

Chapter 15

Psychology of Translation: Critical and Creative Thinking

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ABSTRACT

The process of translation is treated as a sequence of three principal stages (pre-translation source text analysis, translation itself, self-assessment/editing). The chapter is aimed at proving that the first and the third stages of the translation process are based on critical thinking, while the second stage (translation itself) rests upon creative thinking. Therefore, teaching critical thinking must be a necessary part of translator professional training, because it is not only important as such, but also leads students to acquisition of mature creative thinking, which is crucial for translation problem-solving. In this chapter, the problem of training translation quality assessment is analyzed, the difference between critical and creative thinking is discussed, and psychological mechanisms of their functioning in translation are treated as a cognitive process; the role of critical thinking in raising translators' awarenesses and, consequently, translation quality is stressed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sums up some of the author's experience of teaching translation to students majoring in linguistics and English-Russian translation. It is also based on the research made from 2002 to 2005¹, which explains why some points of the chapter are described in retrospect; many conclusions of the research have now been reconsidered and reformulated in the light of the years passed since.

Translation and interpretation (T & I) theoretical studies, as well as T & I training, are all about quality. Indeed, anyone having some knowledge of

a foreign language can more or less successfully translate and/or interpret both ways. The only difference between a trained (professional) and amateur translator/interpreter is in performance quality. Hence, translators-to-be must be facilitated to acquire professional thinking, which is understood in this chapter as their ability to adequately translate any text at a minimum time and effort.

To this end translation training should incorporate critical and creative thinking training. More precisely, students must be facilitated to acquire critical and creative thinking skills. The idea, though not new, is worth extending in its

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practical part, for critical and creative thinking skills should not be taught “as such”, but rather as an integral part of translation studies. Ideally, critical thinking skills should be acquired through an academic subject or subjects; later, in their turn, they will contribute to the effectiveness of mastering translation skills.

According to Becker (1994), Bowell and Kemp (2002), Hassel (2004), Huitt (1998), Wakefield (1992), teaching critical thinking skills is a necessary component of any education and a key to success. Being the opposite of dogmatic, stereotypical, mundane thinking, critical thinking forms a considerable part of a person’s general competence and provides protection from any manipulation or propaganda. From the viewpoint of psychology and theory of education critical thinking is a cognitive process necessary for complex tasks solving. From this perspective critical thinking is sometimes called convergent, logical, or deductive thinking. It is also characterized as reflective thinking, i.e. the one aimed at self-assessment (Hassel, 2004).

Treatment of critical and creative thinking as parts of complex tasks solving seems to be relevant for translation studies, for in terms of cognitive psychology translation is a complex task. With this in mind, it is important to concentrate on the following problems: translation quality, translation process structure, translation as a cognitive process, the role of critical thinking in translation quality improving. As a result, a definition of pre-translation source text analysis (PTSTA) as an important phase of the translation process will be provided in the light of critical thinking studies. At the end of the chapter some comments and recommendations on teaching critical thinking and PTSTA will be given. The chapter logic is circular: the primary goal of translator training is translation quality. PTSTA as well as post-translation editing (PTE) is crucial for the quality of translated text (TT). Critical thinking is the psychological basis for both PTSTA and PTE.

Besides, it contributes to the ripening of creative thinking, or translator’s insight. Consequently, it is crucial for translation quality.

The objectives of the chapter are:

1. To determine the criteria necessary for written translation quality assessment relevant for translator training.
2. To define PTSTA in the light of critical thinking studies and to suggest its scheme.
3. To reveal the role of critical and creative thinking in the process of translation, and thereby clarify the psychological mechanism of translation optimization.

The given objectives predetermine the chapter structure.

BACKGROUND

The translation process is one of those human intellectual activities that combine elements of both craft and high art. This is why translation quality assessment is considered to be one of the most difficult tasks, both theoretically and practically. This accounts for the long-standing controversy between translation theoreticians (e.g. Ковалева [Kovalyova], 2001; Комиссаров [Komissarov], 1973, 1990; Цвиллинг [Tsvilling] & Тuroвер [Turover], 1978) and practitioners (e.g. Качество переводов и его оценка [Translation quality and its assessment]) concerning the issue of translation quality. (There are few authors who, like Robinson (1997), equally take into account linguistic and extralinguistic, practical and theoretical aspects which influence translators’ performance). However, both theoreticians and practitioners would agree that unless one has a clear idea of translation quality it is impossible to determine the mechanisms of its improvement. Hence, the key problem of translation quality assessment and criteria should be treated both theoretically

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