the 3 cm adjustment to all parts, including the front left which contrary to the buyer's actual request.

This misreading falls under syntactic mistranslation because the issue doesn't stem from unfamiliar vocabulary or incorrect terminology, but from a misunderstanding of the sentence's grammatical structure. While the individual words may be clear, the overall meaning becomes distorted when the way those words are arranged is misinterpreted.

3.1.4 Lexical mistranslation

Lexical mistranslation refers to an error that arises when a word or phrase is interpreted with the wrong meaning, especially when that word has multiple definitions depending on context. "Deviation of meaning represents over 58% of errors in crowdsourced Indonesian-English translations" (Salam et al. (2017). In the garment industry, where specialized terms often resemble everyday English words, this type of error tends to occur quite frequently. The overlap can easily lead to confusion if the context isn't carefully considered.

Workmanship:

"Please drop the sleeve seam by 1.5 cm."

This sentence may be misunderstood if the reader interprets "drop" as remove or eliminate. Based on general English, "drop" can indeed mean to discard something. However, in technical garment terms, "drop" typically means to lower the position of a certain construction point or seam. In this case, the buyer is asking the patternmaker to lower the sleeve seam by 1.5 cm, not to eliminate it entirely.

The confusion arises from a lexical error caused by selecting the wrong meaning of a word with multiple interpretations. Although the vocabulary may seem clear, the mistake occurs because the general, everyday meaning was chosen instead of the specific technical meaning intended in the garment context.

3.2 Factors contributing to misinterpretation

3.2.1 Pragmatic mistranslation: misinterpretation of measurement comments contributing factors:

Lack of contextual awareness: Readers often fail to distinguish between descriptive statements and prescriptive instructions. In measurement comments, this leads to confusing feedback results with alteration requests.

Inadequate exposure to buyer communication patterns: Teams unfamiliar with how buyers usually structure fit reports or sample evaluations may not recognize the conventional format of measurement deviation notes.

Assumption-based reading: Interpreting a numerical value with a minus sign as an instruction to subtract, rather than a comparison with the standard spec, causes misguided pattern revisions.

3.2.2 Semantic mistranslation: misunderstanding technical terminology contributing factors:

Limited knowledge of garment-specific vocabulary: When readers aren't familiar with technical terms related to garment construction, such as stitch types or finishing methods. They're more likely to misinterpret detailed instructions, even if the wording seems straightforward.

Absence of internal technical glossaries or training: When technical terms like "3F" or "clean finish" are not standardized or documented internally, individuals may rely on incorrect assumptions or guesses.

Lack of cross-functional collaboration: Sample makers or translators who do not communicate directly with pattern makers or sewing technicians may miss the intended meaning of construction-related terms.

3.2.3 Syntactic (grammatical) mistranslation contributing factors

Challenges with interpreting non-standard sentence structures: Technical comments often use shortened or abbreviated grammar, such as "excl. front left" which requires a solid grasp of implied meanings and how modifiers function. Without this, readers may struggle to fully understand the intended message.

Misinterpretation due to unclear punctuation or phrasing: When important details are hidden within phrases or abbreviations, they can easily be missed or linked to the wrong part of the sentence. This can lead to confusion about what action is actually required.

Over-reliance on a literal reading: Focusing too much on the surface meaning without considering how modifiers work within the sentence may cause readers to overlook exceptions or conditions. As a result, they might carry out instructions incorrectly or incompletely.

3.2.4 Lexical mistranslation contributing factors:

Polysemy in technical language: Words such as "drop," "forward," or "open" can have multiple related meanings depending on the context, known as polysemy. Misunderstandings often happen when people use the common, everyday meaning of a word instead of the specific meaning it has in the garment industry.

Limited ability to infer meaning from context: When readers especially patternmaker, struggle to interpret a word based on nearby instructions or garment features, even simple terms can be misunderstood. Without strong

contextual inference skills, the risk of misapplying technical language increases significantly.

Inexperience with functional garment English: Many garment terms have been adapted or borrowed from standard English but carry different connotations in technical use. Without prior experience, even common words can be misunderstood.

3.2.5 Consequences on sample quality, production time, and efficiency

Misinterpretation of buyer comments whether pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, or lexical has a direct impact on the overall workflow and product quality in garment production. One of the most immediate effects is on sample quality, as mistranslations often lead to errors in executing buyer instructions. For instance, misinterpreting a note about garment measurements can result in incorrect sizing or misplaced logos, while misunderstanding stitching terminology may cause the use of the wrong sewing method. These errors compromise the fit, appearance, and overall quality of the sample, often resulting in rejection. Moreover, production time is significantly affected by such mistakes. When a sample is rejected due to a translation error, it must be repaired and resent for approval, causing delays in the sample approval stage and potentially missing delivery deadlines. Each revision consumes additional time, labor, and resources. Furthermore, operational efficiency suffers, as continued miscommunication disrupts coordination across departments like pattern making, sewing, quality control, and merchandising. These misunderstandings trigger internal confusion, repeated corrections, and lengthy discussions, ultimately slowing down progress and reducing team productivity. In summary, even minor errors in interpreting buyer comments can trigger a chain reaction that negatively affects product quality, delays production, hampers efficiency, and in the long run, undermines customer satisfaction and damages the company's reputation.

3.3 Strategies to minimize misinterpretation

Turunen & Halme (2021), in their study on sustainable fashion communication, emphasize that information must not only be correct but also *actionable,* means structured in a way that supports correct decision-making. This is particularly relevant in technical communication where misinterpreted instructions often lead to rework and production delays. To ensure accurate interpretation of buyer comments and reduce costly errors in sample development, several practical strategies can be implemented as below:

3.3.1 Develop a technical glossary

Creating an internal glossary of frequently used buyer terms, such as stitch codes, finishing types until fit terminology, helps standardize interpretation across departments. As Turunen & Halme (2021) point out, structured tools that translate abstract or technical concepts into user-friendly, decision-ready formats improve communication efficiency. In the context of garment production, an internal bilingual glossary could reduce semantic guessing and improve cross-role consistency.

3.3.2 Conduct targeted training

Providing training sessions focused on common buyer comment patterns and garment-specific English improves staff comprehension, especially for pattern makers, sample coordinators, and merchandisers. "Morphological and lexical training can improve translation accuracy at the surface level" (Stefani et al. (2024)). "Understanding common translation error patterns helps educators and practitioners design targeted learning interventions" (Putri (2019).

3.3.4 Promote cross departmenet review

Encouraging collaboration between departments (e.g., pattern makers, sample staff, IE) in reviewing buyer comments ensures that instructions are interpreted correctly before execution. Additionally, Tornado Taufan et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of translator judgment and strategy in revising unclear source texts before translation begins.

3.3.4 Document repeated comment patterns

Tracking and analyzing recurring buyer comment formats over time allows the team to learn from past feedback and predict intended meanings more accurately in future communications. Lin et al. (2022) suggest that automatic correction of human translation errors can also enhance quality if combined with human review, especially in technical domains.

3.3.5 Encourage clarification when in doubt

When buyer comments are unclear or confusing, it's important for teams to feel encouraged to ask for clarification instead of make assumptions. Taking this step helps prevent mistakes and shows a proactive attitude, which might strengthen trust and communication with the buyer.

By implementing these strategies, garment manufacturers can reduce miscommunication, improve sample accuracy, and also enhance overall production efficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role that accurate translation plays in ensuring effective technical communication between buyers and garment manufacturers, particularly within the pattern and marker department. The findings demonstrate that misinterpretations, pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and lexical are commonly occur due to a lack of contextual understanding, insufficient domain-specific knowledge, and unclear grammatical structures in buyer comments.

Mistakes in translation can cause the pattern team to revise the pattern the wrong way, which leads to errors in making the sample. This can lower overall quality of the sample, slow down the production process, and also reduce work efficiency. Even though these problems often come from small misunderstandings in language, they can seriously affect the workflow and how satisfied the client is with the results. To help solve these issues, this study offers several practical suggestions. These include creating a glossary of technical terms used within the company, providing specific training for technical staff, reviewing buyer comments together across departments, keeping records of repeated feedback from buyers, and encouraging teams to ask for clarification when the meaning of a comment is unclear. By applying these steps, garment companies can make sample execution more accurate, improve communication, and maintain better product quality in the global market

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