

## **The use of metalinguistic knowledge in the process of translation. A study of metalinguistic comments in students self-reports.**

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Having taught translation courses for 14 years I have been able to watch students' progress from low or very low metalinguistic awareness towards gaining more and more self-confidence in their metalinguistic judgements which become frequent as they gain experience in translation.

In this paper I would like to focus on metalinguistic statements which were verbalized by students of English in their self-reports recorded while they were working on an oral translation of a written text. The research data was collected in the form of think aloud protocols (TAPs; see Börsch, 1986 for details), a method used to study the translation process by such scholars as Kusmaul (1995), Lörcher (1991), Krings (1986). Altogether eight protocols (four involved translation from English into Polish and four from Polish into English) were transcribed and analysed for metalinguistic comments, statements or queries. Research questions were formulated as follows:

Why do subjects make metalinguistic comments?

How do such comments contribute to the progression of the translation task?

Are there any qualitative or quantitative differences in metalinguistic comments when translating from or into the student's native language?

To make meaningful use of answers to the above questions provided by the data analysis it is essential to establish certain facts about translation as a task which is frequently unjustly equated with linguistic transcoding. As put by Wills (1996) translation is a knowledge-based activity and although it works on linguistic material and requires bilingual knowledge the task of interpreting a source language text and transferring its sense/meaning into a different linguistic system cannot be successfully achieved without reference to other knowledge structures, such as general world knowledge or domain specific knowledge. Such comprehensive application of one's cognitive structures must involve cognitive control during the process of translation. It is possible to hypothesize that the use of metalinguistic knowledge (Paradis, 2004) is an expression of some internal control mechanism (Gile, 1995; Rodriguez-Fornells et al., 2006) in the process of translation.

The data analysed in this study show that subjects make metalinguistic comments when they are working on a specific problem and are trying to tap into their implicit linguistic knowledge in a conscious workspace (see Hönig, 1991). The comments usually are voiced to justify choices or reject options. They are an expression of self-monitoring whose main task is to check the quality of solutions to a particular translation problem in terms of adequacy and appropriateness. The presence of metalinguistic comments and the way they contribute to achieving the goal of translation, as a product, show that the students make use of their metalinguistic knowledge. It is possible that the metalinguistic comments point to the students growing linguistic self-awareness. This in turn, is an important factor which fosters linguistic self-confidence necessary to gain cognitive control over both linguistic systems in a bilingual mind (De Groot and Christoffels, 2006; Green, 1986). Although at least to my knowledge there has been no systematic research in Translation Studies into the role of metalinguistic knowledge in the process of translation, the presence of metalinguistic comments found in TAPs shows that it probably plays an important part and is worth more extensive investigation.

### **Selected references**

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