

Joanna Albin

The Reflective Translator

Strategies and Affects
of Self-directed Professionals

Warschauer Studien zur Germanistik
und zur Angewandten Linguistik

Herausgegeben von Sambor Grucza
und Lech Kolago



PETER LANG
EDITION

Introduction

“Never let your schooling interfere with your education.”

Attributed to Mark Twain

Translation Studies is a relatively young discipline, which is still struggling to define its own methodological approaches and even the object of its study, but despite this it has been broadly discussed for the last decades. The topics that used to interest TS scholars were translation competence, cognitive processing in translation, text typologies, the author’s vs. translator’s status, equivalence and fidelity, intercultural mediation, as well as translation as a communicative act. Most of these topics are based on the implicit belief that the translation is an important but accessory activity, in which the translator’s role is to protect “third party” interests. The latter are either the author of the original text or the reader of the translation, as well as their respective cultures. Concurrently, conceptions derived from linguistics tried to reconcile these conflicting aspects by seeking an ideal and stable equivalence, while the sense oriented schools turned towards the actual context of the communicative act. Furthermore, *Skopos* theory pointed to the commissioner as a legitimate participant in the translation process. From among numerous studies, only a few posed the question as to who the translator really is. Most of them focused on the translator’s professionalism and ethics, recognising her authority and empowering her to act in situations of mediation or even conflict. However, they mostly maintain the prescriptive nature and disregard the workaday reality of a translators’ job.

In this book I offer the results of a study which examines aspects of translation activity which have largely been ignored. Beyond translation competence, none of these have been studied systematically within Translation Studies, which led me to take advantage of considerable research by both psychologists and pedagogues. Consequently, in many respects the present work constitutes an exploratory study, which will hopefully serve as a basis for future research. Regarding the conceptual design, it is informed by the Social Cognitive Theory and certain other conceptions developed within the fields of psychology and pedagogy. Data elicitation was accomplished by means of a questionnaire based on retrospection and introspection. The integration of the experiences and intuitions of mine and

my colleagues, allowed for a coherent research study to be designed, based on the principle of intersubjectivity.

The study was undertaken in Poland, where even now, at the beginning of the 21st century, translators receive their training mainly as part of philology courses. This is true for all languages, but is particularly acute in the case of less popular languages such as Spanish. The author herself, a largely self-taught translator and translator trainer, belongs to the generation whose training in universities were sadly of little, if any, benefit. Although university studies did not provide translators with the necessary skills, many of them continued in their professional capacity, which was understood to be the result of self-directed learning processes.

Thus, the main objective of this study was to confirm the hypothesis concerning self-directed learning, which was found to be common among active professionals. However, as learning processes occur simultaneously with the realisation of everyday tasks, I was interested in the numerous behavioural, personal and environmental influences. I assume that they reverberate, by means of processes that are still researched within psychology and other disciplines in the humanities, in a translator's emotions, self-concept, motivations and decisions. Thus, translators seem to be not only agents of their own education, but, in a sense, also "products" of translation operations. In describing translators, I put forward the image of a more human, empathic and warm individual whose role has been seen, at best, as an objective, machine-like professional, and at worst, as a usurper that fails to meet the ideal competence standards and is burdened with her capricious black-box processes.

Thus, the study is translator-centred and all the additional data are analysed from her perspective. This additional data belongs to three areas: specialisation and the market, qualifications and competence, and affects and attitudes. Moreover, a general description of translators' specific self-directed learning strategies is provided. Textual operations, in turn, which have been traditionally investigated in Translation Studies, are not examined.

I hope that my results may not only cast some light on the learning processes outside educational institutions, but also contribute to the well-being and prestige of as well as support for professional translators.

Overview of the contents

Chapter 1 summarises the array of theoretical conceptions which I considered relevant to the study design and the interpretation of results. The vast majority of them are taken from the fields of Developmental Psychology, Personality Psychology, Learning Theories and Cognitive Sciences. I was particularly interested in those which have been applied to Pedagogy (1.1 and 1.2), studies on motivation and affect (1.3), expert performance (1.4) and self-directed learning (1.5).

Chapter 2 deals particularly with the concept that occupies translator trainers: translation competence. I evaluate the different theoretical contributions and attempt to track the historical changes of the concept. I focus on those definitions which emphasise the social, affective and metacognitive aspects of translation profession (2.1). Further on, I attempt to locate the concept of translation competence within a broader context of the contemporary market and society, seeking to understand particular conditions which are likely to determine translators' education in the short- and medium-term (2.2). The final section examines epistemic principles that dominate research on translation to sufficiently justify my methodological decisions (2.3).

In Chapter 3, the main objectives and detailed aims of the study are stated and research hypotheses formulated.

Chapter 4 describes methodological procedures in detail. I examine the principles of epistemological constructivism, define the universe and the study sample, and describe the elicitation questionnaire used to gather data from translators. To facilitate the reading of the results, statistical tools and logic applied to data analysis are briefly described.

Chapter 5 looks at the results of the study. Since the data obtained are interrelated, the analysis progresses from a simple data presentation to complex profiles that weave together several factors. Depending on whether the attempted analysis yields significant results, new procedures and measurement instruments have been created. The subsequent sections deal with demographic data (5.1), an evaluation of the market (5.2), an evaluation of education (5.3), self-efficacy (5.4), affective factors (5.5) and learning strategies (5.6).

In chapter 6 I discuss and evaluate the study results. Research hypotheses are being verified and some conclusions based on the results are suggested. Since

the present study has an explorative character, suggestions on future research are offered in numerous places.

The book concludes with a reference list and the appendix, which include some of the generated charts, tables and other statistical material, cross-references to which have been placed within the text.