

## TIME PRESSURE IN TRANSLATION TEACHING AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

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### 1 Introduction

From 1997 to 1998, and again in 2002, I conducted experiments in translation under time pressure with students at the Copenhagen Business School (Hansen 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002a and 2002b). Before very long the experiments became quite popular among the students. In this paper I will offer an explanation of the reasons for their popularity and, at the same time, I will point out the value of such experiments for Translation Studies.

In recent research in translation processes, there are several studies in which time pressure has been a research issue. Most of these studies use the computer software *Translog* (Jakobsen 1999a, 1999b, 2000), which was developed by Arnt Lykke Jakobsen in 1995/1996 at the CBS. Today it is a Windows-based program called *Translog 2000*. It is a tool for all kinds of experiments involving various aspects of "time" – such as time pressure, the calculation of time spent, pauses between the typing of words or letters and keystrokes per minute.

When dealing with the issue of time pressure, the software provides the possibility of allowing the whole text or bits of texts to become shadowed or to disappear after a predefined period of time.

Of course, it is not necessary to use computer software to create time pressure. People can be told in advance that they will have to stop after a given period of time, alternatively, you can show them text passages, one after the other, on an overhead projector and conceal them after a predefined period of time.

Two different kinds of time pressure have been used in translation studies. In the experiments of Jensen (1999, 2000) and de Rooze/Munoz (paper at the EST-congress 2001), all subjects were asked to translate whole texts under the same two or three different time conditions. We could call this *collective time pressure*. The aim of both studies was to show the effect of time pressure on translation. The difficulty in this kind of study proved to be that people react differently to time pressure. The perception of time pressure varied from subject to subject. What constituted time pressure for some, was just normal working speed for others. This naturally affected the results.

In my experiments, I used *individual time pressure*, which means that each of the subjects had a period of time at their disposal that was adapted to their individual writing and translating speed.

I combined a translation under time pressure, which I call *short time translation*, with a translation without time pressure of the same text, the *long time translation*, following directly after the first translation. For the long time translation the subjects had as much time at their disposal as they wished and were provided with several kinds of reference works. With *Translog 2000*, they also had access to the Internet.

After the two experiments I used retrospection employing *Translog's* replay facility.

## 2 Why conduct experiments involving time pressure?

The titles of translator and interpreter are protected by law in Denmark, and, therefore, in order to obtain the title of authorised translator our students have to reach a high standard, which also implies that they have to live up to certain responsibilities and expectations. I had observed that it takes too long for them to acquire the skills required. My hope was to find better teaching methods which could lead to better results in less time. My assumption was that this could only be done, if I could make the subjects more aware of what they are actually doing during the translation process (Hansen 1999: 43).

In earlier experiments with think - aloud protocols (Hansen 1998: 63), I had realized that some students had many good spontaneous solutions immediately after reading the source text, but that they did not make use of them later in the translation process or in the target text. My objective was, therefore, to pinpoint the spontaneous reactions and the first translations that they offered after they had received the text and had had a brief look at it.

## 3 Individual time pressure

My criteria for using individual time pressure were to give the subjects enough time to translate spontaneously, but not enough time to change anything in the first version.

The text was divided into passages of an equal number of lines, mostly consisting of one or two sentences. The first passage appeared on the screen immediately, and the next passages appeared after an individually predefined period of time and disappeared again when the following passage popped up on the screen. I defined the period of time as appropriate if I could see that there had been at least one passage in which they had had to reduce or omit

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number of lines, mostly displayed on the screen individually predefined message popped up on the screen could see that to reduce or omit

information. It turned out that it was totally impossible for them to reconstruct information that they had had to omit because of lack of time. As soon as the next passage appeared on the screen they seemed to have forgotten all about the earlier passages. To find the appropriate individual time pressure, I carried out pilot experiments in which I tested different people under time pressure – that is colleagues, professional translators, students and myself. When using the first edition of *Translog*, I had used a stopwatch when recording each individual's need for time when typing and translating. With *Translog 2000*, it was easier to predefine individual time pressure, as it could be done in the following way:

The students were asked to translate texts of different degrees of difficulty using *Translog* at home under normal working conditions. Using the log files of these translations, I could register the period of time they had used for the translation of 10 lines when not using dictionaries or the Internet. Based on that information, I calculated their average translating speed. My pilot experiments had shown that they needed some time for orientation – which I gave them in relation to the number of lines they had to translate.

#### 4 What can be learned from the experiments?

The short time translation gives an insight into the student's ability to translate automatically and spontaneously under extreme circumstances, i.e. in a situation of stress, while the long time translation shows their competence under what they consider to be normal translation conditions. For most of them the translation under time pressure meant translating under the worst conditions possible.

It should be mentioned that teaching in Denmark in general places a greater emphasis on strategies that promote interest, motivation, self-confidence and cooperation than on active knowledge, the memorizing of facts and knowledge control. These characteristics were also documented in the recent *Pisa* studies. This may be a reason why our students are not really used to solving tasks under any kind of pressure, at least not under extreme time pressure.

My experiments with long time translation showed how the subjects proceeded from their first draft, i.e. the one produced in the short time translation. This included the problems they identified, the strategies, or lack thereof, that they used to solve them, their considerations and the conclusions they drew. The experiments also demonstrated how many of their first good solutions were rejected in the second translation.

It was not expected that the subjects would produce identical versions of the translation in both experiments. That would, in fact, have been impossible because they did not see and could not always remember what they had written in their first translation. Gile (1995: 56) describes similar findings from experiments where participants were asked to formulate the same idea twice. My only requirement was that both translations should be appropriate in context.

I found five combinations as illustrated in table 1. It has to be mentioned that "Skagen" is a little town at the northernmost tip of Denmark.

1. They made errors in the short time translation, but not in the long time translation

2. They had translated accurately in the short time translation but erroneously in the long time translation

3. They translated well under both conditions

4. They omitted something that they could not translate in the short time translation, but found a solution in the long time translation.

5. They made errors in both translations, sometimes the same, sometimes different errors.

Source text	Short time translation	Long time translation
1. Skagen by	*Skagen Stadt	Die Stadt Skagen
2. Skagen området	Skagen und Umgebung	Die * <i>Umgebung</i> von Skagen
3. Det årlige Skagen Festival	Das jährliche Skagen Festival	Das jährliche Skagen Festival
4. var Skagbo	*Omitted	War gebürtige Skagnerin
5. Skt. Hans aften	*Sankt Hans Abend	*Johannistag

Table 1

The errors can also be classified according to their degree of closeness to the source text. They reflect the strategies that the subjects use under both conditions for example omission or some kind of literal translation, table 2:

Sbj.	Short time translation	Long time translation
1	* <i>Omission</i>	War gebürtige Skagnerin
2	War <i>eine</i> gebürtige * <i>Skagenbürgerin</i>	War gebürtige * <i>Skagenbürgerin</i>
3	War * <i>Skagwohner</i>	War * <i>Skagwohner</i>
4	War * <i>Skagbo</i>	Wurde hier geboren

Table 2

The errors can be classified according to the type of error, for example semantic errors, interference errors or both. For example, the translation of "Skagen området", table 3:

Sbj.	Short time translation	Long time translation
1	Skagen und Umgebung	Die *Umgebung von Skagen (Sem.)
2	Die *Skagener Umgebung (Sem.)	Die *Skagener Umgebung (Sem.)
3	Die *Skagen-Gegend (Int.)	Das *Skagen-Gebiet (Int.)
4	Die *Skagen-Umgebung (Int./Sem.)	Der *Ort Skagen (Sem.)

Table 3

I used my impression of their individual competence or lack of competence in an interview, after the students' retrospection with replay, where I discussed their processes with them and suggested how they could improve them.

5 Retrospection with replay

*Translog's* "replay function" shows the whole writing process dynamically on the screen. Retrospection with *Translog* gives the possibility of recognition, a frequently employed method in psychology (Rubinstein 1977: 382). This means that with the replay function the observer can direct the attention of the subjects to their experience. I have noticed that the subjects become fascinated viewing their own process in this way, and the replay on the screen keeps them concentrated on the task of explaining what was going through their minds during the process. Notably, the registered pauses make them remember their problems. For the retrospection with replay, the translation without time pressure was shown. The subjects were asked to tell me what went through their minds during the process, what kind of reference works they had used and whether these works had helped.

To get an impression of preparation and revision phases, the number, length and position of pauses and all corrections and changes during the process, I used *Translog's* "view function", which is a log file of the process (see also Hansen 2002b).

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### 6 Time pressure in research

It could be argued that none of my experiments do in fact represent "normal translation processes", since one was conducted under time pressure and the other was not "normal" in the sense that the subjects had been rushed through the text once already, which must have had some kind of impact on the second process.

However in Translation Studies, the translation processes that are investigated are rarely "normal" considering that by observing the processes and the translators, we, the observers, do in fact change the processes. We cannot escape the observer's effect as described, for example, in Bohr (1957: 20).

Much research concerning processes has used some kind of introspection, mostly think - aloud protocols, where subjects have to observe themselves. We can never know what people really think. We can only arrive at some kind of description of what the subjects believe that they thought at a given moment or what they can remember and describe.

Another objection could be that subjects only say what they think the observer wants to hear. This, of course, depends on the subjects and their relationship with the observer.

It should also be pointed out that it is extremely difficult to isolate variables and to compare the results of different subjects or groups of subjects such as professionals contra non-professionals, because of the immense complexity and variability of individual processes, which are influenced by factors such as personality and biography.

It is also difficult to compare processes for the same person at different points in time, because both people and their circumstances change.

For these reasons, I do not pretend to have investigated some kind of "normal" translation process, but rather the translation competence in translation processes of the same person under different sets of conditions.

### 7 Some general results

Not surprisingly, many of the subjects did better when translating for the second time without any time pressure:

When translating from Danish into German in the first experiments, 62%, i.e. 29 out of 47, improved the product and 38%, i.e. 18, stayed at the same level. There were 25% fewer errors in the long time translation.



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Not all kinds of errors were corrected in the long time translation. In general, there was the same or even a higher number of errors producing text incoherence, and even when they had unlimited time at their disposal, subjects did not always succeed in avoiding pragmatic errors. Thus the experiment clearly indicated that issues such as these should be given a higher priority in translation teaching.

The greatest value of these experiments is that they provide insight not only into the individual methods and strategies or lack thereof, but also into personality factors accounting for the individual behaviour and different ways of treating problems exhibited by the various subjects. There is, for example, a great variation in the degree of care or carelessness in relation to translating. This might be due to a different degree of involvement in the actual task, as described by Jääskeläinen (1999: 204), but from the behaviour and comments of the subjects during retrospection it can be concluded that they exhibited their normal behaviour.

Some of the subjects make many unfortunate changes when not under time pressure, especially in the revision phase, something that did not happen under time pressure (Hansen 2002a: 20). This destructive behaviour manifests itself most clearly when they translate into their mother tongue. In the long time experiment some of them read more into the text than was actually there. Two subjects, for example, report that they have a preconceived idea about the target text and that they are trying to incorporate this into their translation. In fact, compared to the source text, the translated product is distorted.

Some of the bilinguals get frustrated: they did not have any problems when they translated under time pressure, but now that they suddenly have enough time, they begin to speculate over and doubt earlier decisions, especially when translating into their weaker language.

#### 8 Time pressure in translation teaching and translation research

Apart from correcting destructive behaviour, I found that in translation teaching I could use these experiments to make some of the subjects aware that they did in fact have automatic skills that they could rely on - something that many of them had not realized. Others realized that they should perhaps train their automatic skills.

Two examples, one from the translation into German and one from the translation into Danish demonstrate this. The log files, which were taken from the translation without time pressure, showed two translators with a very large number of long *internal pauses*, where "long" means 30 seconds or more.

Their products from both experiments showed that one of them was able to translate excellently under all circumstances – the other one only when she had unlimited time at her disposal.

What is the connection between the long internal pauses (log file) and their results? Here retrospection and interview gave some answers: The first translator reported that on 19 occasions during the retrospection she consulted a dictionary. From the log file, I could see that she had 13 successful solutions after the pauses in which she had looked up a word or a phrase. She said that she mainly consulted the dictionary to get inspiration, but on 5 occasions she stated that she looked up something just to make sure. In her short time translation she had shown that she was a good translator under all conditions, i.e. with or without dictionaries. She was not aware of this fact and realized that she ought to rely more on her automatic skills in future.

The second translator exhibited a highly unusual pattern of behaviour. She said in retrospection that she always looked up everything. She did not spend more time than the other subjects although she said that on 37 occasions she had consulted one or more dictionaries. She was extremely well-trained in dictionary use. Her product and the words and idioms she used immediately after the internal pauses (seen in the log file) showed that 29 out of her 37 consultations were successful, on 5 occasions she made an incorrect choice and in 3 cases she could not find anything of use. My conclusion about her translation competence was that it depended almost entirely on an extremely well developed competence in dictionary use. She was not aware of that fact. It would appear that she needs translation training without dictionaries. Otherwise her life as a professional translator will not be easy because it will cost her much effort to carry out translation tasks.

In *translation research*, these kinds of experiments, where different methods to obtain qualitative and quantitative data are combined, give much insight into the competences, actual behaviour and habits of the individual translator and it becomes possible to detect individual and general competence patterns (Hansen 1997: 207 and Hansen 2003).

### 9 Conclusion

In *translation teaching* the combination of time pressure and retrospection proved to be a faster way of obtaining better results. All through the experiments the attention of each subject was totally focussed on their own processes. The subjects had to be on the alert all the time. They could not hide, escape or doze off - as often happens in traditional teaching. And they received immediate feed back.

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It is generally said that, if you really want to learn something, you have to write it down, speak it, listen to it, if possible touch it and definitely use it (for example: Tranekjær Rasmussen 1967: 28). During such an individual session with my students, each lasting between 3 and 5 hours, they were confronted with the same translation problems at least 5 times. They had to solve them and to talk about them under different conditions. These conditions were:

1. Solving the problems spontaneously
2. Solving them with all kinds of reference works and unlimited time at their disposal
3. Correcting them on paper
4. Talking about them during retrospection
5. Explaining their problems in an interview
6. Listening to my feed back and advice on both translations.

This kind of translation research and translation teaching is fascinating but also time consuming, but it can perhaps be used as a test and improve translator training in future.

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## TRADUCTIONS MOYEN POUR A COMPRÉHENSIV

### 1. Remarques :

Ces dernières années ont vu l'ampleur considérable des méthodologies de traduction. Les traductologues ont exploré de nombreux aspects, mais la lecture de leurs travaux montre que ceux qui sont soumis à la tâche de traduire des écrits, oraux, concrets et abstraits, signifiants, la réflexion est souvent différente, pour ne pas dire plus.

Parmi les divers travaux, une tentative de spécification de la tâche du traducteur pour parvenir à une compréhension semble nécessaire pour penser d'un traducteur expérimenté seraient capables de rendre compte de ces phénomènes.

D'autre part, il est difficile de prévoir certaines compétences traductives à partir de données empiriques.

Certaines tentatives ont été effectuées par le traducteur (Thinking Aloud Protocol) (Laukkanen 1996; Færøe 1996). Les traducteurs devaient verbaliser leur processus de pensée. Pourtant, ces recherches ont permis de reconstruire le chemin de la pensée.

Pour pallier à ces lacunes, on a emprunté la méthode de l'application de cette tâche à des situations dans lesquelles se sont posés des problèmes cognitifs que la linguistique ne peut expliquer.

LES CAHIERS DU BOSPHORE  
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