

A Cognitive Approach to Three Trainee Translators' Overnight Revision Processes

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Abstract

Many researchers have investigated the cognitive process of translation in the past two decades. However, revision after producing the first draft has long been ignored even though it is an essential part of the translation process. This study aims to take the first step to explore the cognitive process and strategies of overnight revision. Three subjects were asked to participate in the think-aloud protocols (TAPs) to translate and revise a text from Chinese into English on two consecutive days. They were subsequently interviewed after the second TAPs. A tentative model of revision process was developed from the TAP data as a result, which starts from evaluating first drafts, realising/verbalising a problem, inferencing strategies, referencing strategies, and evaluating solutions. Apart from the general revision strategies, three types of individual styles and/or approaches of revision were also identified, including self-assured/inner dialogue type, sequential-detailed/linear type and contextual-global type. Similar research should be duplicated with larger populations and different language combinations so as to provide more insights on the revision process after a time gap.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

During the past two decades, a new research focus has emerged in descriptive translation studies, which has been described as the psycholinguistic, cognitive, or mental process of translation. Many scholars have been doing research in this area (Gerloff 1986, 1988; Krings 1986, 1987; Lorsch 1986, 1991, 1995; Jaaskelainen and Tirkkonen-Condit 1989, 1995, 1996; Seguinot 1989, 1991; Kiraly 1995). Special attentions have been paid to differences between learners and professional translators as well as differences between translating from and into one's first languages.

However, these studies are limited to the process of producing the first draft or revising/editing immediately after producing the first draft and without allowing subjects to put their drafts aside and come back to revise it. In reality, few translators can afford to send their first drafts away without revising after at least a short period of time. In addition, translators generally agree that the time spent on revising a first draft is often very valuable and potentially takes longer than producing the first draft (Newmark 1991: 105; Weaver 1989: 117). Although revision after producing the first draft is such a crucial part of translation process, little is known about it.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims to investigate what happens when translators revise their first drafts overnight and meanwhile aims to provide a preliminary model of overnight revision strategies.

1.3 Revision and Revision Strategies Defined

In the literature, there are no definite terms indicating the concept of revising. Some call it "editing" or "edit-check" while others call it monitoring (Seguinot 1989; Al-Besbasi 1990; Gerloff 1986; Krings 1987). Even though a few scholars use the term, "revision", there is no universal definition of it, either. Graham (1983: 99-105) defines it as a part of the quality control procedure done by a reviser rather than a translator her/himself. On the other hand, Al-Besbasi (1990: 155) seems to refer it as a constant target text monitoring and referring back to a source text at all stages of translation. For the purpose of this study, a working definition of *revision* is proposed, *anything done by a translator her/ himself on a target text after a first draft is produced and before a final draft is reached*.

Apart from "revision", the term "revision strategies" also needs to be defined. The concept of revision strategies in this study is basically adopted from previous researchers' definitions. Krings (1986: 268) loosely defines translation strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving a translation problem". Other

researchers, such as Lorsch (1991) and Seguinot (1991), further expand the definition as starting from "the realisation of a translation problem" and ending with "the realisation of its solution or insolubility" and includes "both conscious and unconscious procedures" as well as both "tactics and mental processes".

In this study, *revision strategies* are refined as follows: *starting from identification of a problem in a target text segment to finding a solution or at least temporarily satisfied solution to a problem*. In other words, a translator must first find a problem or a need to revise a target text segment in the first place and presumably, this process is not completed until s/he is satisfied or at least finds a temporarily satisfactory solution.

2. Methodology

2.1 Think-aloud Protocol: The Research Method

Think-aloud protocol (TAP) is the main research method of investigating the cognitive revision process in this study. This is a method of treating translation as a human activity and of seeing how it is taking place in translators' minds. The method was borrowed from cognitive psychology in the 1980s. It is widely used in process-oriented translation studies against the traditional product-oriented translation studies. Also, known as "concurrent verbal report", TAP is basically done by asking subjects to verbalise what's in their mind simultaneously while doing a translation task. The verbal report is recorded during this process and

subsequently the recorded data will be transcribed and analysed.

2.2 The Subjects

Three volunteer subjects were found. [1] They were all diploma-year or first-year trainee translators of the postgraduate programme of Chinese-English, English-Chinese translating and interpreting at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in the United Kingdom. All were given an induction and opportunities to practise think-aloud protocols two weeks before the actual think-aloud experiment took place. This is to minimise the potential variable of being unfamiliar with the research method.

2.3 The Translation Text

The chosen text for translation was an extract of a brief introduction to a Taiwan-based investment company (about 300 words in Chinese). The source text (see appendix) was chosen for the following features: conciseness, semi-technical content, short paragraphs with well defined topics, and minimal need of referring to the whole article.

2.4 Data Collection

Data were collected on two consecutive days in the interpreting suite at the university. There were two TAP experiments. In the first one, subjects were asked to

translate and produce first drafts only. For the second experiment overnight, they were asked to revise their own first drafts. Before the first TAP, subjects were given twenty minutes to practice doing think-aloud as a warming-up exercise. They were also told that their translation would not be assessed and there was no time limit whatsoever. Eleven dictionaries were provided, which include one monolingual English, one monolingual Chinese, one Chinese-English dictionary, one English-Chinese dictionary, two collocation dictionaries, and four technical dictionaries along with one thesaurus. Subjects were interviewed subsequently after the second TAP. [2]

2.5 Data Analysis

The TAP data was first transcribed from audiocassettes and then coded, mainly based on Lorsch's coding system. Lorsch's coding system was chosen for its comprehensiveness. Yet, the coding system is also slightly modified to fit into the purpose of this study. As for the data that cannot be categorised into Lorsch's codes, the researcher developed a few new codes to supplement Lorsch's.

Here is an example of the transcription, its coding and analysis.

Coding example:

PHR ST – PHR TT – RP – VP – [Other]com –Re ST – Re TT- PSP1 – PSP2 – Re TT –
SP θ – Re TT – SP θ

PHR ST: Phrasing a source text segment

PHR TT: Phrasing a target text segment

RP: Realising a problem

VP: Verbalising a problem

[Other]com: Comments on miscellaneous matters

Re ST: Re-phrasing a source text segment

Re TT: Re-phrasing a target text segment

PSP1: first preliminary solution to a problem

PSP2: second preliminary solution to a problem

SP θ : solution to a problem is still to be found

This example begins from phrasing and comparing the source and target text segments. Then, the subject realises a problem by verbalising "this is not quite right". The immediate reaction is to check and compare the source and target text segment again. However, the action was slightly interrupted by not being able to find the source text segment in the source text. After comparing the source and target segments again, a first and second preliminary solution to the problem occurred. Yet, the first attempt to put the preliminary solutions into the original target text segment seems to fail. The subject then decides to "skip (this problem) first". Another attempt comes along almost immediately after the first attempt but still fails. Finally, the subject verbalises a long "okayee" and seems to decide that this problem will be put aside temporarily without a satisfying solution.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Revision Model

After coding, five revision steps emerged from the data. They were: "evaluating a first draft segment", "identifying a problem", "evaluating preliminary solutions", "inferencing strategies", and "referencing strategies". The following explains and demonstrates how these five steps work during the revision process and what strategies are involved in each step. One thing worth mentioning is that the sequence of these steps is not rigid. Also, a translator may not necessarily go through every step during the revision process; yet they still represent an overall picture of the three subjects' revision process.

Step 1: Evaluating a first draft segment

~Phrasing or reading a source/target text segment. (Code: PHR ST/TT)

~Re-phrasing a source/target text segment. (Code: Re ST /TT)

Step 2: Identifying a problem

~Realising a problem (Lorscher's code: RP)

~Verbalising a problem (Lorscher's code: VP)

Step 3: Evaluating preliminary solutions

~Evaluating preliminary solutions (Code: EVT)

Step 4: Inferencing strategies

~Back-translation (Lorscher's code: CHECK BSL/SL)

~Re-reading a source or target text segment (Code: RE ST/TT)

~Re-reading a preliminary solution (Code: Re PSP)

~Mental organisation of a source or target text segment (Lorscher's code: OSL/OTL)

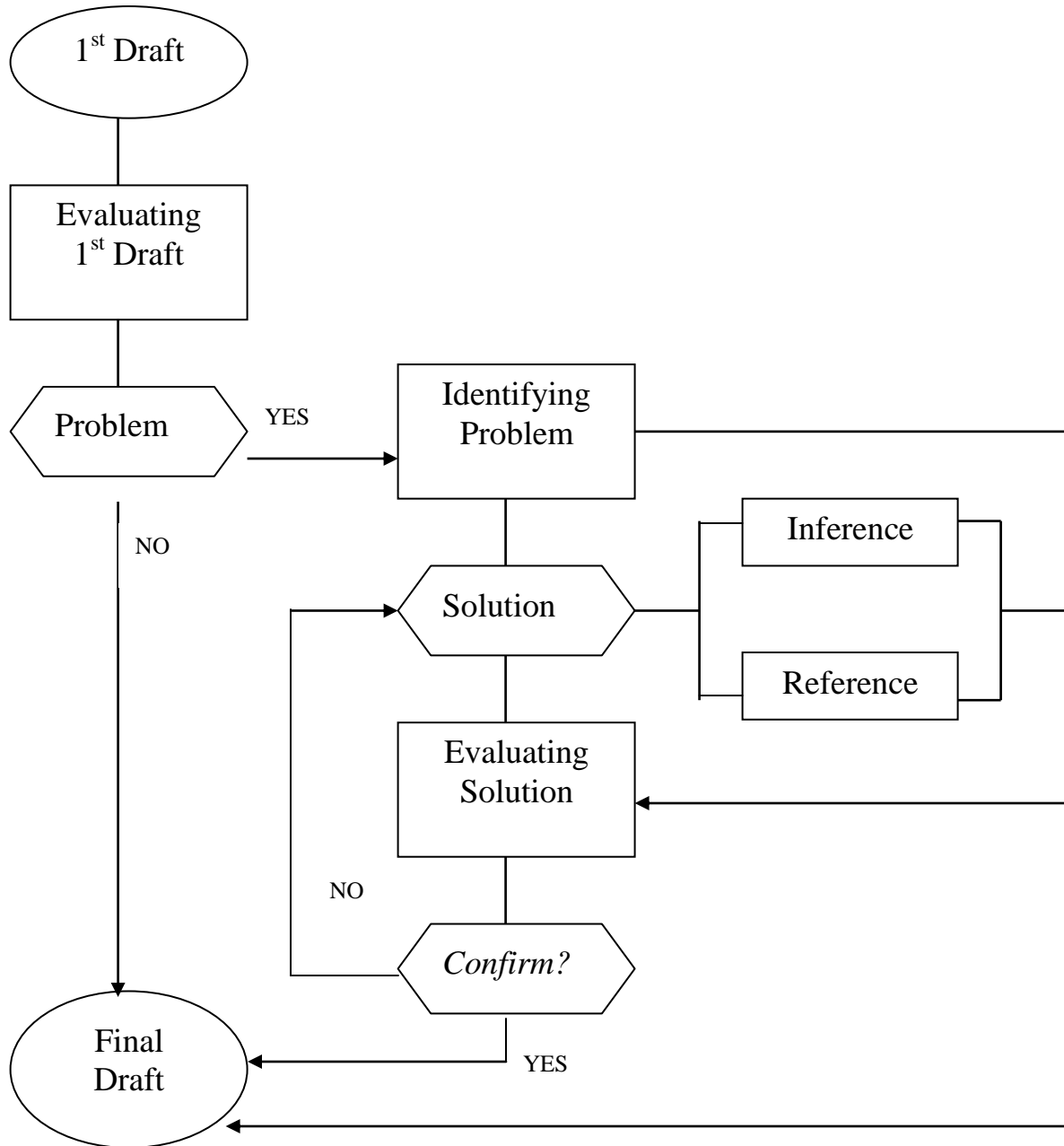
~Searching for an equivalent of a source text segment in the source language (Code: [SL]eq.)

~Re-calling what was done before (Code: ReCALL)

Step 5: Referencing strategies

~Checking dictionaries (Code: CD)

All these five steps can be summarised and shown in the following diagram.



The diagram should be read from the left. Arrows show how a first draft segment proceeds to and becomes a final draft segment. If no problem is identified, then naturally a first draft segment can quickly proceed to a final version. On the other hand, if a problem has been identified, the process may become more complex. Once a subject either realises or verbalises a problem, s/he may instantly find a preliminary solution. If not, there are two types of problem-solving strategies. One is referred to as inferencing strategies, which means that a subject decides to think of a solution on her/his own. The other is referred to as referencing strategies, which means consulting dictionaries until a preliminary solution is found. It is important to note that in the process of finding a solution, a subject may stop at anyone of the strategies and decide to leave the problem temporally. This is recorded as "SP 0 "and shown in the example in the section on data analysis. The other possibility is that a subject may find an optimal solution with anyone of the strategies. In other words, at any given point in the diagram, the process can come to an end (to the final draft).

3.2 Individual Styles or Approaches

In our discussion on revision model, the general pattern of revision strategies has been discussed, now one might think that all translators translate and revise similarly. Yet, with the three subjects in this study, the researcher found three very different individual styles or approaches. Obviously, with such a limited number of subjects, this is bound to occur.

In fact, the researcher is in the process of finding more.

Here individual styles or approaches indicate the most prominent feature while a translator is engaging in a translating activity. To take the use of dictionaries for example. Some translators use them a lot while others use it very rarely and/or differently. This in one way or another reveals a translator's individual style.

The three styles will be discussed respectively.

3.3 Self-assured/Inner-dialogue Type

Subject A in the study is referred as the self-assured/inner-dialogue type of translators. S/he is very confident with her/himself and also prone to "inner speech". In other words, it proved to be less difficult for him/her to think-aloud because s/he admits that talking to oneself is a common strategy for her/him while doing translation. When facing a translation problem, s/he usually talks to her/himself or has innerdialogue until a solution is found. Relatively speaking, s/he rarely resorts to dictionaries. Even if s/he does consult dictionaries, it is not usually for finding a translation equivalent but checking for a second language problem, *e.g.* checking an English collocation, spelling or grammar, *etc.*

3.4 Sequential-detailed/Linear Type

Subject B in this study is referred as the sequential-detailed/linear type of translator (Robinson 1997: 73-76; Jensen 1995: 136-37). S/he is usually very systematic and tries to sort out one problem at a time. In fact, s/he is so systematic that one problem may be

divided into several sub-problems and handled one by one. Another feature of this type of translator is that s/he tends to make more efforts to analyse the source text thoroughly before the actual translation begins. Compared with the self-assured/inner-dialogue type of translator, this type of translator appears to be more dependent on dictionaries. Yet, probably because of being an experienced language learner, in terms of the use of dictionaries, s/he does not just use one dictionary at a time but uses many of them in a complimentary way. For example, s/he may first use a Chinese/English dictionary to find a TL equivalent and then use an English/English dictionary to check how to use a particular TL word or phrase correctly.

3.5 Contextual-global Type

Subject C in this study is referred as a contextual-global type of translator (Robinson 1997: 73-76; Jensen 1995: 136-37). This type of translator is described as a parachutist, floating up high in the sky. Basically, s/he sees the general picture first and cares less about details. However, gradually, s/he will go down to the details. In other words, this type of translators is very tolerant to vagueness when producing a first draft. S /he usually only translates the general idea rather than checking or making sure that every detail is included in the first draft. Relatively speaking, s/he uses very few dictionaries while or before producing a first draft and as a result, the first draft is often very rough. Only when they begin to revise do they go down to the details and check dictionaries, and so on.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has taken a first step in investigating the cognitive revision process of translation. The most important finding is probably the tentative model of revision strategies: commencing from evaluating a first draft, identifying a problem, thinking of inferencing/ referencing strategies to evaluating preliminary solutions. Apart from the general revision strategies, it was also found that each subject has their own personal approach or style of doing translation/revision, including self-assured/inner-dialogue type, sequential-detailed/linear type, and contextual-global type of translators.

The limitation of the data collection method notwithstanding, a general picture of the thinking process that takes place when translators revise their first drafts overnight has been developed. Nevertheless, it would be more beneficial to replicate the present study with a larger population, different text-types, and different language combinations/directions, so that the findings can be generalised. Furthermore, it would be also interesting to explore the relationship between the process of producing a first draft and revising it.

Notes

[1] Before the actual experiment, a pilot study was done on two other diploma-year students in the institute.

[2] The main reason of conducting post-TAP interview is to triangulate the TAP data. Since the interview results are of less importance here, they will not be further

elaborated in this article.

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Appendix A: think-aloud instruction 1

Think-aloud protocol (no. 1)

What is think-aloud protocol (TAP)?

TAP is translated in Chinese as「放聲思考」or「有聲思維」(Literal meaning: to voice out your thinking); in other words, to verbalise your thoughts. In this case, you are asked to speak out whatever comes to your mind when doing translation. This may not be an easy thing to do at the beginning. Therefore, you are advised to practice it by translating and thinking aloud the following paragraph.

財政部日前宣佈提高單一外國專業機構(QFII)投資證卷的上限，由現行的六億美元調高為十二億美元。據估計，財政部這項政策調整，將在明年五月底前，增加外資投入國內股市的動能，高達一百億至一百五十億美元。受此激勵，股價指數強勁上揚，突破八千點大關，雖然日前受到不實消息的影響，但是專家仍對後是深具信心。

Reminder

- In this task, you are asked to produce the FIRST DRAFT ONLY. However, there is no time limit. Please take your time.
- All dictionaries provided on the desk can be used for reference. However, you are not advised to consult the researcher once the translation is started.
- Since the process of your translation will be tape recorded, please do not murmur but try to make your voice audible.
- Please use a pen in BLACK or DARK ink rather than a pencil. Also, please DOUBLE-SPACE your translation.
- Before starting the translation on the next page, please read the brief carefully.

Appendix B: think-aloud instruction 2

Think-aloud protocol (no. 2)

Reminder

- Please REVISE your first draft and produce a FINAL VERSION for publication.
- When revising the first draft, please use a single-line to cross out the previous translations and do not make them invisible.
- Again, you are reminded of making your voice audible and there is no time limit whatsoever.
- You will be interviewed after the revision.

Appendix C: source text for translation

Brief: You are asked by an investment company in Taiwan to translate a document. This document will be published on a leaflet for investors and on the company's website.

【國際投信簡介】

◆ 台灣證卷信託投資業的領航者

國際投信成立於 1980 年，是國內第一家獲准設立的專業基金管理公司，率先投入投信業迄今，已進入第二十年。成立之初即率先以穩健的操作風格，在投資信託業樹立良好的信譽，更以長期追求更大利益、最穩定績效唯一貫的經營目標，深獲國內外法人機構的激賞及受益人的一致肯定。

◆ 二十一世紀金融理財的掌舵人

* 世界觀的經營理念

國際投信是國內最早唯一擁有美國、歐洲兩大市場的基金公司，開創我國證卷市場國際化的先聲。惟國際投信並未因此自滿，目前更積極擴展「投資無國界」的信念，不斷開發合宜的金融投資產品，並致力於建設投資人無障礙的投資新環境。

* 以客為尊的專業服務

秉持誠信、負責原則，建立基金與投資大眾互信互利的橋樑，隨時掌握投資人的需求，提供周到完善的投資資訊。