

The translation process: from source text to target text

Gyde Hansen and the members of the CBS translation project

Research into the translation process

Communication, translation, and interpretation are three of the main educational goals at the Faculty of Languages at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS), the emphasis being on domain-specific texts. To promote research into translation and interpretation, which is of the utmost importance to maintain our high standards of education, a number of researchers from different departments at the CBS started a translation project in 1996.

The group consists of nine researchers from the departments of Spanish, English and German.¹ Most of the members have taught translation in various forms and guises for many years and closely followed the developments in the field of translation research. However, we felt that research in this area had produced few revolutionary results in the last decade. Furthermore, we found it strange that so much theoretical work was concerned with translation into the mother tongue and that many researchers who have constructed models of translation on the basis of findings produced by studies of translation into the mother tongue took it for granted that these could be generalised to apply to translation into the foreign language too. We realised that it is difficult for researchers based in countries with major languages to accept how important translation into

¹The members are: Mette Skovgaard Andersen, Gyde Hansen, Per Lindegaard Hjorth, Arnt Lykke Jakobsen, Astrid Jensen, Elisabeth Halskov Jensen, Inge Livbjerg, Maria Pilar Lorenzo and Inger Mees.

the foreign language is for a country like Denmark, whose language is virtually only mastered by its own inhabitants (population: 5.5 million). We found that certain adjustments had to be made to the models of translation if they are to deal with translation into the foreign language as opposed to the mother tongue. Furthermore, translation theorists tend to talk about translation into the mother tongue without considering the importance of the language pair they are dealing with.

From the late eighties, the focus has increasingly been on *Translation Studies - as an Interdiscipline* (cf. Snell-Hornby 1988). And by now, it is widely accepted that no new trends and ideas will emerge in translation research if the focus is not expanded to include relevant adjoining fields of research such as psycholinguistics, sociology, pedagogy and intercultural communication. In addition there has been a growing interest in the cognitive processes of translation. Researchers are eager to know what goes on in the translator's mind. In 1986, a new approach, referred to as the 'psycholinguistic-neurophysiological approach' or 'mental approach', developed with Hans P. Krings as one of the pioneers. In his monumental work, *Was in den Köpfen von Übersetzern vorgeht*, Krings states that translation theory and practice are far too far removed from each other. He regrets the preoccupation of translation theory with isolated, context-free statements; he also draws attention to the intersubjective, highly abstract statements which have no foundation in corpus-based research, and to sweeping statements on translation theory. In Krings' opinion, this problem, which he calls a major deficiency in translation research, is caused by the failure to test translation models against translation process data obtained by means of empirical studies. Krings was the first to attempt to investigate systematically the translation process by means of introspective methods.

Krings introduced 'Lautes Denken' or 'Think-Aloud-Protocols' (TAPs), which are tape recordings of verbally formulated thoughts which translators have while they are engaged in the translation process. He based his experiment design on Ericsson and Simon's theoretical considerations in *Protocol Analysis* (1980). Among other things, they suggest that the subjects should not reflect on, comment on or defend their method. Krings asked his subjects - graduate students - 'to think aloud, that is, say everything which comes to mind while they are translating but only to the extent that it does not interfere with their translation work'. He himself stayed in the room listening in on what was going on, though, without speaking to his subjects.

In order to establish when the informants made changes in the target text, Krings used pencils in a range of different colours. Whenever informants made changes, Krings gave them a new colour with which they could effectuate the changes. In this way he could see what was modified, in which order and at which point in the translation process. Krings says that the colours gave him much important additional information when he transcribed the tape recordings (Krings 1986:54).

Today, translations are entered into a computer right away, thus making the conditions somewhat different from the middle of the eighties, when the subjects used pen and paper.

Introspective methods have improved considerably over the past ten years. In addition to TAPs, new methods, such as dialogue protocols, computer protocols, video recordings, and oculometry, have been developed to register process data. About 20 major works on introspective studies of the translation process have been published, e.g. Tirkkonen-Condit (1991), Lörtscher (1991a, 1991b), Kussmaul (1989) and Kiraly (1995).

The CBS translation project

In our project, 'The translation process: from source text to target text', we focus on complete texts, produced under different conditions, involving different people, several languages, and both directions of translation. We are interested in recurring processes in translation, both with respect to reception and production.

In contrast with what appears to have been the most usual approach so far, namely to focus on the product, specifically studying the target text with the purpose of establishing to what extent equivalence or adequateness has been achieved, we have decided to focus on the process - without losing sight of the product. However, we feel that our results will inevitably lead to better products from translators because our research will have had the effect of raising the consciousness of the process.

We use both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methods are introspection (TAP) and retrospection (questionnaires and interviews). We obtain our quantitative data from a computer program *Translog*², which records precisely all steps during the translation process (see pp. 63 ff.). In some of the individual projects, we also use video recordings.

The validity of these methods, especially TAPs, has been subject to much criticism and, as some of our early pilot studies (carried out in December 1996) show, they are rather difficult to use. One of the problems in relation to TAPs is whether it is possible to engage in two rather complicated actions of a similar nature (namely translating and thinking aloud) simultaneously, and whether one influences the other. Having to think

² *Translog* has been developed by Arnt Lykke Jakobsen and Lasse Schou.

aloud during the translation process may change the process, which obviously affects the quality of the data. One of the problems of video recordings is that the translation process may become unnatural when it is being taped. If the subjects cannot ignore the video camera, they may feel that they are being observed and consequently change their behaviour.

Nevertheless, it has been established that introspection, despite all objections, renders valuable information about a translator's behaviour.

The two following examples illustrate how protocols may reveal useful information.

Gyde Hansen (Department of German) has a tape recording of a student, who, in the process of translating from Danish into German, produces a non-existent German word. Even though her intuition tells her that her suggested translation is wrong, she is so much in doubt that she spends more than ten minutes checking various dictionaries to ascertain that the word really does not exist. If one were to look only at her target text, in which she has used an appropriate term in the given context, one would never know how much time she spent choosing it.

Another translator formulates many good translation suggestions on the tape recording before she starts translating, without actually writing them down. But when she switches on her computer, she has forgotten all her good suggestions. All this cannot be extracted from her final product - a relatively poor quality translation.

The project group is constantly evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods, and several methods are used in different combinations. As mentioned above, an important tool, used by all the project members, is the program *Translog*, which, as the name suggests, records what goes on during the writing process. It provides

accurate information about the time spent on every aspect of the writing process, e.g. when writing a translation on a computer.

During the writing phase, the program shows the source text on the screen. It can be made to appear in different ways, paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, or in units defined by researchers according to their specific needs. It is also possible to define how long the different paragraphs of the source text are retained on the screen. They can be dimmed or made to disappear after the lapse of a number of seconds (5-600) defined by the researcher.

As soon as the source text appears on the screen, and the translator starts writing the target text, everything the translator does is stored in a log file with the degree of accuracy allowed by the DOS clock. All pauses and all corrections are recorded. If the translator scrolls up and down in the text, it will also be recorded.

Using the log file, the complete translation (writing) process can be reconstructed on the screen either in real time or with a speed stipulated by the researcher. This option to display the entire creation of the target text again may, for instance, be used to enhance the translators' recollection of their considerations during the translation process of specific parts of the text, when the process is discussed immediately after the completion of the translation.

Another device which is possible with *Translog* is to print the entire translation process as one long, linear text with corrections, cursor movements, *Translog* dictionary look-ups (small document dictionaries can be created within the program), and with accurate time indications. This linear representation of the text can be printed in different ways depending on the nature and purpose of the study. The time indications may thus be shown with one hundredth of a second's accuracy, but only if

it is found necessary, since it is also possible to choose a cruder representation if one is mainly interested in the corrections made by the translator.

As described above, Krings (1986) had to use coloured pencils when he observed his subjects, but with *Translog*, the project group now has the possibility of recording all the information which Krings was trying to gather with much greater accuracy and without interfering in the writing process. Thus *Translog* provides us with objective, quantitative data about the writing and editing process in translation. (For a detailed description and assessment of the problems involved in registering time delay in the *Translog* program, see Arnt Lykke Jakobsen's contribution, this volume). The members of the project group are interested in different aspects of the translation process. We have asked professional translators as well as translation students to participate in our research studies. Below, some of the individual projects are briefly described.

Elisabeth Halskov Jensen (EHD) from the Department of Spanish is studying the nature of the comprehension problems that occur in the course of the translation of Spanish legal texts, the way in which solutions seem to emerge during the process, and what effect this has on the reception of the final product.

The purpose of the project is to reveal aspects of the translation proficiency displayed by graduate students when asked to translate without dictionaries and reference works, what they do to establish the coherence of the source text, how detailed their comprehension is, and how this influences their translation. To what extent does a knowledge of text linguistics and grammar, combined with general knowledge of the relevant

domain-specific field, help students to produce a more adequate target text?

An experimental approach was favoured over 'naturalistic observation'. This decision was made because comprehension is not open to direct observation, and the study of comprehension has traditionally been placed in an experimental, psycholinguistic framework. The tests were carried out with a group of graduate students who were asked to 'read and translate orally with the aim of comprehending' both legal and non-legal texts presented to them on a computer screen. While completing this task they were thinking aloud. Later on in the process, they were asked to translate the texts in writing, using *Translog*, so that this part of the process could be reconstructed on the screen. During the tests, the students' comprehension was further assessed and evaluated using the following methods:

- Registration of reading times
- Questionnaires
- Free recall
- Questions and Answers relating to texts
- Questions and Answers relating to the knowledge applied

During the *Translog* translation process, the method of thinking aloud was not used. This was decided in order not to exhaust the students. But the fact that thinking aloud is sometimes believed to interfere with, and change, the structure of the translation process also favoured this decision, since the quality of the products was thought to be important too.

The analysis of the data will consist of a process-oriented analysis of the reading times data and the thinking aloud data, and a product-oriented analysis of the rest of the data.

Inge Livbjerg (IL) and Inger Mees (IM) from the Department of English are examining the effect of the use of dictionaries (and other reference works) on the translation process, starting from a hypothesis that the use of dictionaries does not always improve, and actually sometimes reduces, the quality of the end product.

Experience - based on students' translation products - seems to show that semi-professional translators (represented by CBS graduate students) tend to focus on successive linguistic units such as single words or phrases and therefore fail to see these units in relation to the wider context and context represented by the communicative situation of the translation task in question.

The data for the study were collected in the following manner, the research design having been adapted as a result of experience gained from the pre-pilot and pilot phase. A group of CBS graduate students who did well in their translation exam in general English were asked to translate a text without the use of dictionaries. They wrote their translation on a computer which stored it in *Translog*. No time limit was set: the students themselves indicated when they were satisfied with their product. The text was then saved. The students were now given a short break before they returned to the computer again, this time with the opportunity of revising their product *with* the use of dictionaries. Again there was no time limit. Both phases were accompanied by thinking-aloud, which was taped, and additional observation protocols were made by IL and IM, including a record of every look-up in dictionaries. Retrospection followed immediately after this phase.

To eliminate a fear that this test design might have provoked the subjects to put undue focus on the use of dictionaries in the second phase, a new batch of students with the same background translated the text, this time

with dictionaries right from the start, but otherwise under the same conditions (thinking aloud and no time limit) as above. Pilot studies undertaken prior to the full scale study had shown that the initial hunch (i.e. that students focus on too small units, see above) was not the whole truth. Students did in fact very often set out by producing an adequate context-based translation, but subsequently they *either* ended up by rejecting it in favour of a less felicitous, or even erroneous, translation when they got access to dictionaries, or they spent a surprising amount of time consulting dictionaries before they - often very reluctantly - returned to their first adequate choice of translation.

This behaviour seems to be confirmed by the full scale study. An example:

The Danish text used in the present investigation is a report on the Danish Foreign Minister's reaction two days after the Danish UN resolution of April 1997 criticising human rights in China had failed to gain support. The students were asked to translate the text for publication in the

Guardian the next day. The text begins:

BODSGANG UDELUKKET

Danmark vil ikke gå bodsgang til Kina. Det ligger ikke lige for.

All students rightly conclude that the core meaning of the religious metaphor 'gå bodsgang' (embark upon a procession of supplication or on a penitential pilgrimage) in this context is that *Denmark will not apologise* to China. Yet most students spend a substantial amount of time looking up 'bodsgang' or 'bodsferd' in the Danish-English dictionary and subsequently checking the entries found there in the English dictionary, all

the time getting more and more frustrated because they do not feel that they find a viable solution. Then they *either* give up their original, adequate solution, writing e.g. *'Denmark is not going to make a procession of supplication towards China', or, after much agonising deliberation, decide to stick to their original meaning-based solution. But in quite a few cases this final decision is accompanied by self-deprecating remarks such as 'but I have probably misunderstood it all'.

As such comments show, this behaviour may in some cases be explained by a, not always justified, lack of trust in their own authority - a fact which may be a consequence of the learning situation (cf. Hönig 1988; Livbjerg 1997).

Another example:

The above text contains the sentence ... *sådan lød kommentaren fra udenrigsminister Niels Helveg Petersen (R)* ... Students had generally no problem in producing translations like *this was the comment made by the Danish Foreign Minister, Niels Helveg Petersen* ... but then took endless trouble over the translation of (R), which in this context should simply be left out. Denmark has many political parties and therefore normally coalition governments. It has become the custom in certain newspapers always to add the letter representing the name of the party that a given politician belongs to, e.g. (R) for 'de radikale' which is a centrist Social Liberal Party. In this context, however, where the focus is on what Niels Helveg Petersen has to say in his capacity as Danish Foreign Minister, an English reader would be distracted by having a completely irrelevant explanation of his political affiliation thrown in. Quite a few students realised that the information was irrelevant, but they 'dared not' leave it out, and even among the students (a minority) who did leave out the

element, some commented that they would not have dared do so in an exam situation.

María Pilar Lorenzo (MPL) from the Department of Spanish wants to investigate the translator's professional competence when translating into a foreign language based on the language combination Danish-Spanish. MPL holds that even recent research on the translation process has not seriously considered translation into a foreign language, or, at any rate, has failed to consider translation into a foreign language as a professional activity. Admittedly, some of the studies of the translation process using introspective methods compare the two different directions of translation, but the validity of the conclusions is limited because the studies are based on students with inadequate competence in the foreign language. Not until translation theory started to focus on the translation process did it introduce tools, albeit rudimentary ones, to determine what goes on in translators' minds when they translate into the foreign language, and whether this can be compared to what goes on when they translate into the mother tongue.

MPL thinks that the relevance of this question is underlined further by the fact that instruction in the subject of translation into a foreign language is often given by native speakers, to whom translation into the foreign language becomes translation into their own mother tongue. This may affect the students and make them fundamentally uncertain about their translations - something which is not at all good for their future work as translators.

To students, translating into a foreign language easily turns into an impossible process as they fumble towards a rather indefinite goal, finding it hard to tell whether or when it has been reached. The feeling of

uncertainty when evaluating their own translations may be so strong that it can hamper decision-making, which is a crucial factor in the translation process.

During the translation process, translators are constantly faced with choices and always have a range of options, but their ability to assess the possibilities is weakened when they are translating into a foreign language. It is important to examine and describe this problem in order to be able to develop strategies which can reduce such uncertainty.

It is relevant to establish how professional translators address this kind of uncertainty which complicates their everyday work with translations into a foreign language. They would not be able to do their job if they had not developed survival strategies to fight the constant uncertainty and feeling of inadequacy. MPL will map out and systematise these strategies.

The focus is particularly on the strategies that are applied when translators face text types which fall outside their professional routine and which consequently call on them to use their self-evaluation competence. Among other things, it is examined to what degree professional translators use 'playing it safe' strategies and base their certainty on different kinds of message adjustment.

Using a combination of observation and introspective methods, such as video-tapes and *Translog*, MPL is studying the translation process, particularly the decision-making process, with 12 professional translators translating into Spanish, their foreign language.

The CBS translation project will run for the next three and a half years.

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