
Parallelism Between Language Learning and Translating

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Abstract

This study supports the notion put forward by Robinson (1997) that translation is actually a language learning process and the translator is always a language learner. It also attempts to match the four skills in language learning - listening, speaking, reading and writing to translation behaviour and shows that the closest to translation is writing. The paper discusses Sager's (1994) comparison between translation and writing activities to illustrate how close both these two activities are as they involve similar approaches and features. Five experienced, non-professional, part-time translators from the University of Malaya who were the participants for this think-aloud protocol study involving the translation of scientific texts from English to Malay were interviewed. From this study, it was found that all of them used the direct (memory, cognitive and compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective and social) language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1989) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) while translating.

Introduction

The researcher's informal observation as an English language teacher of the strategies that second language learners employ in the classroom, her informal analysis of the translation process of a scientific text by a colleague, and her experience in translating as well as discussions with translators have led the researcher to believe that there are similarities in approach and features between language learning and the translation process. Oxford's (1989) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) can thus be applied for both language learning and for translating. According to Oxford (1989), SILL has been used

with language

She suggests that strategies are behaviors or thoughts that the individual uses to achieve a goal, no matter what the goal is.

Aims of the Study

The aims of this study are to:

1. explore the parallelism between language learning and translating;
2. match the four skills— listening, speaking, reading and writing in language learning to translation and show that writing is the closest to translating; and
3. discuss Sager's (1994) comparison between translation and writing activities

Methodology

Five experienced, non-professional, part-time translators were the participants for this think-aloud protocol study involving the translation of scientific texts from English to Malay. The five participants were asked to translate scientific texts from English to Malay by verbalizing their thought processes or articulating whatever came to their minds while translating their own chosen scientific texts from English to Malay. They were also interviewed. Their think-aloud protocols were transcribed by the researcher and then interpreted and matched against Oxford's (1989) SILL.

Second/Foreign Language Learning Strategies

In learning a second/foreign language or even one's mother tongue, a learner resorts to various strategies such as direct strategies which comprise the memory, cognitive, compensation strategies and the indirect strategies which comprise the metacognitive, social and affective strategies. These are shown in Table 1. Basically, a learner learns from the mother or teacher who serves as a role model. Then the learner socializes with his friends and expands his/her vocabulary based on the different activities he/she is involved in. In school, the learner is introduced to the dictionary to find out the meanings of words that he/she comes across while reading or communicating with friends. The learner learns to write sentences and later to expand them into paragraphs and finally succeeds in writing essays.

Table 1
OXFORD'S STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL)

DIRECT STRATEGIES	INDIRECT STRATEGIES
<p>1. Memory strategies Creating mental linkages (e.g. grouping, associating, elaborating). Applying images and sounds (e.g. using imagery, semantic mapping). Reviewing well (structured reviewing). Employing action (e.g. using physical response or sensation).</p> <p>2. Cognitive strategies Practising (repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognising and using formulas and patterns, recombining and practicing naturalistically. Receiving and sending messages (getting the idea quickly, using resources for receiving and sending messages). Analysing and reasoning (reasoning deductively, analysing expressions, analysing contrastively (across languages), translating, transferring). Creating structure for input and output (taking notes, summarising, highlighting).</p> <p>3. Compensation strategies Guessing intelligently (using linguistic clues, using other clues). Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (switching to the mother tongue, getting help, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, using a circumlocution or synonym).</p>	<p>1. Metacognitive strategies Centering your learning (overviewing and linking with already known material, paying attention, delaying speech production to focus on listening). Arranging and planning (finding out about language, organising, setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, planning for a language task, seeking practice opportunities). Evaluating (self-monitoring, self-evaluating).</p> <p>2. Affective strategies Lowering your anxiety (using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation, using music, using laughter). Encouraging yourself (making positive statements, taking risks wisely, rewarding yourself). Taking your emotional temperature (listening to your body, using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, discussing your feelings with someone else).</p> <p>3. Social strategies Asking questions (asking for clarification or verification, asking for correction). Cooperating with others (cooperating with peers, cooperating with proficient users of the language). Empathising with others (developing cultural understanding, becoming aware of others thoughts and feelings).</p>

Oxford (1989: 135-145).

Table 2
Percentages of Direct and Indirect Strategies used by Participants in their TAPs Analysis

STRATEGIES CASES	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Meta-Cognitive	Affective	Social	TOTAL
Case One	7 10.14%	38 55.07%	2 2.90%	6 23.19%	4 5.80%	2 2.90%	69 100%
Case Two Text One	2 4.0%	21 42.00%	1 2.00%	23 46.00%	1 2.00%	2 4.00%	50 100%
Text Two	0 0%	9 52.94%	1 5.88%	6 35.29%	1 5.88%	0 0%	17 100%
Case Three	1 4.55%	7 31.82%	0 0%	11 50.00%	3 13.64%	0 0%	22 100%
Case Four Text One	1 1.72%	31 53.45%	1 1.72%	20 34.48%	1 1.72%	4 6.90%	58 100%
Text Two	2 10.0%	10 50.00%	1 5.00%	6 30.00%	0 0%	1 5.00%	20 100%
Case Five	0 0%	28 68.29%	0 0%	12 29.27%	1 2.44%	0 0%	41 100%
Average Overall Use of Strategies	13 4.69%	144	6 2.17%	94 33.94%	11 3.97%	9 3.25%	277 100%

Discussion of Findings

The study by the researcher found that all of the participants used the main direct and indirect language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1989) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) while translating. This is shown in Table 2. However, the fifth participant (Case Five) did not overtly use the memory, compensation and social strategies because he had more than nineteen years of experience in translating and translating had become 'automatic' to him. Also, this is one drawback of the think-aloud protocol technique whereby not all the participants actually verbalise all their thoughts aloud even though they have been asked to do so. To this participant, translating has become 'automatic' that he does not realize that he has not verbalized but has actually translated on paper. This study supports the notion put forward by Robinson (1997) that translation is actually a language learning process and the translator is always a learner. The researcher agrees with Robinson (1997: 51) who suggests that

“translation is an intelligent activity, requiring creative problem-solving in novel, textual, social and cultural conditions” He further suggests that translation involves “complex processes of conscious and unconscious learning” Also he admits (1997:49) that “experienced translators are fast because they have translated so much that it often seems as if their brain isn’t doing the translating – their fingers arc.. (the target language equivalent terms) come to them automatically, without conscious thought or logical analysis”.

The researcher suggests that translation can be studied as though it were a language learning process. The researcher proposes that just like language learning, translating too is a problem-solving task. She agrees with Darwish (2003:21) that translation involves, besides two languages, a host of other disciplines such as linguistics, rhetorics, culture, concepts, equivalence, communication and writing. To complete the process of translating a source language text to a target language text, the researcher proposes that strategies bridge theory and practice. The strategies that the participants used were the direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1989). All the main direct and indirect strategies were found to have been used by the participants while translating in order to realize the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic synthesis and analysis as proposed by Bell (1991) in his translation model, the cognitive, linguistic, communicative and pragmatic approaches and finding equivalent terms in the target language as proposed by Sager (1994) in his translation model, and making and implementing decisions, active reading, comprehension and production as suggested by Darwish (2003) in his translation models.

While translating, the participants used all the main direct and indirect language strategies from the start to the end of their translation task. The participants generally followed this sequence:

- 1 translation planning and organising,
2. information analysis via reading and understanding the source language text,
- 3 analyzing and reasoning (understanding the message so that it makes sense) the source text,
4. translating to target language text sentence by sentence,
- 5 reviewing and revising,
6. evaluating final translation,
- 7 delivering completed translation product to the publishing house to be edited,
- 8 further reviewing after editing to ensure content has not been made ambiguous and
- 9 finally returning it to the publishing house for it to be published.

We can see that the translation process is not linear but iterative and cascaded based on the context of the situation and is culture-embedded. To ensure a good translation, the participants used the cognitive, linguistic, communicative and pragmatic approaches as suggested by Sager (1994) to ensure a clear, accurate and natural translation. The most important part of translation is the writing or production part whereby a translator has to render the original source language text to the target language text.

According to Sager (1994), translation and writing are close parallel activities. This is discussed in the following section.

Figure 1

Specification Analysis in Writing and Translation (Stages 1 - 4)
Preparation for Writing and Translation (Stages 5 - 12)
 (Sager 1994:169 and 186)

Writing	Translation Stages
Determine the general content of the message (What?)	1. Identification of SL document
Determine the general purpose of the message (Why?)	2. Identification of intention
Define the recipients (Who?)	3. Interpretation of Specification and
Define the function, i.e. the expected reaction of the recipient.	
Plan the amount and order of content (What is presupposed?)	
Plan the realisation (What is assumed?) (What is expressed linguistically, what by other means?)	
Preparation for Writing and Translation	
Choice of text type	5. Choice of TL text type
↓ Consider external constraints (format, publication, circulation, presentation, Where, When, How?) Consider alternative modes of communication	
	6. Choice of translation strategy
	7. Reading-comprehension
	8. Research/Dictionary look-up
Determine structure, chapters, headings, paragraphs	9. Search for equivalents 10/11 Matching/Compensation
Message production	12. Document production
↓ Evaluation Revision and Modification Presentation	

Similarities between Writing and Translation

The researcher agrees with Sager (1994:169) that the closest of the four language skills to the translation process is the writing skill as both writing and translation have similarities in approach and features.

In Figure 1, Sager (1994:169) shows a detailed set of the decisions taken before writing which are contrasted with the specification and preparation phases of translation to show the similarities of features between the two activities.

The specification phase according to Sager (1994:168) serves the purpose of identifying the task and becoming familiar with two aspects, the document to be processed and the task description. According to him, translators have to go through a process of analysis and reflection. Sager suggests that this phase introduces the different communicative situations. It places translators in the middle of the situation of speech acts which they must perform in their professional roles, and involves them already in their dual role which is:

1. as readers when they are faced with receiving a message, and
2. as writers when they are faced with a need to re-produce a message.

According to him, this initial assessment can be expressed as a number of questions, the answers to which have to be found by the translators themselves or by consulting the other role players in this situation (see Figure 1):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Identification of SL Document: | What type of document is it? |
| 2. Identification of Intention. | Who is the document for? |
| | What is the document for? |
| 3. Interpretation of Specifications: | What type of document is to be produced? |
| 4. Cursory Reading: | What is the document about? |

Sager (1994:168) suggests that these questions can be broken down further. In Figure 1, a detailed set of the decisions taken before writing are contrasted with the specification phase in translation to show the coincidence of features. In a regular systematic process of translation production these questions are divided into several steps of identification and analysis. Some of the answers can be provided by the analysis of the source language document, the rest have to be elicited from the task specifications which translators, like other technical writers, work according to. Sager (1994:169) further states that the answers to these questions permit translators to decide whether they are qualified to undertake the task, whether they have the

proper resources to carry it out, what translation strategy to adopt, possibly including the use of tools provided by information technology, and what detailed techniques to use.

These questions are discussed below:

1. Identification of source language document: Before reading a document, Sager (1994:169) suggests all readers form an impression of the text and the topic they are dealing with in order to tune their cognitive processes to the right attitude of receptiveness, otherwise they lack a stimulus for making the effort for looking at it in the first place. Translators, according to Sager, receive documents which in some way have already been pre-selected for this activity by someone, and therefore look at such documents only from a professional point of view, but nevertheless need to identify it more closely and this needs text analysis. They also have to identify the text type (that is whether it is a letter, novel etc.) and topic. Bell (1991:205) divides texts according to the dominant function and envisages further subdivisions, each of which is realized in a number of text forms such as:
 - a. Exposition: narrative, descriptive, conceptual
 - b. Argumentation: overt, covert
 - c. Instruction: with option, without option
2. Identification of Intention. Sager suggests that translators want to know the intention of the source document, that is, whether they have to acknowledge the circumstances of the message or whether they can treat the document like a text to which a new intention has to be attached.
3. and 4. Interpretation of Specification and Cursory Reading: Sager (1994:172) states that the translator's next step is to define the task to be performed on the basis of the explicit or implicit instructions received, e.g. "for information"(of an official or group of officials); "working document"; "document for discussion" (in a meeting of committees, working parties etc.). According to him, the situation of the translation process will include situational factors such as time, cost and direction. In addition, he suggests that the personal factors which will affect the translation process include the translator (single/multiple), initiator (writer, agent, reader), authorship (single,multiple), readership (primary, secondary; mode of reading) and awareness (writer/reader awareness of translation). The overall time required for producing a translation is, according to Sager, (1994:173) theoretically and practically relevant. It is theoretically relevant, because it distinguishes translation from simultaneous interpreting and, in practice,

a time gap is required both for the task itself and for revision; however, an excessive time gap may make a translation irrelevant. Sager feels that the time interval between the source document production and delivery of the completed translation to the end reader can also have a direct effect on the translated document because it may require changes in the temporal references in the text.

Another factor that has to be considered according to Sager (1994:175) is the condition of the translator. He feels that translators must assess their own competence in the light of the task in hand. Too many translators tackle too wide a range of jobs and therefore are slower in their work and earn less than they could if they specialised more. He points out that highly successful translators, like technical writers, specialise because this permits them to develop their skills in particular areas to the highest degree. As proven in this study, Sager feels that translators must establish whether they can do the job alone or whether for technical or time reasons they need help. He further suggests that translators must find out whether they are dealing with a document from a single author or whether they are translating a composite document, whether the text has been edited to conform to a particular style or to previous documents which have also been translated. In addition to this, Sager suggests that translators must know whether the readers of the translation are primary or secondary readers, i.e. whether they are directly addressed or whether they are incidental readers. Also important is the user expectation of the translation.

Sager (1994:185) suggests that as soon as the general feasibility of a translation task is established, in the sense that the specifications are realistic in terms of time, cost and textual factors, and translators have confirmed their personal capability of performing the task, the process can progress to the next phase. This is the preparation phase where the main emphasis is in producing a target language text based on instructions, notes or, as in most cases, an existing document in the source language.

According to Sager (1994:185), the first pragmatic decision is that of choosing the text form of the new product, followed by the choice of an appropriate strategy of translation which might consider the use of all machine aids to translation. Also a translator has to do a detailed reading of the document and where necessary, some separate research, usually confined to looking up words in a dictionary. From Figure 1, we can see the two sets of decisions involved in the writing process being contrasted with the translation process in order to show their great similarity. Sager (1994:186) suggests that what distinguishes the process of translation from that of writing is that it involves

a transformation of code which is based on the search of pragmatic, cognitive and linguistic equivalents at the various levels appropriate for the particular act of communication that is to be mediated. He suggests that the translation task can also be described as a process of establishing and expressing equivalents. In the same way as technical writers must first decide the text type they have to write, translators, assuming that the same range and functions of text types are available in the target language, have to decide, on the basis of the specifications, whether to replicate the source language text type or not. The search for equivalents begins at the level of the text type and if there is no direct equivalent, there is then the choice of different target language text type or the possibility to adopt a translation text type. The translation strategies chosen by translators are affected by a large number of factors such as.

- 1 textual characteristics: literary, biblical, non-literary (include scientific, technical and legal)
2. relation of source to target document: autonomous, dependent, derived
- 3 intention. same content plus same intention or new intention
4. content: same intention plus same content or some different content (include reduction, addition, modification)
- 5 precedent: documents in a sequence which will initiate a series or which continue a series of related documents, documents which are likely to remain isolated occurrences
6. number of translations required: documents translated into one language only or into several languages at the same time
- 7 degree of revision required. documents in definitive original form, documents likely to undergo stages of re-writing, hence requiring re-translation, and documents used for scanning only and of which a fuller translation may be required later
- 8 user requirement: documents for superficial reading, "for information only", documents for detailed reading, filing and future reference for a known reader, documents used as drafts for other documents, documents for publication, texts with the force of legal documents

(Sager, 1994:189)

Some of these factors overlap. Sager (1994: 190) suggests that not all of these possibilities are exploited in practice, but the combination of factors in even the small number of final products for which there is practical evidence of identifiable strategies so translation can be seen to be founded on a very complex range of requirements.

The next stage of preparation consists of a detailed reading of the text. According to Sager (1994:198), the cognitive process of understanding begins

with reading/comprehension, a single or an iterative process of varying intensity. There are many techniques of reading, according to the degree of familiarity with the topic and the subject knowledge of the translator. The technique adopted must permit the identification of the cognitive units of the text, while at the same time (according to the pragmatic equivalent of the text type chosen earlier), retaining sufficient perception of the linguistic structure so that the translation can show the degree of recognisable linguistic relationship with the source document decided upon in the strategy decision. According to Sager (1994:204), "dictionary look-up" and other forms of consultation of reference works begin at this stage of the process and continue from then on with varying intensity and purpose. He suggests that in the reading comprehension phase, consultation is oriented towards the source language; in the translation phase the orientation is bi-directional according to the nature of the problem, in the revision phase the orientation is towards the target language, unless there appears to be a need to go back to an earlier phase. Thus, he suggests "look-up" is initially supportive of comprehension, then it becomes concerned with equivalences and moves finally towards control of expressions.

The final stages involve evaluation and editing where revision is done to the translation to meet the requirements set by the commissioner of the translation. The last stage is when the translated product is submitted for presentation to be published by the assigned publishing company.

Thus we see from Figure 1, that writing and translating involve similar features. The translation stages have been discussed above. The specification of the writing stages involve determining the message content (what?) and general purpose of the message (Why?), defining the recipients (Who?) and function (expected reaction of the recipients), planning the amount and order of content (What is presupposed) and the realisation (what is assumed and what is expressed linguistically, what by other means). The preparation phase for writing involves the choice of text-type (letter, novel, literary, non-literary, expository, informative, argumentative etc.). Here the writer has to consider the format, publication, circulation, presentation involving the questions - where?, when? how? and the writer also has to consider the alternative modes of communication. The writer, besides considering the above, also has to determine the structure, division of the written material into chapters, headings and paragraphs.

(1994:186) suggests that the writer has to evaluate, revise, modify and finally present his written work (when it is for publication) for publication.

Sager's (1994) suggestion that writing and translation share similar features is supported by the researcher. In fact, the researcher is of the opinion that of the four skills in language learning, writing seems to come closest to translation.

The researcher also supports Smith-Worthington and Jefferson's (2005:80) proposal that the process of writing involves planning (prewriting, shaping, researching), drafting, revising and copyediting (proofreading and publishing). She also agrees with Smith-Worthington and Jefferson's (2005:84) suggestion that the three features of writing are as follows:

1. Writing is recursive or circular in nature – it is a backward and forward process. The recursive nature means that the thinking process sometimes circles back to earlier stages.
2. Writing takes time – time is needed for ideas to rise and develop. Different stages have their own activities. It takes sufficient time to complete a document.
3. Writing is different for everyone – it varies from one person to the next. This is because people are different, their thinking processes and learning styles vary. A person writes to fit his or her personality and thinking style.

Based on the researcher's experience as a translator, on her discussions with other translators, and from this research, the researcher strongly feels that the above writing process and the three features of writing put forward by Smith-Worthington and Jefferson (2005) can be extended to the process of translation. Here too we see a close parallelism between writing and translating as they share similar features and approaches. The researcher is concerned with writing because translation is transferring or substituting one written record from the source language to the target language.

Conclusion

From the TAPs analysis, it is seen how translators make and implement decisions regarding the closest, natural equivalent in the target language and here they share the same experience with students learning a foreign or second language where these students make revisions, imitate, use imagery, and all the language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1989), to be intelligible to the other party with whom they are communicating. Both learning a second language and translation are iterative, cumulative, dichotomous, integrative, interactive, forward and backward-looking mental operations involving revision. The in-depth analysis of the think-aloud protocols clearly showed that there are parallels between second/foreign language learning and translation processes. The translation process via TAPs also revealed that the participants used the major activities in the translation models proposed by Bell (1991), Sager (1994) and Darwish (2003). The writing process and the three features of writing as

proposed by Smith-Worthington and Jefferson (2005) can be extended to the translation process. Thus, it can be generally said that of the four language learning skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), writing is the closest to translating.

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