TRAINING THE TRANSLATOR

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To Gertrud

Contents

Introduction

On 30 June 1993, a round table discussion took place at the Department of Applied Linguistics in Germersheim, University of Mainz (Germany) at which translators and interpreters are trained. The subject of the discussion was the state of the market for professional translators. Among the issues raised were the nature and range of qualifications which a translator needed in order to cope with the tasks awaiting him. The participants, all of them professional translators, agreed that translators should be well-informed about special fields such as car-manufacturing, computer technology, and the law, and experts in the associated terminology. Also, they should have a near native-speaker competence in two, possibly three, foreign languages. Interestingly, at one point in the discussion, the chairman of a regional translators' association got up and maintained that a knowledge of linguistics and translation theory was in fact completely useless and would not help translators at all in their everyday work.

In a way, the last statement is typical of many people in the profession, and indeed of quite a number of teachers of translation. At the root of it is the idea that an engineer, lawyer or businessman/woman with a reasonable knowledge of foreign languages and a few good dictionaries at his or her disposal will be able to translate. What these people fail to see is that there is a distinction between factual knowledge and procedural knowledge, a distinction which was first brought to our notice some time ago by Wolfram Wilss, and more recently in Wilss 1993. Factual knowledge, i.e. knowledge of special fields, special terminology and foreign languages, is undoubtedly an essential requirement for translators. But it is not enough. We often come across texts involving experts sharing the same language which are hard to understand, even by other experts, because these texts lack for instance a coherent logical structure or fail to rouse and hold the reader's interest. The people who produced these texts knew what they were writing about, but they did not sufficiently know how to write. In the same way, translators must know *how* to translate. Translation, to put it briefly, is not just an exchange of words and structures, but a communicative process that takes into consideration the reader of the translation within a particular situation within a specific culture. People engaged in translation studies are trying to describe just how this process works.

Fortunately translation studies are not always faced with misunderstanding and opposition. There seems to be a growing awareness all over the world that

we need methods for training translators, and that these methods should be concerned with the actual process of translation. Scholars of translation studies have been asked to talk about their methods not only in translator training institutions of Western and Eastern Europe and the Western World, but also in Middle Eastern Countries, India, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Thailand, South America and Africa. Translations have always been produced in these countries but it is now felt that the training of translators should be institutionalised and given a sound methodological basis.

Another sign of a positive attitude toward translation studies and of a growing awareness of the importance of the subject for translator training is the foundation of The European Society for Translation Studies (EST) in Vienna in 1992, which among other things, as stated in its constitution, offers consulting services on topics involving translation and interpreting and the teaching and training of these skills.

The present book fits in with this newer, method-oriented tradition. Accordingly, I shall not be concerned with the presentation of straightforward factual knowledge, nor shall I discuss how best to teach a foreign language, or specialised subject-areas or cultural studies. Furthermore, no attempt will be made to consider what details should be taught in these fields, although the proper selection of detailed knowledge is an important topic in translator training, and some improvements could certainly be made in this area. Instead, in this work the aim will be to explore various aspects of the methodology of translation.

It has been said that translation studies are not just concerned with matters of language alone but represent an interdisciplinary field, a view which for instance became apparent in the title of a congress in Vienna on September 9-12, 1992 *Translation Studies - An Interdiscipline* (Snell-Hornby et al. 1994). Certainly, in order to train specialists in technology, law, economics and medicine not only does the terminology of these disciplines have to be taught but also to some extent their scientific methods. To this end, we must look outside the confines of language in translator and interpreter training. Also, for the actual investigation of the translation process we cannot restrict ourselves to linguistics alone. The investigation of comprehension and production processes involves not only linguistic but also psychological, at least psycholinguistic and possibly also neurophysiological, knowledge and methods. Translating literary texts involves literary studies, and investigating creativity in translation involves the findings of creativity research.

It seems that the translation process is such a vast topic that one may feel discouraged even to begin looking at it. I shall therefore restrict myself for economy's sake. My approach still draws predominantly on linguistics, more specifically on psycholinguistics and textlinguistics. Within psycholinguistics I

make use of such notions as bottom-up and top-down processing, activation of semantic features, prototypes, and scenes and frames. The notion of text linguistics favoured in this book includes the pragmatic dimension, that is to say the relation of the text to the author and to the reader of the text. Special emphasis is laid on the methods and models of descriptive stylistics, speech act theory, text-typology and functional sentence perspective. When talking about creativity in the second Chapter I shall include some of the basic concepts that have been developed by creativity research.

In the first Chapter, I begin by looking at the problems that students have when translating. In doing this, use is made of certain empirical methods which have been developed. Error Analysis and Think-aloud protocols are discussed and some findings made by myself and others on students' approaches are presented. Since no large-scale investigations have been carried out so far, these findings are still rather inconclusive. Nevertheless, it does not seem unreasonable to me to use them as a starting point for suggesting ways of helping our students to overcome the difficulties they have when they translate. Moreover, the presentation of the think-aloud-protocol-approach may stimulate teachers of translation who read this book to try this method with their own students. In the first Chapter the book may look somewhat error-biased and schoolmasterly. In order to counterbalance this impression, the second Chapter looks at successful translation processes observed in students, and specifically where processes involving creativity are concerned.

Ways to help our students form the topic of the following chapters. I begin with the most comprehensive frame of reference, pragmatic analysis (Chapter 3), and then proceed to discuss the most common source of translation problem, word meaning (Chapter 4). Topics which are more specifically pedagogical are then explored: the use of dictionaries (Chapter 5); the evaluation of translations and grading of errors (Chapter 6). Finally, there is a summary of strategy tips teachers can give their students and of tips on the grading of errors teachers can use for their marking of translations (Chapter 7).

The book is aimed at teachers of translation who are interested in explaining translation in a rational way. One may, of course, hold the opinion that translating is an intuitive process inspired, perhaps, by the translator's creative gift. But can we teach intuition? We may be able to create an atmosphere favourable to intuition. But when it comes to deciding which of the various ideas that have come to our minds should be chosen, intuition will have to be counterbalanced by reflection, at least if we want to carry conviction with our students. We cannot really hope to rely on arguments of the type, "This is a better translation because I feel it is better." What our students need are rational arguments which, as far as possible, are based on objective principles. Professional translators should know what they are doing, and should be able to talk about it

with those who commission translations and with those whose translations they have to supervise or revise. It is the rational approach which distinguishes the expert from the non-expert.

The book, as has been stated, is intended for teachers of translation - primarily. But why should not students read it as well? They might well be able to learn a good deal about translation on their own. Also, after reading the book they may become more like equals to their teachers in discussions. I hope their teachers will appreciate this.

Chapter 1

What goes on in the translator's mind?

1.1 Types of empirical research

How can we teach translation? All of us who are involved in the training of professional translators will have more or less explicit answers to this question. Many of us will refer to our teaching experience and will be able to list a number of problems and suggest ways of dealing with them. And some of us will be able to refer to a theoretical and methodological framework for their practical teaching.

Nevertheless, those of us who are honest will occasionally have asked ourselves: do we really put enough emphasis on the right areas? Or could it be that we stress problems which are not problems for our students after all, and that we actually disregard areas where they encounter difficulties? And has it ever crossed our minds that our students might perhaps have found ways of dealing with problems which we may never have thought of and which, if they are successful, may serve as models for our teaching.

In order to find out more about what goes on in our students' minds, translation teaching ought to be based on data-based research. To my knowledge, there are two of these approaches, product-oriented and process-oriented ones (cf. Toury 1991:45ff.). I shall deal with these approaches in some detail because teachers of translation may want to do their own research.

There is product-oriented error analysis and translation quality assessment. It can be divided into three steps, description of errors (looking at the symptoms), finding the reasons for the errors (diagnosis), and pedagogical help (therapy). The criteria for error description are prospective, i.e. we try to describe the effect the translation, given a specific purpose, produces on the reader. Errors could, for instance, be described as "unjustified narrowing down of the meaning of words, insufficient stylistic precision, lack of textual cohesion" etc. These descriptions form the basis for the grading of errors. I shall discuss this topic in detail in Chapter 6 on "evaluation and errors".

Looking for the reasons of errors has been one of the main concerns of foreign language teaching pedagogy. It is generally assumed that when learning a foreign language we get a mixture of mother tongue and foreign language, a so-called "interlanguage", on the basis of which some errors can be explained

(cf. Corder 1973:145ff., 284ff.). They usually result from interferences in a very broad sense as when the learner transfers the phonological, grammatical or lexical system of his mother tongue onto the foreign language. For instance, for the distinction between cognitive and empirical knowledge there are two verbs in German, *wissen* and *kennen,* but in English there is only one verb, *know*. We will therefore not be surprised when an English speaker learning German produces the sentence: *Er kennt nicht was er tun soll* instead of *Er weiß nicht, was er tun soll* (cf. Corder 1973:285).

As teachers of translation we can make use of the interlanguage approach when students translate into the foreign language. But at a more advanced stage these "linguistic" types of errors will decrease, and when translating into the mother tongue they will be comparatively rare anyway. This does not mean, however, that there will not be errors any more. There will still be stylistic errors, errors where the situation of the target readers has not been sufficiently considered, and there will always be errors of comprehension. For these types of errors foreign language error analysis has as yet little to offer. Moreover, diagnoses based on errors are largely speculative, because we can only infer what went on in the translator's mind. Our expectations and guesses may coincide with reality, i.e. with what happens in the translation process, but there are also the well-known cases when we find mistakes in our students' translations which are explained to us by our students in a completely different manner from the way we would have explained them on the basis of our error analysis.

The fact that by looking at the product we can at best speculate about the process that led up to it does not seem to be clear to all who write about this topic. Thus, Hatim and Mason (1990) seem to think that they can actually retrace the pathways of the translator's decision-making procedures by looking at the translated text (p.3/4). Bell (1991) when developing his model of the translation process seems to be aware of the need for introspection and conscious observation of the processes involved in translation in order to complement his model. Nevertheless he presents a model gained by working back from the output (the product) by the logical process of induction (Bell 1991:29, 267). I am not saying that as teachers and instructors we cannot make use of these approaches, but when adopting them we should not raise expectations which cannot be fulfilled. Their value lies not so much in the illumination of the mental processes in translation but rather in their pedagogical function. They can help us to put our students on the right path, as it were, and if they have lost their way these approaches can help them to get a clearer view of their destination again. It will be seen in this chapter that unsuccessful translation processes could, in fact, have been avoided if the translators had been aware and made use of the methods of text analysis and translation criticism while translating. I shall therefore deal with these approaches in more detail in the subsequent chapters.

In order to avoid errors we should prescribe a "therapy". We can advise our students to take courses in mother tongue usage in order to become more sensitive to the way they use their own language. We can also prescribe a remedial course in the foreign language in order to improve their foreign language competence. We can prescribe a course in text analysis in order to improve their understanding of the source text and help them with their decisions when translating it. However, therapies of this sort would be like trying to get someone to find their way through a fog unless we can guide their steps clearly, that is, point out more precisely how students produced their errors.

A new process-oriented approach has been developed recently in order to gain more immediate access to that notorious black box, the translator's mind. By adopting introspective methods from psychology, experiments have been carried out in which translators were asked to utter everything that went on in their minds while they were translating, and these monologues were tape recorded. These monologues are referred to as think-aloud protocols (TAPs). Such protocols have been analysed in order to classify translation strategies, with the pedagogical (diagnostic) aim of observing difficulties encountered by the students. The title of this chapter is, in fact, a translation of the title of the pioneering study in this field by Krings (cf. Krings 1986, cf. also House/Blum-Kulka 1986, Königs 1987, Lörscher 1986, 1991). Although by using TAPs we are "closer" to the translator's mind we still to some extent have to infer what goes on, as we shall see when analysing the protocols. There is no, and probably never will be, direct access to mental processes. But there is, I hope, an improvement by degree when analysing protocols instead of errors.

1.2 Methodological problems with think-aloud protocols

1.2.1 *Choice of subjects*

TAPs as methods of empirical research into the translation process proper have proved to be a bold step in the right direction and the results gained were often unexpected and sometimes surprising, but the first studies made do not really inform us about professional translating or, indeed, translating as it goes on in translator training institutions. The subjects of the experiments were foreign language students and translating for them was part of their foreign language learning curriculum. Thus the subjects were not told for whom they were supposed to translate, nor for what purpose, that is to say a translation assignment was completely missing. Moreover, they did not have any systematic instructions in how to deal with texts in order to translate them. In their curriculum translation was basically used for testing foreign language skills.

This lack of a methodological basis sometimes becomes painfully obvious in the decision-making strategies of the subjects, for instance of those used by Krings (1986a,b) in his first empirical study. They resorted to such naive principles as "If all competing potential equivalents turn out to be equally appropriate or inappropriate, take the most literal one!" or "Take the shortest one!" or "If one of the equivalents is to be found in the bilingual dictionary and the other one is not, take the one from the dictionary!" or "If all equivalents concerned are in the dictionary, take the one that precedes the others!" (Krings 1986b:273) With the methodological background they had, it is not surprising that the subjects came up with these bizarre principles. What is surprising, though, is that these "strategies", as he calls them, remain uncriticized by Krings. Krings and in fact many of the scholars engaged in protocol research seem to avoid judgements altogether in their studies. They do not link up the decision making strategies they observe with the resulting translations. Lörscher is aware of the fact "that what the subjects consider to be successful and what the analyst does often do not coincide" and that what subjects think to be good solutions apparently are translation errors (Lörscher 1992a:159). Nevertheless, he, in the same way as Krings, does not take this further step and combine analysis and evaluation. In my opinion, there is no reason for this kind of restraint. If we want to provide data for translation teaching, we cannot abstain from evaluating the translations which are produced at the end of the processes observable in the protocols. If the translations are unsatisfactory, then one may with some justification expect that the processes leading up to them are problematic too (cf. Hönig 1988b:11). If the translations are of high quality, the subjects will most likely have used appropriate strategies (cf. Jääskeläinen 1993:112).

It is one of the aims of my investigation to isolate such processes in order to find out where our students have problems and then to help them. This means that in my analysis of the various solution-finding processes I shall always link up process and product, that is I shall evaluate the translations eventually decided on by the subjects, and I shall use the model of communicative error analysis and translation quality assessment described in Chapter 6.

The obvious thing to do, therefore, seems to apply these introspective methods to students training to become professional translators, i.e. semi-professionals. There have been a number of studies of both professionals and semi-professionals recently (cf. Krings 1987, Hönig 1988b, Séguinot (ed.)1989, Kiraly 1990, Gerloff 1988, Lörscher 1992b), and in some of these, professional situations have been at least simulated, i.e. the subjects had had some training and the importance of the translation assignment was realized (cf. Jääskeläinen 1989, 1993 Tirkkonen 1989,1992, Hönig 1988b, Kiraly 1990). It was observed that there are indeed differences between professionals and semi-professionals on the one hand and non-professionals on the other in the way they produce

their translations. I shall refer to these studies when presenting my own observations made in seminars.

I am using semi-professionals for my protocols because they represent the typical student in institutions for professional translation training, that is to say a person who has acquired a methodological basis and a certain amount of translation competence but who faces nevertheless still a number of problems when translating. A semi-professional can be compared to a sailor who knows the direction in which he should steer his boat but finds it hard to keep the right course in stormy weather.

Moreover, I do not think there is such a big difference between professionals and semi-professionals. We are all semi-professionals to some extent. Although we may know all the necessary techniques and strategies, we still on occasion fail to make use of them. I have often observed advanced students, including myself, stubbornly sticking to a word, for instance, instead of looking for a paraphrase, and even if we are aware of all the necessary techniques, solutions do not just spring to mind. The reason seems to me that translation is not only a skill but also a problem-solving process. If translation were a skill like, say, driving a car, professionalism could be achieved once and for all. The correct actions for driving can be internalized, and then normal driving situations are mastered without any conscious mental effort. With problem-solving activities like translating, internalization of strategies and techniques is only part of the process. There will always be situations when we have to make a conscious effort, and it is in these situations that we often get the feeling that we are, alas, semi-professionals only.

Professionalism thus is a relative quality, and it might be argued that the distinction between the non-professionals used as subjects by Krings, Königs and Lörscher and the semi-professionals I used is a rather vague one. The distinction is indeed not of a qualitative but a quantitative nature. As Königs pointed out to me (private communication) there may be foreign language students (i.e. non-professionals) who solve problems in a similar way as semi-professionals, and there may be semi-professionals who have the same difficulties with their solution searching processes as non-professionals. Nevertheless, if subjects have been provided with translation strategies there is a greater chance that they will arrive at good solutions. And the instances where, in spite of a knowledge of strategies, they do not arrive at useful solutions will perhaps highlight the bigger problems.

In my analysis of the protocols I shall point out a few of the situations and problems which typically arise. Ideally, such an analysis should be statistically based. Since the corpora of protocols that have been used so far, including my own, are still rather small, it is perhaps too early to make use of statistics. It has been argued by Krings (private communication) that I am focussing on specific