TRANSLATOR AWARENESS

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Introduction

If we want to encompass adequately the wide-ranging field of human translation, it is necessary to include in translation studies (TS) the concept of translator awareness (or translator consciousness, for that matter). However, this is more easily said than done, because this concept does not easily lend itself to definition, let alone to measurement, e. g., by investigating translator behaviour. To put it bluntly: Translator awareness is a fuzzy concept. Like many obviously difficult-to-define concepts, with which dialogue in TS is burdened, translator awareness lacks an articulated theory within which different forms of translator behaviour can be convincingly related to, or distinguished from, one another. Hence, TS has so far not tackled, at least not systematically, the issue of translator awareness.

To make things worse, in discussing translator behaviour, we find ourselves in an area of research which is characterized by a diversity of behavioural perspectives and strategies. The fact that we can connect quite different goals with the activity of translation becomes apparent if we follow Vinay´s suggestion to distinguish between "Artrad" (translation as an art), "Théoritrad/Linguitrad" (theory of translation), "Pédagotrad" (translation teaching), "Stylitrad" (translation in comparative stylistics), and "Ordinotrad" (machine translation) (1975).

Today, his list would have to include at least four more candidates: "Cognitrad" (translation as a cognitive event), "Sociotrad" (the social implications of translation), "Cultrad" (the cultural dimension of translation) and "Semiotrad" (translation as a semiotic undertaking). All terms denote specific aspects of the process and the goal of translation, and as such, translator awareness.

This statement points to translator awareness as a collective term for highly different forms of intelligence. Nevertheless, people not directly involved in translation sometimes have rather strange ideas of the level of intelligence required for carrying out translation tasks. Translation is regarded as something commonsensical or as something that can be taken for granted. There is a widespread belief that in order to work as a translator, one need not have highly developed mental capabilities, in contrast to e. g., the fields of music, mathematics, chess, or computer science. It is easily forgotten that the professional translator must be in a position to plan ahead, to exploit opportunities offered by the resources available, and to perform a job in a prudent way uncontaminated by ideology or unrealistic assumptions cultivated by the uninformed public.

If we try to define translator awareness despite the difficulties mentioned above, we can take as a starting point the definition of language awareness as presented by Donmall on behalf of the British "Language Awareness Working Party". He has stated that language awareness is a language user's sensitivity to the nature of language and its role in communication (1985: 7). In itself, this definition is not very informative, but it is does drive home the fact that translator awareness and translator behaviour are closely interconnected and that translator awareness is an important building-block of translator competence.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this interconnectedness is that it does away with the often counter-productive debate over translation postulates (e. g., to be as literal as possible and as free as necessary), in which so many discussions on the goal of TS have bogged

down. If we want to obtain a better, more principled and coherent understanding of translator awareness, we must do this by interrelating theory, research, and, above all, practice as it occurs in real translators in real time in real contexts.

These remarks should help to place in proper perspective the various dimensions of translator awareness, such as individual awareness (for literary translation) and collective (schematic) awareness (for technical translation). Naturally, in an article of limited length, it is impossible to devote sufficient attention to any specific manifestation of translator awareness. Indeed, even to treat a single type of translator awareness would require a lengthy discussion going far beyond what can be discussed within the range of the present paper. The most I can hope for to accomplish here is to provide a "feel" for translator awareness, to convey something of its core parameters, to suggest how it unfolds and proceeds from lower-level to higher-level translator activities, and thus to touch upon its developmental trajectory.

Owing to environment, training, motivation, practical work, or, in all probability, a constant interplay between these factors, translators will develop a certain degree of translator awareness, even given but a small opportunity to do so. Obviously, there exists at the core of translator awareness an information-processing device which is unique to a specific manifestation of translator awareness, and upon which are based the more complex realisations and embodiments of that awareness. In standard translator-mediated intercourse, the observer typically encounters a complex array of awareness factors functioning together, in a more or less accomplished manner, smoothly, even seamlessly in the process of executing intricate translation tasks.

More volatile issues in our framework arise when we consider aspects of translator performance which appear, at first blush, to elude any analytical approach. Underlying are cognitive capacities which clearly make use of mental skills but because of their seemingly broad and general nature appear inexplicable in terms of translator awareness.

The two most notorious candidates for analytical non-explainability are translation creativity and translation intuition.

Translation creativity

Although creativity is, so to speak, an icon of our time, its study is a problematic area of psychology in general and translation-related psychology in particular. It is impossible to compress creativity into a few theoretical statements which serve as the key for unlocking all its secrets and for building up a set of distinctive features which, taken together, suffice to conceive of a formula for creativity on which to build creative translator performance. The relative vagueness of the creativity concept is e. g., apparent in the statement that "non-literary translation is a semi-creative, intellectual craft ..." (Berglund 1989: 270). The same is true of creativity in general, the reason being that we lack clear conceptual and definitional distinctions between creativity, productivity, originality, and imagination. Probably nobody will subscribe to the claim that such distinctions are possible, because of the difficulty in assigning precise meanings to these notions. Although we are aware that creativity is a salient part of our life, we are still hard put to objectify the concept of creativity in a scientific way and to investigate the manifold dimension of creativity.

Translation creativity is some trait that can be expected of a translator who has accumulated a wide range of translation knowledge and can now apply this knowledge appropriately and judiciously in translation situations. Creativity manifests itself as a combination of original transfer strategies in one of more translation-relevant textual domains, coupled with a seasoned feeling for contextually determined "dynamic equivalence" (Nida 1964) or "equivalence in difference" (Jakobson 1959). Informed translators can draw upon these skills and carry out well-motivated and well-founded lines of translation action by activating their creative resources. A salient point of translation teaching should therefore be to discover creative promise in translator-

trainees and to develop creative abilities into creative skills, e. g., by combining production training and evaluation training, without falling into the trap of gratuitous and meaningless generality (triviality).

Translation intuition

Whenever creativity in translation is discussed, intuition must also be considered. Here we see a similar picture. The concept of intuition is also beyond the reach of precise definition. Intuition has its traditional place in an environment where the chain of scientifically verifiable modes of performance ends. Intuition is the ability to produce solutions spontaneously (holistically), according to situational demands, rather than in a rational manner. Intuition is a provokingly unclear concept. We can conceive of many forms of intuition, but we are unable to define the phenomena as such, just as we are unable to say why something is intuitionally correct and something else is not. Intuition is, we could perhaps say, a fire that lights itself. Therefore I am hesitant to speak of intuition-controlled behaviour.

Intuitive behaviour cannot be summoned upon demand. It is unpredictable and can also, under certain circumstances, be the root of dangerous errors. "Obviously, some intuitive leaps are 'good' and some are 'bad' in terms of how they turn out. Some men are good intuiters, others should be warned off" (Bruner 1960: 60). As it is, we cannot normally rely upon intuition; it often helps us in an emergency, but without ensuring success. It can produce unexpected results in a specific situation, but in translation this does not happen frequently.

Translation knowledge

If we regard translator awareness as a pillar on which translation performance rests, we cannot satisfy ourselves with discussing it in the framework of general cognitive psychology. It is necessary to include in our approach the concept of translation knowledge. It is generally

assumed that there are three aspects of knowledge-based behaviour: first, the acquisition of knowledge, either in a direct (experiental) or in an indirect (mediated) manner; second, the storing of acquired knowledge in memory; and third, the reactivation (retrieval) of internalized knowledge, normally for multiple use, either in a problem-solving or in automatized form.

Knowledge is a precondition for certainty in handling a specific problem. The more sophisticated and the more stratified in terms of breadth and depth knowledge is, the less likely are complications in getting the source-text meaning adequately across to the target-text reader. A translator must be aware of the fact that he cannot properly comprehend and reproduce a source text belonging to a domain which is completely alien to him. If circumstances force him to do the job anyhow - and this is a well-known situation in professional circles - he must be aware of the need for collecting background information (e. g., by exploiting parallel texts; Wilss 1996), before he starts carrying out his task. In technical translation, which represents the bulk of translation activities all over the world, the reliability of the work of the translator depends on the volume of epistemic knowledge which he can muster up, and not, as in literary translation, on "the art of balancing different claims" (Raffel 1988: 157). As a rule, epistemic meaning is always embedded in a larger, supra-individual conceptual framework which almost invariably has typifying properties. The determinacy and sharability of epistemic knowledge resides in its being accessible to a scientific community and can be validated by its members. The shared knowledge about a specific domain not only prevents uncontrollable drifts of understanding, but it represents the common frame of reference to which the source-text author, the translator, and the target-text reader can comfortably stick and behave predictably.

Another way to clarify the concept of translator awareness is to approach our topic from the angle of memory research. Memory is, according to St. Augustine, the present of the past. Memory research has revealed that a large proportion of our knowledge is highly abstract

in nature, thus permitting us to store knowledge in a structured manner. Structured knowledge is a conglomeration of mental complexes that have attained unit status which has become known as "schema", a term popularized (but not invented) by Bartlett (1932) and revitalized for cognitive psychology by Neisser (1967). Like a category, a schema is a cognitive unit enabling us to cope with a situation according to the principle of "minimax strategies" which play an outstanding role in translator performance because the motto "fast is smart" permeates the whole range of translation activities. Schemata are hierarchically structured: There are more general (superordinate) and more specific (subordinate) schemata. Schemata are based on prior experience. "This prior experience or organized knowledge ... takes the form of expectations ..., saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time" (Tannen 1979: 144).

One - almost trivial - assumption about knowledge organization is that schematically organized knowledge allows more complete recall and activation of knowledge than non-schematic (episodic) knowledge. Hence, schema-driven information processing represents a major portion of the overall processing capacity of man. Of course, schema-supported knowledge is only one pillar of cognitive activity; another, equally important one, is "fluctuation" (de Beaugrande: 1991). Fluctuation is a term which we use for describing the interdependence between episodic, fragmentary experiences which we make everyday, and structured knowledge which we need to accommodate anew, haphazardly made experiences, such as the meaning of hitherto unknown words or metaphors, the impact of new stories, and all the other experiences we make when we try to find adequate solutions for translation problems. Like any language user, translators strive to develop standard translation procedures which enable them, consciously or subconsciously, to render textual input by projecting source-text items onto the standard lexical (terminological), phraseological, syntactic, and textual patterns of the target linguistic repertoires. At least for translators who in their professional life enjoy

the tremendous privilege of having to cope only with a fairly homogeneous spectrum of texts, translation is in part a habit. In order to practise habits, a translator has to learn them. This seems to be common-place observation, but to be aware of its pedagogical significance, it is fundamental to the preparation of translation-teaching materials (Wilss 1996).

As we can experience every day, we access only a limited portion of our de facto knowledge, but we can widen our access routes and our textual navigation techniques, if our knowledge is organized in schematic structures. On the whole, we know much more than we are able to retrieve from our knowledge stores. In view of the fragmentary character of knowledge-recalling procedures, only a few of the things we have learnt are available for knowledge-based output, and what knowledge is accessible is a basic feature of translator awareness, which may or may not be accurate.

Simply to state that knowledge is a basic feature of translation awareness is, of course, not enough. The concept of translation knowledge has to be specified, and in a first (tentative) approach, we can do this by distinguishing between two types of knowledge, declarative and procedural knowledge.

Declarative knowledge (knowing that) means that the translator has available in his memory stored-up supplies of knowledge and experience which he has built up in the course of training and professional activities. No translation begins at a cognitive zero point, so to speak.

Procedural knowledge (knowing how) means that the translator has available not only a static knowledge of the pertinent subject-matter, but also a dynamic knowledge, i.e. he knows (or ought to know) to which textual configurations he must apply which operative moves, and which specific effects he wants to achieve by using a particular translation procedure (literal vs. non-literal translation).

The distinction between the two types of knowledge is relevant for translation theory, translation practice, and empirical TS. At this

juncture a major task for translation pedagogy comes to the fore. Which knowledge must a translator have in a particular translation situation in order to optimally fulfil client demands (in a client/server relationship)? Out of all the knowledge, which can he access via internal memory and external data-bank storage media? How does he select the knowledge which is nowadays labelled "just-in-time knowledge"? Obviously, reasonable control and mastery of the translation process depends upon a sensible combination of declarative and procedural knowledge and a perpetual awareness of the translator's source-text/target-text dual commitment.

Context

If we apply knowledge to concrete textual input, we must be cognizant of the fact that each translation act is basically determined by three "intervening variables", namely context, culture, and compensation. Context, no matter how we define it, linguistically, extralinguistically, or pragmatically, is one of the most significant criteria for assessing translator awareness, first, because context is "omnipresent", and second, because context is a kind of interface between the internal world of the individual translator and the external world of textual input. A translator must be able to understand the source-text meaning and to reproduce it in a manner acceptable to the source-text author's intention(s) and the target-text reader's expectation(s) in terms of how, when, where, and why something was said and for whom the message was intended. The process of contextually based translation is the constructive aspect of (almost) any translation undertaking.

Culture

An implication of the contextual view of translation is that many (but not all) translations are embedded in a cultural, or, for that matter,

intercultural frame of reference. Culture is often alluded to as the human-made part of the environment (Triandis 1972). In a simplified fashion, one can say that translation, as a specimen of socioculturally determined linguistic behaviour, contains both culture-specific and culture-universal components, and that the relationship between culture-specific and culture-universal meaning may vary a good deal from one cultural community to the next. Mental mechanisms which are related to translation, such as source-text decoding and target-text encoding, are observable in all cultures, no matter how close to each other or how distant from each other they may be. In order to avoid cultural (pragmatic) failure and to obtain in the target text the same level of impact and appeal as the original text has had in the source-culture environment, the translator may have to adopt, at least in certain translation areas such as Bible translation, rather intricate and sophisticated roundabout or adaptive strategies which require a high degree of cultural awareness.

Compensation

One need not go to exotic language and culture communities to find out hosts of examples which show that adaptive strategies are imperative for shaping the target text in such a way as to achieve at least a minimal degree of functional or pragmatic equivalence between source text and target text. Therefore, awareness of interlingual/intertextual similarities and differences is an essential prerequisite for efficient translator behaviour. Whenever attempts at straightforward direct transfer on the basis of formal or functional one-to-one correspondences fail, the translator has to engage in reshaping (paraphrasing) operations to ensure an intelligible, easily readable target text. In such cases, the translator cannot and must not be satisfied with merely trying to simply take over what is already there in the source text. Any language has the resources for rearranging lexical items in morphological, phraseological, and syntactic constructions in

a specific, interlingually non-substantive way. Two questions facing the translator almost constantly are "How do you say this in the target language?", and "Why can this not be expressed in the target language on the basis of a formal correspondence?".

An important aspect in this connection is that there may be not just one set of compensatory behaviour for everyone, because individual translators may adjust the source text to the target text differently. Whereas the general procedural components in translator behaviour are to all intents and purposes universal, their concrete manifestations in the build-up of textually appropriate strategies, methods, and techniques are likely to vary from one translator to the next. What does seem to be common among translators trying to master their multi-facet tasks is the skill to compensate for interlingual and intercultural differences. The awareness of the need for compensation may be the same, but how compensation is achieved depends largely on the adaptive skills of the translator.

To sum up, I have suggested that if we really want to understand how the mind of the translator works, we need first of all to establish a coherent concept of translator awareness. If awareness research is conceived of as the investigation of variables that influence translation activities, TS will contribute significantly both to the theory and the practice of translation.

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