

The current state of translation process research - with some unsolved challenges

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Translation process research (TPR) is the label used to refer to a special empirical, experimental, descriptive approach to translation studies based on close, technology-supported observation of translational (micro)behaviour. It aims primarily at getting to know about the cognitive processes involved in translation. Methodologically, TPR is based on software which logs a translator's keystrokes on a computer keyboard in time in combination with an eye-tracker which simultaneously tracks the translator's eye movements across a screen displaying both a source text and the translator's emerging translation. Audio/video recording of the translator's voice/face as well as more radical bio-physiological measures have sometimes been used, also. Concurrent screen recording is an additional option.

With this method, translation processes associated with comprehension, reformulation and target text production can be directly observed at different levels of granularity, inferences about the mental processes involved can be made, and observations and inferences can be compared with verbally reported features of thought processes. Multi-methodology is necessary to capture the complexity of translation, and the possibility of triangulating verbal data with machine-recorded data from the same events seems to offer an attractive way.

Knowledge about translation processes and the methodology employed in TPR can be usefully applied in related fields, e.g. in the development of user-friendly translation support systems and assessment of them for usability (as in the EU CASMACAT project). TPR methodology is not entirely unproblematic, however. If reported verbal data are contradictory to what we believe the hard data show, which do we trust? Also, the complementarity of ecology (realism and naturalness) and experimental equipment is a challenge. Where is a good balance? If we wish to explore the possibility of translating TPR from the research lab to the classroom there are new challenges.