Section Five — Translation and Interpreting Training and Industry

Use of Consultation Material in NAATI Translation Accreditation Examinations: A Think-Aloud Protocol Analysis

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Abstract
The think-aloud protocol (TAP) as a data acquisition method in translation studies has been gaining recognition since the 1980s. This thesis is a foundational study that revolves around experiments conducted at RMIT University in which three pairs of postgraduate translation studies students undertook a simulated NAATI translation accreditation examination in both English-into-Chinese and Chinese-into-English directions. An analysis of the data acquired in verbalisations and exam paper errors is presented and preliminary conclusions are given based on observed phenomena. These findings not only have implications for further process-oriented research but also present unexpected pedagogical considerations for translation training in Australia and abroad.

Keywords

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The accreditation rate of students taking the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) examination has been of some concern for a number of years, yet little process-oriented research has been done which looks at the way examinees approach the examination task and how they actually arrive at translation decisions. Furthermore, the use of dictionaries – in particular, bilingual dictionaries – in both pedagogical and professional contexts has been the subject of analysis, and in some case criticism, by a number of theorists. This research aims to bridge these two points of discussion by examining the relevant phenomena in real-life experimental situations. It has relevance in the institutional, ethical and
pedagogical domains of professional translating and is informed by both local and international contexts.

1.2. Hypotheses

This research was motivated by a number of hypotheses which were independently conceptualised by the researcher. It was hoped that the testing of these hypotheses might yield outcomes relevant not only to training institutions but the translation profession at large. They are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1.** Students in NAATI translation accreditation examinations make full use of different kinds of consultation material when a full range of possible materials are made available.

**Hypothesis 2.** Students make more consultations when translating from their first language (L1) into their second language (L2) than vice versa.

**Hypothesis 3.** Students make consultations to comprehend previously unknown words.

**Hypothesis 4.** Consultations do not always lead to adequate translations.

These questions will be addressed throughout the body of the thesis by analysing the results of think-aloud protocol (TAP) experiments conducted with three pairs of students currently or previously enrolled in Master’s translation courses at RMIT University. The experiment involved asking the subjects to verbalise their thought processes as they undertook two NAATI translation accreditation exams – one Chinese-into-English and the other English-into-Chinese.

1.3. A brief introduction to TAPs

Since its inception in the early 1980s as an experimental method in psychology to understand the “mechanisms and internal structure of cognitive processes” (Ericsson & Simon 1983: 1), the think-aloud protocol (TAP) (also known as “thinking aloud protocol” or “talk aloud protocol”) has been applied in a variety of ways in a plethora of academic fields, and a major one of which is translation studies (Jääskeläinen 2009:. 290). Giuseppe Palumbo, in *Key Terms in Translation Studies* (2009), offers a succinct definition of TAP as a research tool for examining translation processes:

In the ‘think aloud’ method of data collection a translator is asked to translate a text while concurrently verbalising as much as s/he can of his/her thoughts. The verbalisation is audio- or video- recorded and then transcribed: