13.   Self-Revision

According to the European standard EN 15038, "On completion of the initial translation, the translator shall check his/her own work". Skipping self-revision is simply unprofessional. The minimum acceptable is a full unilingual re-reading of the translation – no scanning or spot-checking. If time permits, a comparative re-reading may be done as well, depending on how confident the translator is about the accuracy of the translation. When the translator is a freelance producing directly for a client (not for a translation agency), this may be the only check the translation receives, unless the translator has another freelance look at it. When the translator is an employee, self-revision is still very important because in many translating organizations today, designated quality controllers most often do not carry out a full revision of the draft translation. In some organizations, senior staff translators operate like freelances in the sense that their self-revised translations may go straight out to the client.

Many of the matters discussed in Chapter 11 (degrees of revision) and Chapter 12 (procedures) are applicable to self-revision.

In Chapter 1, I pointed out that it is easy to make mistakes when writing or translating, and easy not to notice these mistakes. Now I should add that it's probably easier not to notice your own mistakes than the mistakes others have made. That is because the wording is yours, so you have a familiarity with it and a certain personal attachment to it. There may be passages of which you are particularly proud and as a result you fail to notice problems that may be obvious to others.

13.1   Integration of self-revision into translation production

In this chapter, we'll be concentrating on an issue that is peculiar to self-revision – the different ways you can integrate checking and amending work into the overall process of producing a translation. How do professional translators integrate self-revision into their work? Self descriptions by translators during workshops on revision, as well as empirical studies of self-revision (see Appendix 6), suggest that there is no one recognized approach; different people do the job quite differently.

The production of a translation can be described in terms of three phases and five tasks:

Three phases of translation production
   (1)   pre-drafting (before sentence-by-sentence drafting begins)
   (2)   drafting
   (3)   post-drafting (after sentence-by-sentence drafting is complete)

Five tasks to be performed
   (1)   Interpret the source text.
   (2)   Compose the translation.
   (3)   Conduct the research needed for tasks 1 and 2.
   (4)   *Check* the draft translation for errors and amend if necessary.
   (5)   Decide the implications of the brief. How do the intended users and use of the finished product affect tasks 1 to 4?

Different translators distribute the tasks over the phases differently. Perhaps they will develop a default strategy for texts with which they are familiar (say, texts in the field of finance that are reasonably well written, under 3000 words, and have a deadline that allows 4 hours per 1000 words). They will vary the strategy when confronted with unfamiliar texts: those that belong to other fields, are not well written, are much lengthier or have a shorter deadline.

I should make it clear before proceeding that, in speaking of strategies, I am referring only to what translators do more or less consciously. By 'more or less', I mean that some things have become so much a matter of routine that a translator may not be immediately aware of them. But apart from that, much that goes on in the mind when we use language is completely inaccessible to our awareness, and is therefore not part of 'strategy'.

There are two types of strategy: for comprehension of the source and for composing the translation. For comprehension, the default strategy may be to do considerable preparation before beginning sentence-by-sentence composing of the translation. Translators who adopt this strategy may read the source text through entirely or at any rate in some detail, mark difficult passages, do a considerable amount of conceptual research (i.e. research needed to understand a passage), and perhaps even jot down some possible target-language wordings. Other translators work quite differently: they take a quick glance at the text (perhaps to see if they need to ask for reference documentation) and then start composing the translation. They may do a certain amount of research as they go, or simply leave a blank, write down alternative translations, or take a guess at the meaning preceded by a question mark; they then do further research after drafting is complete. Thus the post-drafting phase may not consist simply in checking-and-correcting; it may include research and composing work as well.

As regards the composing work, there are several default approaches. Some translators we may call 'Architects', borrowing a term from the study by Chandler discussed in Chapter 1, but using it somewhat differently, to refer not to a strategy for creating an entire text from the pre-drafting to the post-drafting phase, but rather to a strategy for composing individual sentences during the drafting phase. Architects are so called because they do a lot of planning: they consider several possible target-language wordings in their minds before finally picking one and typing it out; they then move along immediately to the next sentence of the source text. Others, whom we may call 'Steamrollers', type out something as soon as they have read the source sentence, and then proceed immediately to the next sentence of the source text. They do not ponder possible wordings

in their minds before their fingers begin moving on the keyboard. A third group – the 'Oil Painters' – also type out something (often a rather literal translation) as soon as they have read the source sentence, but they immediately revise it, perhaps several times, before proceeding to the next sentence. They translate-by-revising so to speak. They are called Oil Painters because they lay down one wording, then another on top of it, and then another. Oil Painters and Architects both try to get down a fairly finished translation during the drafting phase, the former through revision, the latter through mental planning.

Thus the term 'self-revision' does not refer only to checking-and-correcting that takes place during the post-drafting phase (though many people do use the term that way); the drafting phase includes some degree of checking-and-correcting work as well, this being especially true of Oil Painters.

Some translators need to Oil Paint (revise during the drafting phase) because they do not read whole sentences before beginning to compose, just enough to get started. It is then sometimes necessary to backtrack because the unread portion of the sentence forces changes in the already translated part. Consider this sequence:

> Source text:
> Le nombre d'évasions a diminué dans la majorité des pénitenciers à sécu-rité minimale durant la première moitié de l'année fiscale 1999-2000.
>
> Gloss:
> The number of escapes has diminished in the majority of the peniten-tiaries with minimum security during the first half of the financial year 1999-2000.

After reading as far as the French for 'minimum security', the translator wrote:

> The number of escapes has dropped at most minimum-security penitentiaries

Then after reading the remainder of the French, it became necessary to back-track and change the tense ('has dropped' to 'dropped') because the text was written during the 2000-2001 financial year, and the perfective was therefore not permissible. Presumably some people use this approach because they have found that only a few such changes are necessary after the remaining portion of the sentence is read. As a result, time is saved, and the translator can compose more continuously, with relatively short gaps for reading. Those revisions which do prove necessary are not terribly time-consuming; even a bigger change (e.g. moving 'at most minimum-security penitentiaries' to the front of the sentence to improve the link with the preceding sentence) is simple using the word processor's click-and-drag option.

Translation Memory (see Chapter 14.5) disrupts the Architect and Steamroller strategies, to a greater or lesser extent depending on how much target-language material has been found in the Memory's database. The translator unavoidably

becomes an Oil Painter, constantly stopping to revise bits of target-language material inserted from the Memory.

People who speak their translations using a dictation machine appear to be either Architects or Steamrollers; Oil Painting is impractical because it calls for frequent backtracking, which is awkward with such a machine. For those who dictate using speech recognition software that turns speech into text, there is a need to speak very clearly or risk having the machine fail to recognize words. But it is hard to concentrate on speaking clearly if you do not know exactly what you are going to say, so you must plan a good stretch of translation before opening your mouth; otherwise there will be a great deal of on-screen correcting required. Thus users of such software will probably be Architects.

After drafting is complete, Steamrollers will often find that they need to do a considerable amount of revision. Architects and Oil Painters will probably have less to do at the post-drafting phase, the former because of their careful consideration of several possible wordings before writing, the latter because of all the revision they have already done during the drafting phase. Of course, during the post-drafting re-reading of the translation, translators get a more synoptic view of the text, and certain macro-level problems that were not evident when focusing on individual sentences may be identified as needing revision. Those who dictate may discover during this phase that unwanted features of the spoken language have crept into their drafts.

In one empirical study, Englund Dimitrova (2005) found that highly experienced translators tend to make most of their changes during the drafting phase; students, and translators with only 2-3 years' experience, more often wait until the post-drafting phase. In another such study, Jakobsen (2002) found that professionals spend more time on the post-drafting phase than students but make far fewer changes during that phase than students.

Another aspect of the drafting phase where translators may differ is focus of attention. Some focus on the Language parameters (especially Idiom) when working on familiar texts. That is, their aim during the drafting phase is to set down readable, flowing prose. They do not want to pause to work in every single secondary idea in the source text, as this interrupts the composition process. Then they use the post-drafting phase to bring an idiomatic but not entirely accurate or complete translation into closer conformance with the source text.

Some people do the opposite: in the drafting phase they try to get down a very accurate and complete translation. Then they use the post-drafting phase to fix up the Language parameters. You may not be aware of such a focus, but it is useful to *become* aware of it in order to spend your post-drafting time wisely. If you have been focusing on Transfer during the drafting phase, then perhaps you need to pay critical attention to Language during the post-drafting phase. You may find that this is not easy, because you tend to accept wordings you have already composed unless they are truly awful.

Another function of the post-drafting phase may be to correct the effects of 'automated' drafting. It is well known that as translators gain experience, they increase their speed by automatically translating source-language expression

X by target-language expression Y. Ideally, a bell goes off in the mind if Y is in fact not appropriate in a particular passage, but sometimes this bell may not be functioning properly. The post-drafting phase affords an opportunity to correct the resulting errors.

You might also consider whether some of the revision work you are doing during the post-drafting phase could be avoided. For example, if the source text is poorly written, are you improving the writing as you compose your initial draft, or are you leaving such improvements until the post-drafting phase? The latter approach is probably more time-consuming overall. Another example: the post-drafting phase is not a good time to make decisions about things like the level of formality of language. Changing the level will be very time-consuming; it is not something you can do by search-and-replace. Better to come to a final decision about such matters early in the drafting phase.

With longer texts, you may be wasting time during the post-drafting phase by checking points you already checked (perhaps days earlier) during the drafting phase, but have forgotten about in the intervening period. If you often find yourself checking a point and then realizing that you have already checked it, place a mark on that passage of the translation the first time you check it.

To sum up, people differ in how they integrate the checking task into the translation production process, and as a result there are differences in how much checking remains to be done in the post-drafting phase, and which parameters need to be checked during that phase. We do not know how many people use one approach, how many another, though informal shows-of-hands during workshops reveal that Steamrolling is very common when translating familiar texts.

Is there a best way to work? No one knows, because empirical studies have not yet advanced to the point where we can say that one particular way of integrating the checking task into the translation production process is superior (that is, it results in a translation which is better, or is produced more quickly, or both). In all likelihood, the best way to work will vary from one person to another. So the question is whether you have found the way that is optimal for you. Perhaps if your default strategy is to be an Architect, you should give Steamrolling or Oil Painting a try.

13.2   Self-diagnosis

If you think there may be a problem with your current approach to self-revision, you could attempt a formal diagnosis of your work methods (if you cannot find someone else to do it). Here are some of the questions you will need to answer:

(a)   What are the weaknesses in my draft translations? That is, what types of problem are typically present at the end of my drafting phase? Your self-revision procedures should focus on these. There is no point wasting time on your strengths. In other words, you don't want to be

over-checking. Why check consistency of heading treatment if your drafts are already consistent?

To diagnose the weaknesses in your drafts, save a copy of your translations at the end of the drafting phase. After a while, you will have accumulated a body of drafts which you can use for diagnostic purposes. (See Chapter 14.2 for more on diagnosis.)

(b)   What are the weaknesses in my final output? That is, what types of problem are typically still present at the end of my post-drafting phase? These are the weaknesses which your checking procedure is not currently catching. So you need to change your procedure to deal with them. If you discover that your inter-sentence connections are still not very clear at the end of the post-drafting phase, then you need to be spending more time on unilingual re-reading, and perhaps that should be your final check.

(c)   To what extent am I *over-correcting*? How much time do I spend making unnecessary changes in my draft? Can I justify each change to myself, in terms of the revision parameters ("I've left something out", "that's the wrong level of language"), and more particularly in terms of the readership and future purpose of the translation ("that won't be understood by the non-expert readers", "this is a prestigious publication"). To some extent, over-correcting is a matter of confidence, or rather the lack thereof. Inexperienced translators find it hard to quickly decide that a wording is alright. Being uncertain, they make changes, which may in fact not be necessary.

(d)   To what extent am I *introducing errors* while self-revising?

To answer questions (c) and (d), you will need to save several versions of your translation as it comes into being during the drafting and post-drafting phases. You can then compare the versions using the Compare function of your word processor (see Chapter 8.4); as you examine the changes you have made, you can see whether you are over-correcting or introducing errors.

If you are very ambitious, you can install a screen recorder like Camtasia in your computer. You will then be able to record everything that happens on your screen while you work, after which you can play it back and observe your self-revision habits. There is also software that will record all your keystrokes and play them back (for more information, enter the two words "Translog" and "translation" in Google).

13.3   The term 'self-revision'

Some people may prefer to reserve the term 'revision' for the process of checking someone else's translations (discussed in Chapter 14). There is a significant

difference between checking the work of others and checking your own work. While the former obviously takes place after the translation is complete, the latter, as we have seen, is distributed over two phases: the drafting phase and the post-drafting phase. The European standard EN 15038 uses the term 'checking' for the self-revision work which occurs in the post-drafting phase and makes no reference at all to self-revision during the drafting phase. Many people may regard the self-revision work done during the drafting phase, especially by Oil Painters, as simply a normal part of the writing process rather than a distinct process: as you compose sentences, you monitor what you've written, and occasionally you recompose.

Practice

1. Write down how you think you distribute the tasks over the phases. Do you do a lot of comprehension work before you start or do you try to understand-as-you-go? When it comes to drafting the translation, are you an Architect, a Steamroller or an Oil Painter? Do you focus on Transfer or on Language during the drafting phase?

2. If you are one of those who make quite extensive changes during the post-drafting phase, do you think this means there is something wrong with the way you work during the drafting phase?

3. Do you think your self-revision procedure varies with any of the following factors:

    • length of text?
    • urgency of translation request?
    • topic (familiar or not)?
    • quality of the writing in the source text?

    If so, how?

4. Exercise in self-revision.
   This exercise will inevitably be quite time-consuming, because each individual workshop or course participant must first translate a text (300-400 words is a suitable length). It is not a good idea to have people bring a pre-drafted translation with them, for two reasons. First, they may pre-revise the text to avoid embarrassment. Second, an important part of the exercise is to notice checking and amending work done during the drafting phase. People who bring a pre-drafted translation may have forgotten what they did during the drafting phase.

   Ideally the exercise would be done in a room where everyone can work on a computer and share his or her self-revised texts with other participants,

by email or by posting on a commonly accessible website or by projection on a screen at the front. However this will very often be impractical. The exercise can also be done using pen and paper or printouts. The instructions below assume no electronic sharing.

There are four steps. With a one-day workshop, allow a lengthy mid-day break during which participants can both eat lunch and do Step One. With a two-day workshop, you might do Step One the afternoon of the first day, and Steps Two to Four the morning of the second day.

If participants will not have access to the Internet and electronic term banks, the instructor will need to distribute photocopied documentation. The simpler alternative is to use a text that does not call for any research except in printed dictionaries (which should be available). The disadvantage of using such a text is that participants will not then experience the interaction that often occurs between conducting research and making changes in the draft.

Step One - Pre-drafting and Drafting
(a)   Proceed through the pre-drafting and drafting phases using your normal method and working at your normal speed. (This will not be possible if the circumstances of the workshop mean that you have to use paper and pencil instead of a computer, or a computer instead of a dictating machine.)

(b)   If working on paper, do not erase anything when you make changes. Simply cross words out, leaving them legible. Write on every other line or every third line so as to leave room for changes. If working on a computer, you can keep track of any revisions you make during drafting by turning on Track Changes (see Chapter 8.4) under the Review tab. This tab also allows you to display only the changed version on screen as you proceed, so that you will not be distracted by coloured markups of your insertions and deletions. Select Final, or deselect Insertions and Deletions in Show Markup.

(c)   Do not go over your draft once you come to the end of the text. In other words, do not proceed to the post-drafting phase.

(d)   If you were working on paper, give the workshop leader your hand-written draft showing the changes you made during the drafting phase. If you were working on screen, give the leader a triple-spaced printout of your draft, showing the changes. To do this, select Final Showing Markup under the Review tab, and make sure Insertions and Deletions are selected in Show Markup. Then go to the Print dialogue box and choose Document Showing Markup.

(e)   Write down a brief description of how you carried out the pre-drafting and drafting phases:
   •   Did you read the entire source text, or just glance at it and then start drafting?

- Did you do any preliminary research? Any research while drafting?
- Did you use the Architect, Steamroller or Oil Painting approach?
- Did you focus on Transfer or on Language while drafting?

Step Two - Post-drafting

(a)   Take up to five minutes to decide how you are going to revise:
- Which parameters will you check?
- Will you do separate readings for Language and Transfer, and if so, in what order?

(b)   The workshop leader will announce how much time you should take to do your self-revision. You will have more time if you Steamrolled through the drafting phase, or if you are doing a full comparative revision, or if you are doing two separate readings.

(c)   Write corrections in by hand; don't use a computer. If you prepared the draft on paper, print the changes in block capitals. (Using a different colour of pen will not work unless a colour photocopier is available. Printing in block capitals will distinguish changes in the post-drafting phase from those made during the drafting phase when a black-and-white photocopy of your work is made for other participants.)

(d)   If you identify a problem but do not find a solution fairly quickly, just underline the passage and move on. The focus of the exercise is finding problems rather than finding solutions.

(e)   Do not repeat any procedure (e.g. do not do two read-throughs for Accuracy).

(f)   Hand in your revised draft.

Step Three - Presentations

(a)   Prepare to give a five-minute presentation on your work either to the entire group (if small) or to a subgroup (if the entire group is large). The presentation should explain:
- how you prepared the draft (using the description you wrote down at Step One (e));
- how you worked during the post-drafting phase: which parameters were you especially concerned with and why did you chose them? Did you do separate readings for Language and Transfer? If you did a single reading, did you focus on Language, on Transfer, or both equally?
- subjective aspects of the self-revision process (e.g. Did you find yourself agonizing over a point? Did you suddenly realize that you were pondering a change when no change was really needed?)

(b)   Receive from the workshop leader, for each participant, a copy of the drafting phase output showing changes as well as a copy of the post-drafting phase output showing changes made during

that phase, so that you can follow the presentations of other participants.

(c)   Give your presentation when your turn comes.

Step Four - Small Group Discussion

Take 45 minutes for discussion with a small group of 3-5 other participants. For example, each of you might say, for selected points, why you made a change or decided not to make a change. This is an opportunity to see things you may have missed.

Further reading

(See the References list near the end of the book for details on this publication.)

Dragsted and Carl (2013).