

Meaning as a dynamic concept. A Think Aloud Protocol study into strategies employed by inexperienced translators.

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The purpose of this paper is to report on a small-scale study into strategies used by inexperienced translators in the process of meaning interpretation and transfer.

The notion of meaning in language is undoubtedly a complex one. So far linguists and language philosophers have tried in vain to produce a comprehensive definition of meaning that would exhaust all its aspects and satisfy those scholars who are interested in what constitutes meaning. In translation meaning is a dynamic concept since it is the object of interpretation and transfer. To quote Pierce 'meaning of a sign is its translation into a further sign' (see Gorlee 1994:121) or to quote Jakobson (1966:232), 'the best way to study meaning is through translation'. Indeed, the context of interlingual and intercultural communication provides a different perspective on meaning where its dynamic and sometimes even elusive nature can be observed. The process of meaning interpretation and transfer for the purpose of translation seems one of the most complex mental activities performed by the human mind. It involves two language systems, two cultures and one purpose – to enable communication.

To shed some light on the processing performed by a translator in order to carry the meaning across language boundaries, a small-scale study was carried out. The research method was that of Think Aloud Protocols (TAPs) in which 5 inexperienced translators were asked to translate a text from English into Polish and at the same time verbalize the problems they encountered and report on their information processing. The tape-recorded protocols were analysed in order to see how translators move from linguistic signs in the SL text and interpret their meaning which they need to transfer into linguistic signs in their TL translation. The data analysis of TAPs provided an abundance of information about the complexities involved in the process of meaning interpretation and transfer. First, translators have problems with understanding the meaning of some SL text items and then at the stage of transfer there are numerous dilemmas of either interlingual or intercultural nature. When faced with a 'meaning' problem, translators resort to a

set of strategies which they employ in their prospective retrospective moves within the SL and the TL text and outside into the translator's store of knowledge. TAPs show that strategies employed by inexperienced translators are mostly intuitive plans which over rely on bottom-up processing whereas top-down processing which results in the employment of more creative strategies is often blocked.

To use a metaphor, in translation meaning is taken on a journey. First it is packed by the author of the SL text, then unpacked by the translator and repacked into a TL text. As it is with travelling, goods do not always arrive intact. The same may happen with meaning in the process of translation.