
The psychology of translation and psychological competence development in translator training programmes

La psychologie de la traduction et le développement des compétences psychologiques dans les programmes de formation des traducteurs

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Abstract

Holmes (1988) in his map of Translation Studies envisioned a process-oriented branch of Descriptive Translation Studies which is concerned with the psychology of translation trying to find out what happens in the mind of a translator during the process or act of translating. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the psychological dimension of the translation procedure and propose a didactic approach aiming to student psychological competence development in a translator training programme. To this respect, the psychological aspect of the translation process will be briefly discussed, comprising the workings of the translator's mind ranging from cognition to emotion as well as personality traits. Another important parameter to be considered is the psychological immersion of the translation phenomenon to the way in which translated texts are understood and interpreted by their recipients as well as the interconnectedness between translation psychology and translation sociology research. Furthermore, the implications of the psychological nature of the translation process for translation didactics will be investigated, providing suggestions that could help students handle the psychological tension felt during the learning process and develop their emotional intelligence in order to deal with emotional challenges during their career as professionals. The overall intention of the paper is to show that there is a psychological angle to most translation-related procedures, which could offer interesting avenues for fruitful research cooperation within Translation Studies as well as with other disciplines.

Key-words: translator training, translation didactics, translation psychology, psychological competence, translator's personality and performance

Résumé

Holmes (1988) dans sa carte des études de traduction a envisagé une branche des études de traduction descriptives axée sur le processus qui s'intéresse à la psychologie de la traduction en essayant de découvrir ce qui se passe dans l'esprit d'un traducteur pendant le

processus ou l'acte de traduction. Le but de cet article est d'étudier la dimension psychologique de la procédure de traduction et de proposer une approche didactique visant le développement des compétences psychologiques des étudiants dans un programme de formation de traducteur. À cet égard, l'aspect psychologique du processus de traduction sera brièvement discuté, comprenant le fonctionnement de l'esprit du traducteur allant de la cognition à l'émotion ainsi que des traits de personnalité. Un autre paramètre important à considérer est l'immersion psychologique du phénomène de la traduction dans la manière dont les textes traduits sont compris et interprétés par leurs destinataires ainsi que l'interconnexion entre la psychologie de la traduction et la recherche en sociologie de la traduction. En outre, les implications de la nature psychologique du processus de traduction pour la didactique de la traduction seront étudiées, en fournissant des suggestions qui pourraient aider les étudiants à gérer la tension psychologique ressentie pendant le processus d'apprentissage et à développer leur intelligence émotionnelle afin de faire face aux défis émotionnels au cours de leur carrière en tant que professionnels. L'intention générale de cet article est de montrer qu'il existe un angle psychologique dans la plupart des procédures liées à la traduction, ce qui pourrait offrir des pistes intéressantes pour une coopération de recherche fructueuse au sein de la traductologie ainsi qu'avec d'autres disciplines.

Mots-clés : formation du traducteur, didactique de la traduction, psychologie de la traduction, compétence psychologique, personnalité et performance du traducteur

Introduction

Psychology is a multifaceted, both academic and applied discipline, involving the scientific study of mental processes and factors such as perception, cognition, emotion, personality and behaviour. Psychology also refers to the application of such knowledge to various fields of human activity such as education and work as well as the treatment of mental diseases. Translation Psychology [Holmes (1988), Jääskeläinen (2012)] can be defined as a subdiscipline of Translatology addressing the study of translators as multidimensional individuals functioning as a whole According to Holmes (1988: 72), translation process research constitutes the core of translation psychology, dealing with “the process or the act of translation itself”, including “systematic investigations under laboring conditions”. This empirical translation process research, in the sense perceived by Holmes, emerged in the mid-1980's aiming to investigate what happened in the translator's mind during the translation process, while the first empirical studies into the translation process used mostly think-aloud protocols as research techniques.¹

¹ Since the 1980's, most process studies employ multimethod approaches using different types of data elicitation techniques such as retrospection, dialogue protocols, keyboard-logging and eye-tracking to allow for triangulation of research results.

1. Psychological factors affecting the translation process

In its widest sense, translation psychology research covers not only what is happening in the translator's mind during the translation process but it also embraces the emotional, behavioral and social factors involved with the translator's personality (Jääskeläinen, 2012: 191). Another important parameter that is taken into account involves the interaction of the above-mentioned factors with the translator's professional environment and other agents involved in the translation process, from both an objective viewpoint and as perceived by the translator himself.

2. Emotional factors and personality traits

The role of emotional and affective factors constitutes one of the basic research questions raised in translation-process studies. Jääskeläinen (1999) examines the role of translators' attitudes towards the translation task, with the preliminary research data indicating that an enthusiastic attitude may contribute to translation quality, while Tirkkonen-Condit (2000) examines the factor of uncertainty in taking translation decisions, indicating that translators tend to show a high tolerance of uncertainty and tendency to avoid taking decisions and looking for translation solutions.

Another psychological parameter in most translation-related phenomena concerns translators' personality traits and their impact on task performance and quality. Hubscher-Davidson (2009: 182-184) conducted a research focusing on the identification of translators' personality traits and their influence on task performance. Students had to translate a literary text and their personality traits were analyzed by a personality type test while the translation quality was assessed by translation teachers. According to her research findings, students belonging to the "intuitive personality trait" outperformed students of the "sensing personality type". The latter were proved to adopt a practical approach to translation tasks and to feel uncomfortable when asked to perform translation tasks where they had to use their creativity and imagination. Thus, the interrelatedness between personality traits and translation quality could increase our understanding of the different psychological aspects involved in the translation process and in terms of translator training might help students assess their weaknesses and strong points as translators.

3. Translators' knowledge of recipients' expectations

The psychological immersion of the translation phenomenon may be considered to investigate, apart from the translator's personality traits, other features such as the way in which translated texts are understood and interpreted by their recipients. One of the most important aspects in the translator's work is the process of understanding the source text as a reader for whom it was intended and addressing the target readership in a way that accords with the expectations of the translation commissioner. As Robinson (1997: 149) puts it:

“at some point translators will have to make certain assumptions about the people they are addressing...once again translators or interpreters will be forced to pretend to know more than they could ever humanly know - simply in order to go on, to proceed, to do their job as professionally as possible”.

Translation psychology may be understood to help translators include knowledge of what the recipients expect of a translation and how they react to the translated product, an aspect of the translation phenomenon on which little research has been in the field of translation studies.² One of the main dilemmas that is raised in this respect regards professional ethics of translation and particularly translators' choices when professional ethics (loyalty to the translation commissioner) contrasts with personal ethics since translators are human beings with their own attitudes, beliefs and attitudes. According to Robinson (1997:121) the definition of translator ethics is highly controversial. To his words:

“For many translators it is unthinkable to do anything that might harm the interests of a person or group that is paying for the translation the translation “commissioner” or “initiator”). For other translators, the thought of being rendered utterly powerless to make ethical decisions based on personal commitments or belief structure is equally abhorrent”.

4. Translators as social beings

Research on translators functioning as social beings is closely connected with the psychology of translation.³ The sociological turn of Translation Studies has focused research in the mechanisms underlying translation viewed as a social practice. In particular, the study of the translation process as a social activity focuses on the human agent, the translator, as a member of a sociocultural activity called upon to interact with the community's structural dimensions. Robinson (1997:164) views translators not only as language professionals working in a business context, but also as social beings beyond the business context whose “social affiliations and loyalties in their non-working lives have a significant impact on how they work, what they work on, how they structure their

² A representative study is that of Kenesei's (2010) who investigated readers' response to translated poems by using an interdisciplinary approach combining text linguistic and literary analyses of text as well as using cognitive approaches to measure reader responses.

³ The interconnectedness of translation psychology and translation sociology is stressed by translation studies scholars such as Abdallah (2010: 28) who points out the emotional aspect of translation process, while Chesterman (2009) proposes a new branch of translation research called “Translator Studies” focusing on the translator's personality and stressing among others the interconnectedness of translation process research and translation sociological research.

professional lives, and indeed how they use and understand language”. Consequently, understanding the humans involved in these social practices creates an interface with the psychology of translation since issues such as translation ethics and the ethical dilemmas translators face in translation industry have certainly cognitive and emotional implications for translators.

5.The translator’s professional environment

The psychological aspect of translation involves both the training environment of the translator but mostly the pressure of the translator’s profession. In this context, the efficiency of translator training is not only determined by factors of economic, pedagogical and organizational nature but also by a variety of psychological factors creating the appropriate psychological climate to turn the training process into a pleasant experience to future translators. The translator’s profession involves a lot of pressure nowadays which is also felt by translation students, who, consequently, expect to receive solid training to enable them to face the challenges of the translator’s profession in the real world. In this context, the task of the translation teacher consists not only in helping students deal with the stress felt during the learning process but mainly in developing in them those subskills which underlie the general translation competence taking into consideration the psychological factors involved in the translator’s profession.

Cozma & Dejica-Cartis (2013) conducted a research to identify the psychological aspects that students consider relevant in the context of their training for the translation profession. The study was based on a questionnaire addressed to first and second-year students in the Translation MA programme at West University of Timisoara where students were asked to answer questions regarding their fears and worries related to their career as translators as well as the components that a translator training programme should cover to make them feel psychologically secure as professionals. The results showed that all students mentioned their greatest fear was their lack of familiarity with many specialised domains, especially they feared that they would not possess cultural knowledge to produce a functionally appropriate text in a certain professional field. Consequently, they expected their teachers to give them the opportunity to acquire specific skills and knowledge associated with aspects of the translator’s profession such as a certain amount of theoretical knowledge that would help them raise their self-confidence as professionals and, more importantly, practice to various activities related to the profession such as time management and deadlines, translation evaluation techniques, translation resources etc. Also, they expressed their need for psychological support from their teachers and an emotionally safe atmosphere during the training process. It seems, therefore, that translation students perceive their good training to depend, among others, on teachers’ ability to develop their

professional skills, but also on the emotional and supportive learning environment created during the training process.

6. Psychological competence development – proposals

The term “Personal or Emotional Intelligence”

In this section of the article the pedagogical implications of the psychological dimension of translation for translator education are discussed. The approach taken has been to put forward the basic educational considerations for psychological competence development that would help translators both face the psychological stress felt during the learning process and develop their emotional expression in order to deal with emotional challenges and negative feelings invoked by translation tasks they are working with as professionals.

A key-concept in our approach is the term “personal intelligence”, also known by the term “emotional intelligence”. According to Goleman (1995: 43), the term “emotional intelligence” incorporates the following five elements:

Emotional self-awareness: knowing how you feel about something since many professional decisions are based on our reactions to people, which makes recognizing how we are reacting essential to successful decision-making.

Emotional self-control: transforming and channeling emotions in positive and productive way since the better able you are to control your mood, the more positive and successful you will be as a translator.

Emotional self-motivation: finding motives within one’s self to accomplish professional goals. The better able the translator is to channel his emotional life toward the achievement of goals, the more efficiently he will do his job and the more professional recognition he will receive.

Empathy: identifying, understanding and responding to other people’s emotions as a crucial skill for professional translators who rely on social contacts. This is a very important skill that will help them interact with those involved in the translating process in a personally and professionally efficient manner.

Handling relationships: it involves maintaining good professional and personal relationships.

Knowledge of emotions could be implemented practically to help translators treat emotional challenges and develop a number of emotional competencies. The proposal made here involves certain aspects of the learning process such as: pedagogical approach, learning environment and activities as well as assessment methods of the learning process.

7. Pedagogical approach to classroom dynamics

General pedagogical trends changed during the 1960s and research in translation and foreign language teaching drew mainly from scientific fields such as psychology, communication studies and humanistic studies. The pedagogical approach behind the design and the procedures proposed here draws from (Gonzàles-Davies, 2004: 12):

Humanistic Teaching Principles

The Communicative Approach

Cooperative Learning

Social Constructivism

Cognitive Psychology

The Humanistic Approach considers the student as a subject who can contribute to improving the group's as well as his own competence, and not as an object receiving passively the teacher's knowledge. The principles of humanistic teaching have been supported by the discovery in neurobiology of the interconnectedness between brain functions, emotions, and learning outcomes. In this context, emotional issues are considered as important as learning outcomes, defining to a great extent the quality of student performance. The Humanistic perspective favours group learning as well as the positive consequences of affect and of respecting different attitudes and aptitudes.

Cooperative Approach aims at creating a learning atmosphere where each student feels actively involved in the process and the end product. It is based on the concept of synergy and team work, which can contribute to reduce peer pressure, improve communicative and social skills, bridge linguistic and cultural differences among students, thus resulting in more effective learning.

Social Constructivism views learning as a social act that helps to construct knowledge by building on the previous knowledge, experience and motives students take with them into the classroom. Learner autonomy is the key-concept in this approach. In Kiraly's words (2000: 46): "the students will have to construct their own language of the profession and their own understanding of their responsibilities and rights as professionals through experience, by collaboratively participating in the authentic activities of professional translators".

The following pedagogical approach based on Cognitive Psychology contributes to a better understanding of how students overcome constraints in the learning process. [Honey & Mumford (1986), Gonzàles Davies & Cotoner (1999)]. During the first stage of the learning process, known as the unconscious incompetence stage, students are not aware of the difficulties of the discipline they have chosen to study and, in this stage, they just gather information. The next stage is the conscious incompetence stage in which they have become acquainted with the problems and difficulties about their subject of study and that there is still much to learn about the particular domain. Then, they reach the next stage of

learning, that of conscious competence, where they follow their teachers' instructions but they start at the same time developing their skills and knowledge about the discipline they have chosen to study. Finally, they arrive at the last stage of learning, that of the unconscious competence stage, where most of the students' skills and knowledge have been developed reaching the expert level. It goes without saying that not all students follow the above learned process in the same way, rate and route.

8. Learning environment and activities

Learning environment

As far as the learning environment is concerned, Gonzàles - Davies suggests that: "learning is understood as a global experience, that is, one that includes the participant's emotions and purposes as well as their mental activity. That is to say, EQ is as relevant as IQ to learning outcomes" (Gonzàles-Davies, 2004:38). The basic principles underlying this learning approach could be summarized as follows (Gonzàles-Davies, 2004:17):

An interaction between all the participants of the learning setting

A need to respect different learner styles, teaching styles and translator styles

The perception of the teacher's role as guide, counsellor, informer and evaluator

The acceptance of student diversity and their perception as autonomous learners

A need to respect learner styles, teaching styles and translator styles

Acceptance of recent research results on emotional intelligence and its implications on learning outcomes

Catering for the specific needs of students with little experience in the translation world

Learning through negotiation in a classroom environment functioning as a combination of a hands-on workshop and a discussion forum on translation issues.

A key-concept in the creation of the appropriate learning environment is motivation and self-confidence development since translation is understood as a communicative and team activity and, consequently, it is essential that students feel their work is highly appreciated and accepted. Interaction could provide a stimulus for learner motivation and autonomy development so that the silent learner can become an active participant and individual work and reflection are not left aside. Motivation is also related to course content selection and the extent to which it corresponds to students' interests, prior knowledge and experience. Class material should also reflect progression in content, starting with content related to students' prior knowledge and progressing to content with which they had no previous experience.

The teacher has a key role to play and parameters such as his personality and motivation to teach, as well as his academic and professional background shape to a high degree the learning environment. In an interactive context, he is not only a lecturer, but also a guide, counsellor and someone who can identify with the students' feelings. As Underhill (1999) puts it:

when the Lecturer (concerned only with the subject matter, discovers that this is not enough and so develops vertically through a new interest in methodology, becoming a Teacher, and then again when the Teacher experiences the need for further growth and seeks the interpersonal expertise and awareness which lead to becoming a Facilitator.

Gonzàles- Davies (2004) suggests some of the main aspects to be considered by the teacher that will have an effect on the student's learning rate (speed at which learning takes place) and learning route (way of learning). The following parameters concern not only the mental but also the emotional aspects of the learning process in order to achieve a most positive and rewarding learning outcome (Gonzàles-Davies, 2004: 37):

students' background, both personal and professional

students' learning style that can be accessed upon research on models of learning styles and models of intelligent and emotional intelligence

students' attitude on the concept of translation profession, their motivation for studying translation and their self-concept as translators

students' aptitudes, including their various abilities and mental framework such as ability to apply different translation strategies, reading and writing proficiency and problem potting and solving skill.

student type that will influence the pedagogical orientation and the possible related

translator types.⁴

9. Activities and tasks

As far as the specific activities and tasks are concerned, Nunan (1989) suggests that translation classes adapt to students by applying a number of different pedagogical approaches, laying the emphasis on either the pedagogic or on real life activities, depending mainly on the level studies, undergraduate or postgraduate. Pedagogic activities would help students develop the different skills so as to perform according to professional standards, while tasks and projects that

⁴ According to Ellis (1985), there are four student types: active, passive, experiential and studial while the ideal student should demonstrate characteristics of all four. Campbell (1998) also distinguishes between two basic characteristics of student personality: disposition and proficiency. Disposition is related to psychological qualities that involve two personality traits: risk-taking versus prudent and perseverant versus capitulating, while proficiency is related to developmental skills. The interaction of the two produces one type of translator or another.

imitate professional assignments are real life assignments that would help them obtain authentic professional experience.

Additionally, the activities and tasks assigned to students should aim at helping teachers make out the characteristics of their students' personality. In particular, they should help them: a. reflect on their self-concept as translators and develop their level of self-awareness, b. overcome personal and professional constraints, c. develop their self-confidence and provide them with strong motives, d. make them more autonomous problem solvers, d. understand the different aspects involved in the translation assignment and reader acceptance of the translated product.

The activities suggested below aim at initiating students in the real world of professional translation and helping them handle better the psychological tense and stress felt as future translators since one of their sources of anxiety is lack of familiarity with various aspects of the translator's profession.

10. Translation projects

Translation project assignment, authentic or pedagogical, that will enable students to engage either in pedagogic or professional activities and provide them with the opportunity to collaborate towards an end product. Gouadec (2000) suggests the so-called "situational" or "project-based approach" where a student group assumes responsibility for an authentic translation task, coming across translation problems in an authentic context. In projects, different aspects of translation competence are practiced, related both to aptitude and attitude. The translator's attitude involves the emotional and psychological aspects of translation while aptitudes relate to the subcompetences necessary for the translator's profession and two other features, the professional know-how and an understanding of subjectivity. Professional know-how refers to the translator's ability to manage all constraints they will probably encounter at work and to develop marketing skills. While, the translator's subjectivity is directly related to the psychological aspect of translation and to emotional and intrapersonal intelligence development. The previous factors are reflected in each student's learning and translating style, ranging, according to Campbell's terminology (1991) from risk-taking to prudent, perseverant or capitulating attitudes.

11. Team work activities

Team work activities could promote collaborative learning offering to students an important social and personal experience in order to improve their interpersonal skills. Kelly (2004) suggests a number of techniques that could be used with small groups in translator training such as: a. buzz groups which concern a brief debate on an issue in a group of two or three and reporting back to the whole class, b. peer tutoring which involves student and learning from one another, thus, taking advantage from of different prior knowledge within a class group, c. role play that involves role assignment to students to simulate professional situations and d.

cross-over groups that involves groups which break up and re-form in a different composition in order to transfer ideas among different groups.

12. Oral presentations

Oral presentations assignment on a theoretical aspect of translation allowing students to develop the ability of public speaking and their presentation skills which are much demanded by employers and therefore should be acquired in translator training programmes.

13. Assessment methods

Assessment is undoubtedly an essential part of the teaching and learning process and in the translator's profession as well. However, despite its importance translator performance assessment is an activity which, is according to Hatim and Mason (1997) "under-researched and under-discussed". Some alternative methods to traditional assessment techniques are peer assessment, self-assessment and assessment by external experts.

Peer assessment involves assessment by other students allowing them both to receive feedback from fellow students and to provide their comments on other students' work. Thus, they can benefit by developing their critical ability as well their ability to justify their decisions to their peers.

Self-assessment involves the process of students evaluating themselves of their own work. The particular technique initiates students to the process of self-evaluating their work as professionals which constitutes a crucial skill in the translator's profession.

Assessment in group activity where a research question is put to students' members of a group and the results are evaluated either by another group of students or the teacher. External assessment which involves bringing in professional translators to provide occasionally feedback to translation students' work. Trainees come this way into contact with professional criteria for quality assessment contrasting them with those applied in an academic context. This kind of assessment could be, if used in an advanced level of studies, highly motivating to translation students.

Conclusions

The important aspect that the present study has attempted to highlight is the need for more interdisciplinary work within the field of Translation Studies, hoping that closer collaboration between psychology research and translation research could lead to the advancement of professional translator education. Psychology can benefit translator training by making an important contribution to understanding the psychological factors that affect translators as professionals and help them become self-reliant with appropriate aptitudes and attitudes towards the translator's profession.

This could be done by placing the translator in focus in the design of translator training programmes and by bringing together translation process research and translation psychology research. Understanding the human psychology will definitely help us to understand how translators behave and work in particular situations. In this respect, psychological and pedagogical flexibility are essential while a one-track approach will discourage students to develop in full their translation personality and competences.

Effective learning could be attained by a combination of learner autonomy and group work that would encourage students overcome their fears and psychological stress when faced with difficulties in handling a translation assignment, both as trainees and as future translators. Translator training should aim at helping translation students become not only competent, but also autonomous, self-confident professionals, able to handle each new translation situation with their own personal ideas and problem-solving strategies. Collaboration could be seen as a fundamental concept of effective learning environment ensuring their autonomy not only as professionals but also as life-long learners and helping them handle the psychological tension as learners and mostly as future translators. Collaborative action could also involve students joining teachers in research concerning teaching processes and in designing their own learning environment, encouraging them to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning that will certainly help them to develop their self-autonomy as language mediation professionals.

To summarize, by teaching translation competences to students on the basis of an interaction of cognitive, emotional and social factors, we can guide them from the beginning of their studies toward an understanding of the translation process that is shared by professional translators. In Robinson's (1991: 260) words:

Translators are never, and should never be forced to be (or to think of themselves as) neutral, impersonal transferring devices. Translators' personal experience – emotions, motivations, attitudes, associations- are not only allowable in the formation of a working TL text, they are indispensable.

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