

# **REVISION AND TIME CONSTRAINTS IN TRANSLATION**

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## **Summary**

We are going to carry out a series of experiments aimed at collecting data about the reactions of translators to time pressure and then evaluate the output with the help of expert revisers to see whether the quality of the translations correlate with the amount of time the informants were given to make them. This idea is based on the pilot project, presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Diploma of Advanced Studies.

**Keywords:** translation process, revision, time constraints, Translog, eye-tracking

## **Research problem**

We have carried out the pilot study aiming at the examination of the effect of time pressure on the translation process as a whole and on revision in particular. The project was small-scaled and was conducted with a view to working out the methodology for the thesis. It consisted in the analysis of the screen recording of two texts being translated by two translators.

However, we made surprising findings concerning the quality of the final product: translating under time pressure seems to yield a higher quality output. These findings correspond with Lorenzo's (2002), who discovered that the more time the students spent on revision, the worse the final output was.

This made us change the initial idea for the research project: now we want to investigate the correlation between time constraints and the quality of final output. Of course, this does not mean that we are no longer interested in the translation process as such. Discovering the underlying mechanisms of this process is crucial for explaining why this happens.

## **Literature review**

The translation process is not easy to define as it is very complex. Malmkjær (2000: 163) states that:

'translation process' may be used to designate a variety of phenomena, from the cognitive processes activated during translating, both conscious and unconscious, to the more 'physical'

process which begins when a client contacts a translation bureau and ends when that person declares satisfaction with the product produced as the final result of the initial inquiry.

House (2000: 150) emphasizes that “we are dealing here not with an isolable process but rather with a set of processes, a complex series of problem-solving and decision-making processes”. These processes have been described and classified in various ways. Here we would like to present the classification we are going to use in our research.

According to Brian Mossop (2000: 40), the **three phases** of translation production are:

- (1) pre-drafting (before sentence-by-sentence drafting begins)
- (2) drafting
- (3) post-drafting (after sentence-by-sentence drafting is complete)

And within these phases there are **five tasks** to be performed:

- (1) Interpret the source text.
- (2) Compose the translation.
- (3) Conduct the research needed for tasks 1 and 2.
- (4) Check the draft translation for errors and correct if necessary.
- (5) Decide the implications of the commission: how do the intended users and uses of the finished product affect tasks 1 to 4?

The distinction that he makes between phases and tasks is what makes his model different from others, because the latter imply that the tasks are somehow inherent to the nature of the phases, while for Mossop the important factor is the distribution of the tasks over the phases, as “[e]ach task can be performed during any phase (with the exception of task 4, which cannot occur during phase 1)”. The main problem for Mossop is that “we do not know, and need to know, [...] *how translators distribute the tasks over the phases*” (2000: 40; emphasis in the original).

On the basis of this division, the translation process can be analyzed in detail and translating styles can be identified. This classification of translating styles was originally devised by Chandler (1993) for writing styles in general and then adopted by Mossop for translating (2000 and 2001):

<b>Task/phase: writing strategy</b>	<b>Planning / pre-drafting</b>	<b>Revising / drafting or post-drafting</b>
Architect	Major	Minimal, after drafting
Bricklayer	Major	Major, after drafting

Watercolourist	Minimal	Minimal, during drafting
Oil Painter	Minimal	Major, during & after drafting

**Table 1. Mossop's classification of translating styles (2000, 2001)**

Identifying these styles and finding out their correlation with the quality of the translational output and with the reaction to time pressure is an important part of our research.

As for the previous research on the translation process, we would like to mention a few studies that are especially relevant to our object of study.

Asadi and Séguinot's 2005 study "Shortcuts, strategies and general patterns in a process study of nine professionals" seems to be the embodiment of the research on the translation process Mossop (2000) longed for. It analyses the translation into L1 (two from French to English and seven from English to French) of pharmaceutical texts by nine translators working in this field. Screen recording and TAPs are used as the methods of data collection.

Special attention is given to the distribution of time across the three translation phases: pre-drafting, drafting and post-drafting. Two different approaches are identified that correspond to Mossop's (2000 and 2001) 'architect' and 'watercolourist': some translators planned their translation before entering it on the screen, and made little on-line revision; others translated and revised almost simultaneously.

The distribution of translation tasks such as production, documentation and revision over the phases also differed significantly. Some left most documentation and revision work until the post-drafting phase, while others just monitored the translation during the last phase, but did not introduce any major changes. Mossop (2007: 15) emphasizes that "this difference is regularly reported by professionals attending self-revision workshops". So these findings can be used as evidence of the existence of various translating styles.

Jakobsen (2002) is interested in detecting differences in the distribution of time over the phases of translation in the groups of four non-professionals (4 students of translation) and four professionals. All were native-speakers of Danish, but Jakobsen introduced a new variable making them translate two texts into L1 and two into L2. The difference between the texts translated into L1 and L2 was a greater amount of revision during the drafting phase when working into L2.

It took the professionals less time than the students to complete the drafting phase, but surprisingly, they spent more time on the post-drafting phase, while introducing fewer changes. This might serve as evidence that successful translators tend to use the same translation style (e.g. 'architect').

Künzli's 2007 study on the revision of a legal text that gives a general idea of the significance of time in the translation process. Ten professional translators revised a legal text. The evaluation of their revision work was made by a teacher of legal translation with degrees in both translation and law.

In the final evaluation of the revisions Künzli uses the same system Arthern (1983, 1987) applied for the assessment of the translators that worked under him in the former Council of the European Communities: all changes are classified into justified, unnecessary, changes that introduced errors, and necessary changes that were not made. Unlike Arthern, who only sums up the reviser's flaws, Künzli subtracts them from the total number of justified changes. With this formula only three of the ten subjects had more good changes than bad changes or failures to change. Four of the ten only worsened the draft translation, an alarming finding confirmed by other studies.

As for the time, the two translators who spent the most time made the two best revisions. This seems logical, but then a surprising fact is discovered: the next two translators who spent the most time turned out to make the worst revised versions. This demonstrates that spending a lot of time on revision does not necessarily produce a high quality text.

Related to this is María Pilar Lorenzo's 2002 empirical study that demonstrated that the more time the students spent on revision, the worse was the final output.

And, finally, Astrid Jensen's (2001) doctoral thesis *The effects of time on cognitive processes and strategies in translation* is one of the most comprehensive studies on time in translation. She analyses the translation process in terms of the distribution of time and tasks over the phases on the basis of the translations made by three groups of translators (non-professionals, young translators and expert translators). Each subject had to translate 4 texts with time constraints of 10, 15, 20 and 30 minutes, the latter regarded as virtual lack of time pressure.

Jensen is interested in the application of Bereiter and Scardamalia's models of Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Transforming to translation, predicting that Knowledge Telling model will be used almost exclusively for translation under time

pressure. She finds evidence for this hypothesis on the basis of the analysis of the TAPs and *Translog* protocols.

In his doctoral thesis “La traducción, contra reloj: Consecuencias de la presión por falta de tiempo en el proceso de traducción”, de Rooze carries out a pilot experiment with students (large groups of 30 students every academic year from 1999 to 2002) and two definitive experiments with students and professionals using *Translog* and retrospective questionnaires.

The findings are the following (2003: 100):

- “Si hay que traducir más de 200 palabras por 10 minutos, la calidad desciende en más de un 15%”.
- “Hay una clara tendencia a cometer errores en el texto justo después (100%) de otro error, coincidiendo, además las pausas con el error (77,2%)”.
- “Algunos estudiantes trabajan mejor bajo presión de tiempo y parece haber una correlación con las calificaciones”.

The first one is of special interest to us in view of the future research. The third finding might be indicative of the existence of different translating styles, some of which are more robust, which is one of the new hypotheses we formulate (see below).

## **Hypotheses**

The first three hypotheses are the ones we worked on in the pilot project: we believe that time constraints will affect the translation process in two ways:

1. Time pressure will affect the distribution of time over the three translation phases, especially the pre-drafting and post-drafting phases.
2. Time pressure will affect the distribution of translation tasks over the translation phases, especially revision and documentation.
3. Time pressure will affect different subjects in different ways, indicating thus their translating styles.

The others have been formulated on the basis of the new findings:

4. Translations done under time pressure tend to be of better quality than those done without any time constraints.
5. There are limit values of time after reaching which the quality of the final output would go down. In other words, there is a point of diminishing returns.
6. Some translation styles are more robust in the sense that they handle time pressure significantly better than others.

In order to define the limit values, we would need to carry out a different kind of experiment with a series of exercises as Jensen (2001) did. We should also notice that our findings were on the basis of translations made by students, which were categorized as non-professionals. Perhaps the situation would be different had the experiment involved professional translators. So our final hypothesis concerns this issue:

7. Professionals deploy more robust strategies (as defined in terms of a point of diminishing returns), comprising differences in time distribution, translation tactics employed and the reaction to time constraints between professionals and non-professionals.

## **Research methodology**

Various methods of data collection will be used in our project allowing us to triangulate the data and get the most exact measurements possible. These methods are questionnaires, retrospective TAPs, *Translog*, screen recording and eye-tracking.

The questionnaires will be used to get information about the informant's background, experience and normal practices.

TAPs have been used in Translation Studies for studying different groups of subjects, language pairs and aspects of the translation process. These studies have yielded many interesting insights into the mental translation process, but doubts persist regarding their experimental validity.

In general, there are some serious doubts as to its correlation with real mental processes going on in a translator's mind. Also, Ericsson and Simon (1993/1984: 15) admit that unconscious automated mental processes cannot be verbalized. This was thought to have important implications for research on professionals vs. novices (Börsch 1986; Krings 1986; Séguinot 1989). Research has demonstrated that professionals, while automatizing routine tasks, are more aware of higher-level problems (Krings 1988).

Ericsson and Simon's assumption that concurrent verbalization does not interfere with the cognitive process (1993/1984: 78-107) is quite disputable. Jakobsen (2003) demonstrated that use of concurrent TAPs results in a slow-down (by about 25%) and break-down of the cognitive processes.

One solution to this problem would be the use of retrospective TAPs, which was also suggested in Ericsson and Simon's survey. Proponents of this method argue that it "present[s] an alternative for the studies of cognitive processes in translation" (Buchweitz and Alves 2006: 243). Retrospective TAPs is one of the methods of data collection that we are planning to use in further research on translation processes.

*Translog* was created after some years of exclusive use of TAPs in translation process research to respond to "the need felt for quantitative reinforcement of assumptions about translating based on qualitative data only" (Jakobsen 1999: 11). *Translog* is a perfect instrument for eliciting all kinds of textual information, and it has been successfully used in translation research for about a decade. We are going to employ this program in order to avoid extremely time-consuming coding of the data. However, *Translog* has little to say about the processes taking place during the pause.

Screen recording is an invaluable instrument when combined with *Translog* as it affords an excellent opportunity to see what happens on the screen in each moment. Extra-textual activities like looking up words in electronic dictionaries or Internet searches can be followed.

But we would like to go still further and use eye-tracking equipment for the experiments. It allows us to get insight into the translation process as there is a firm link between cognitive effort and eye movement, and in particular, between cognitive effort and pupil dilation (O'Brien 2006: 186). Gaze direction gives valuable information regarding the processes taking place and serves as a support of the claim that translation process is not linear.

## **Research material**

As for the subjects of the experiments, we are planning to involve a number of informants that would allow us to make some generalizations. Besides, they will represent at least two groups: professionals and non-professionals. However, adding a group of semi-professionals would give us better insight into the development of translation competence. There have been various criteria for classifying informants into

professionals (from fifth-year students to translators with more than 10-year experience). We are going to be very rigorous in this aspect. Translation students will be regarded as non-professionals, even though an additional division can be made between first- or second-year students and fifth-year or Masters students. Semi-professionals will be translators who possess two to five years of professional experience, and, finally, professionals will be those with ten years of experience or more.

Getting access to students is relatively easy. As the Universitat Rovira i Virgili does not have undergraduate programs in Translation, we will need to cooperate with other universities. The first choice is the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, as there are programs in Translation on both undergraduate and postgraduate level and carrying out experiments there does not require high travelling expenses. Another option is the Universidad de Granada, because of a great number of students studying Translation there and active researchers affiliated with this university. The number of non-professionals will be at least 6 per group, which we'll intend to make as homogeneous as possible.

In both cases, the combination of languages would be L2 into L1, with L1 being Spanish and L2 English. However, we do not exclude a possibility to work with L2 other than English, which would make our findings more generalizable.

The combination of languages chosen for the experiments with students would define the combination used with professionals. It has been stated in more than one occasion that accessing professionals can be a hard task. Keeping it in mind, we have decided to contact Spanish and Catalan associations of translators offering them free seminars on revision and translation process with a possibility to carry out the experiment. We hope that the number of professionals per group will be at least the same as that of students.

The type and difficulty of the text is another important issue. It is obvious that the results would not be the same if a general and a specialized text were used. Even though it would be more interesting and, perhaps, more important for the benefit of the practitioners to work with specialized text, we have decided to start with a general text posing no specific terminological difficulties to begin with. In this way, we control the variable of familiarity. The length of the texts will be of 250 words, typical for many translation tests. It is long enough to present a coherent piece of information, and short enough to allow using it in a series of exercises.

We are going to work with the same time constraints Jensen (2001) did, i.e., 10, 15, 20 and 30 minutes. However, we are going to work in reverse order starting with 30 minutes.

### **Expected results**

We hope to confirm the findings from the pilot study. Even if the findings based on the pilot study are discarded when compared with a larger bulk of data, this would bring us closer to the understanding of the translation process.

### **Expected benefits**

One of the most ambitious aims of this project is to be able to offer some suggestions for better practice on the basis of empirical data. Of course, it is hard to change the style one works in, but if there is evidence that one or the other mode of translating is more effective, this would make life of many a translator easier.

The findings could also be used in translator training either to provide students with more precise recommendations or to plan more effectively the curriculum and examinations with relation to time pressure.

### **Transfer of results**

We are going to disseminate the results of the experiments and our findings through international conferences and renowned journals dedicated to Translation studies like *Meta*, *Target*, *Across Languages and Cultures*, *The Translator*, etc. we hope that the thesis be published in a form of a book to facilitate access to it by other researchers.

### **Financial needs and resources**

We hope to be able to get students and professionals participate in the experiments on voluntary basis without remuneration. If it is not possible, we will pay the professionals according to the standard fees. As for the opportunity of the stay in Copenhagen, kindly offered by Professor Arnt Jakobsen, we hope that the travel expenses be covered by a travel grant from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili.

## Work schedule

In the second semester of this academic year, we are going to perform a literature review, especially in the field of quality assessment, errors classification, text difficulty classification, etc.

Having established the criteria for text selection and evaluation of the translations, we are going to carry out the first part of the experiment involving students. This can also be done during the second semester of this academic year.

In summer we are planning to go on a research visit to Copenhagen Business School, where eye-tracking equipment is available. Afterwards, a series of experiments with professionals will be carried out.

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