Uncertainty in Translation Course Students of Translation Master of Mascara University as Case Study

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Abstract

The concept of uncertainty in translation studies is becoming one of the main recent tendencies. It is a problematic that links between philosophy and cognitive studies. Hence, the present study aims at exploring the cognitive processes of students of master when dealing with situational difficulties such as unfindable words, stylistic features, syntactic difficulties…it is a qualitative study that handles the problem of uncertainty from a didactic perspective. The main hypotheses of this paper are "there are other methods to depict the uncertainty of students rather than the TAP method", "it is extremely difficult to know in which cases students were uncertain", and "the cognitive study of uncertainty is an abstract, and consequently, an impossible one". For the purpose of this study, the research relies on two data tools; a questionnaire that has been addressed to teachers of translation in order to get the ins and the outs of this topic; and an in-class observation of students dealing with variables

passages. The paper closes with a set of results and recommendations.

Key-words: Uncertainty; Translation; Cognitive Studies; Teaching.

1. Cognitive Approaches of Translation

One of the major issues in translation studies was the role of cognition and cognitive studies in the understanding of the process of translation. In fact, number of models and theories has been developed in this field; the common denominator is inevitably the focus on the mental description of translators (or translation learners) in order to explain the difficulties, the steps and the strategies adopted by translators. A much debated question is to what extent is the cognitive study of translation efficient in the explanation of different translation problems. Hence, many models flourished since the development of this field of study.

The first significant cognitive model is the one suggested by ESIT scholars Marianne Lederer and Danica Seleskivotich, called “the interpretive theory”, “the sense theory”, or “the School of Paris” in the 1970’s (Alves and Hurtado Albert 2010). The interpretive theory invested the main cognitive principles in the study of interpreting; understanding, Deverbalizing, memorizing, cognitive and linguistic knowledge... it suggests a three step model; the interpreter (later the translator)

understands the utterance, deverbalizes the linguistic from the cognitive knowledge then reformulating it in the target language.

Talking about the cognitive research in translation studies inevitably leads us to evoke one of the most famous empirical experiments that this field knew; it was the Thinking Aloud Protocol (TAP). Kring's study (1986) is seen as the founding work of this emerging paradigm (Alves and Hurtado Albert 2010):

> *TAP did not provide direct access to unconscious or automatic cognitive processes. Nevertheless, they remained as the main source of process-oriented information until the late 1990's… Experimental designs lacked systematization and clear objectives, used small samples (case studies) and differed significantly both conceptually and methodologically among researchers."*
>
> (Alves and Hurtado Albert 2010:29).

Another model has been developed by Bell; it was a typically linguistic and psycholinguistic model. It puts to the fore both artificial intelligence and SFL (systemic-functional linguistics) in its conception of language. Starting with a top-down/bottom-up structure, it begins with a

> *"visual and recognition of the words of the ST, undergoes syntactic parsing in combination with mechanisms of lexical search processed by a frequent structure analyzer, followed by semantic and pragmatic processing to generate a semantic representation supported by an idea organizer and a planner. Once the decision to translate is taken at the level of semantic representation, the input is reprocessed by synthesizers distributed in pragmatic, semantic, and lexico-grammatical levels." (Alves and Hurtado Albert 2010:29)*

Based on Sperber and Wilson's model of communication (1986), Gutt develops his cognitive approach to translation. In fact, they stipulate that the "crucial mental faculty that enables human beings to communicate with one another is the ability to draw inferences from people's behavior." (Gutt 2014:29). The main concept in the relevance theory is "inference". Hence, Gutt points out that the sender of the message (translator) produces a stimulus to let his receiver decodes the content and, thus, gets the inferred information. There are three conditions of any message; production, which is the fact of knowing the receivers expectations, situational context and cognitive experience. The model is strictly related to; expectations, Implicature, semantic representations, cognitive contexts and inference.

Moreover, Kiraly's social and psycholinguistic model (1995) is mainly concerned with processing information within the translator's mind. According to this view, the translator's mind is "an information-processing system in which a translation comes from the interaction of intuitive and controlled processes using linguistic and Extralinguistic information." (Alves and Hurtado Albert 2010:30). Thus, the model's main concepts are: information sources (long-term memory, ST input and external sources like reference boots, dictionaries...) the intuitive work place, and the controlled-processing-center. Face to a translation problem, the information already stored in the memory of the translator will be retrieved and updated with regard to the ST input. Translation problems emerge from the intuitive workplace where the expectancy and intuition of the translator are of paramount importance to the choice of translation strategies.

Developed by Daniel Gile and intended to translation teaching, the Effort Model focuses on the way interpreter's efforts should be rendered. The model consists in; the listening and analysis effort (related to all comprehension oriented operations from the subconscious analysis to the final comprehension of the intended meaning), the production effort (from the mental representation of the message to TT production

including all operations of revision and proofreading), the memory effort (related to interpreting in which short-term memory plays a key role in the outcome quality). (Gile, 2009).

Needless to say that the various cognitive approaches to translation tackled to the translational phenomenon from different perspectives, each one focused on a given problematic. Wilss (1996) handles translation as a decision-making type of behavior. He argues that cognitive psychology is the most suitable domain that should cover translation. Furthermore, he points out that "translation is an intelligent type of behavior to be considered from the perspective of problem solving and decision making upon which other mechanisms, such as creativity and intuition, also play a role." (Alvaro 2010:31). For the purpose of this study, he draws on scheme theory which is based on schemes or cognitive units that facilitate knowledge acquisition. "in order to solve problems, individual builds on both declarative (knowing what) and procedural (knowing how) knowledge." (Alvaro 2010:31).

2. Cognitive Translation: Main Issues and Concerns

Tackling translation from a cognitive perspective is dealing with a set of issues that are closely related to cognition and mental processes. In this context, highlighting the main issues of cognitive translation is

primordial. Translation scholars and researchers deal with: unit of translation, segmentation of the original input, intuition, semantic representation, memory, linguistic and Extralinguistic knowledge, awareness, automatic processes, explicitation VS implicitation, translator's mind mapping, problem solving, decision making, thinking aloud protocol, uncertainty, Deverbalizing,..

3. Cognitive Studies in the Teaching of Translation

One of the first cognitive models that gave importance to translation trainings is the interpretive model. In fact, though the theory had been developed in order to help interpreters fulfilling their task; it is now used for both interpreters and translators training. It starts with dividing the process of translation into three steps: understanding, Deverbalizing and reformulating. Each step requires a set of cognitive skills that should be inculcated to the trainee when dealing with "understanding" step which is sine qua none for any translation process. Marianne Lederer distinguishes between two types of inputs; cognitive and affective. By cognitive inputs, she refers to the meaning that the original author tends to convey. In this context, students of translation should deal with both explicit and implicit meanings. She underscores the importance of cognition within the translational process "cognitive inputs are both

notional and emotional. All texts or segments of text require these inputs, which we have simply called cognitive although they are also affective, with, moreover, a constant shift in balance between the two (…) as Piaget said ”affective life and cognitive life are inseparable although distinct.” (Lederer 2014:29).

Then, she divides the cognitive inputs (units) into two primordial concepts; world knowledge (the sum of linguistic and Extralinguistic knowledge stored in the long-term memory) and contextual knowledge (the sum of information gotten from the ST itself). Based on the “cognitive inputs”, Lederer tackles what she called “cognitive equivalence” which can only be achieved by combining both texts meanings and the notional inputs.

Moreover, the Effort Model, developed by Gile and valid for both interpreting and translation, gives crucial insights to translation teaching. Gile presents a general framework ranging from competencies and skills of translation students, to the way efforts should be managed from understanding step to reverbalizing one. Besides, he handles crucial notions such as; quality, awareness, intuition, decision-making, memory… “The effort models were designed with a didactic purpose in mind, not for research purposes: they set out to explain well-known, recurrent difficulties in interpreting as well as advice given to students to overcome them.” (Gile 2009:188)

Furthermore, in his book "Pathways to Translation Pedagogy", Kiraly's model is based on the following assumptions: "(a) translation is a linguistic behavior, (b) translation also involves cognitive information processes, (c) translation is a form of communicative interaction in a social and cultural context, and (d) translation learning is intrinsically related to the second language learning but it is not coextensive with it." (Kiraly 1995:37). Accordingly, teaching translation, following this view, is a purely cognitive operation since it deals with the translator's behavior (problem solving, decision making, choice of words,…), the information processing (understanding and interpreting the explicit and implicit meanings), the cultural and social representations, and it is generally used in teaching a foreign language.

4. The Concept of "Uncertainty"

In order to tackle uncertainty, we have first to deal with one of the key concepts of translation studies which is equivalence. In fact, Anthony Pym, who is one of the first scholars who handled this concept, links between the increasing dissatisfaction with equivalence and the rise of the concept of uncertainty, he underlines two main reasons of the 'decline of equivalence'; invisibility of the source (since throughout centuries, the ST varies from manuscripts to software, to digital

literature,…); and epistemological skepticism (related to the radical changes in the field of humanities from structuralism to post-structuralism to deconstruction… which made the concept of equivalence fuzzy (Pym 2010). Hence, there are two main reasons for the decline of equivalence: technological changes and the intellectual climate.

Pym explicitly presented the importance of the concept by highlighting the fact that we are never sure of what we translate; "the basic idea here is that we can never be entirely sure of the meanings that we translate. We thus have to admit we are uncertain about what we translate, and yet we must try to translate nevertheless." (Pym 2010:90)

Several problems rise from the above point of view:

- The rise of the concept of uncertainty makes 'equivalence' that has long been a key concept in translation studies a sort of utopia,
- Every translation is a relative and approximate operation, and, thus, never an equivalent one,
- How could we depict the uncertainty of translators through the outcome they produced?
- Since translation is based on uncertainty principle, it is always an indeterminist process,

- How can we evaluate and tackle several concepts that that have long been a part of translation criticism such as: quality, appropriateness, meaning,..

Uncertainty principle, also known as principle of indeterminacy, is influenced by Werner Heisenberg's epistemological skepticism which is the "general attitude of having doubts about how we get knowledge. In this case, we might be skeptical or uncertain about what we know about the source text or the purpose the translator has to achieve."(Pym2010:92). The translator is never able to be certain about the intention of the original author, the expectations of his readership, the cultural and ideological parameters, the translation market and all the ways these standards intervene within the translational process.

One worth asking question: why is it important to tackle translation from the uncertainty principle? We have to say that the translation and the environment in which the translator works are never clear and obvious ones; there must be one or more aspects that are fuzzy or incontrollable by the translator. In this context, Pym argues that:

> *"We could say that a text never fully determines (causes, explains, justifies, or accounts for) what a receiver understands of it. Each receiver brings*

> *a set of conceptual frames to the text, and the reception process is thus an interaction between the text and those frames: no source text fully determines a translation of that text, if only because translations rely on observations and interpretations."* (Pym 2010: 93-94)

Indeterminism means that not all acts and operations are caused by already known reasons and facts. There are always deliberate and unexplainable events. In translation, this view is valid in the sense that we have always several possible translations to the same ST, thus, none of these translations is **determined** by the ST. This is why, indeterminism goes in the opposite side of equivalence, because while the first concept is based on the impossibility of a full understanding of things and utterances, the second means that the target text is equivalent to the source text because there had been a full and perfect understanding from the translator.

In his attempt to understand how indeterminacy could affect language and meaning, the American philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine (1950's) suggest the following experiment: Let us imagine a 'jungle linguist' who arrives in a village where people speak a completely different language. The linguist tries to learn this new language. When walking in the street he witnesses an event: a rabbit runs past, one of the natives points at the rabbit and exclaims: 'Gavagai!'. The linguist

writes down 'Gavagai = rabbit' which is, from his perspective, equivalence. But, how can we be sure that gavagai means rabbit? It could mean "look there, a rabbit!", or perhaps, "a rabbit with long legs" (Pym2010).

5. Methodology

Participants

The present paper seeks to test the degree of uncertainty of students of master translation at the University of Mascara when they come across certain types of structures and unfindable words. Hence, they were given a text about the "Brexit" and they were allowed to use dictionaries and other resources; they were not provided with explanations from the teacher. Besides, the main tools of research used here are questionnaire and in-class observation.

Procedure

Firstly, students were given a questionnaire of 8 questions to introduce them to the study area, the aim behind using this questionnaire is mainly to seek their cognitive attitude vis-à-vis unfindale words (cultural concepts, terms, neologism, archaism,.), secondly, a text of 160 words was distributed, they were asked to translate it in 40 minutes. For the purpose of this study, they were allowed to use any kind of resources

(dictionaries, glossaries, online resources,.) and without any explanation or intervention from the teacher. After 40 minutes, the teacher gathered the suggested translations, and started his interpretation and recording of the results from cognitive perspective focusing on the way uncertainty of students was present on their translations.

Data Tools of Research

The present study relies on a questionnaire that has been addressed to students of translation in order to test whether they are aware of uncertainty aspect in their translations or not as well as to perceive the different strategies and techniques they use in order to deal with different translation problems by suggesting translations to certain examples of unfindable words. The second tool is observation which is the main tool of collecting data since the study is undertaken in class with students of master.

Corpus Presentation

The text is taken from the Euronews Channel website; it is titled "**Bank of England says no-deal Brexit would be worse than 2008 crisis**", and handles the dire consequences of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union as it was declared by the Bank of England. Besides, it is a short text composed of about 160 words, since the length of the text is not that

important for our study as the primordial aspect is the words and structures that can be a source of uncertainty to students. Also, the present study focuses on the strategies and solutions that the examinees adopt in order to solve these different problems.

Results and Discussion

There are two results to be analyzed; the results of the questionnaire that had been addressed to students of translation, and the results of the research that was undertaken during the course of translation.

The Questionnaire

The following questionnaire sheds light on the problem of "uncertainty" in translation. It is tackled from a didactic point of view. Hence, it is addressed to Students of Master Translation Arabic-English-Arabic at the University of Mustapha Stambouli - Mascara - Algeria. For the sake of the research, the questionnaire was anonymously analyzed and the results were meticulously recorded:

- **On the "absoluteness" and "permanency" of the notion of equivalence:** since the concept of uncertainty is used as an opposition to the concept of equivalence, the first question focused on whether or not equivalence is a permanent and absolute concept.

Hence, 75% of the questioned students believe that equivalence is not a permanent concept. However, 25% reckon that equivalence is the core concept of translation studies, and, consequently, it is a permanent concept.

- **Dealing with unfindable words:** participants were given the word "spam" with definition, they were asked to translate it into Arabic, different definitions were given:

البريد الإلكتروني غير المرغوب فيه، البريد المزعج، البريد الطفيلي، البريد المتطفل، البريد الإلكتروني غير المحبذ، رسالة غير مرغوب فيها...

Hence, we notice that the majority of participants tend to use explicitation to deal with this term which is the first strategy that students try to adopt before coining a "single" term in Arabic or trying to re-use a concept from the old Arabic language as it is the case with many terms that were given new significance.

- **The process of translating an unfindable word:** in order to analyze the cognitive process that participants adopt when dealing with unfindable words, the next question focuses on describing the mental process that students go through while translating; it can be summed up as follows; 1)- trying to get the meaning of the concept in the source language, 2)- translating this meaning (definition) into Arabic, 3)- giving a summary of this definition in Arabic so that it gets the aspect of a concept.

Nevertheless, the first impression that we get when after analyzing these descriptions is that participant do not try to be creative and coin a concept, which is the core principle of uncertainty concept. They uncertain about the new concept, hence, "out of security", they tend to use explicitation.

- **Feeling uncertain about some choices when translating:** 100% of the participants reckon they feel uncertain when translating.
- **Solutions of uncertainty:** They all agree upon one solution; conveying the whole meaning of the source text which is, from a cognitive point of view, a cut-clear evidence of the absence of solutions of uncertainty. As if students were escaping uncertainty through focusing on the whole text rather than its details.
- **Translational strategies of uncertainty:** there are some cognitive strategies such as: "the translator should believe in himself", or "the translator can share his translation with other translators" (proofreading), as well as general translational strategies like: explicitation, borrowing, addition.

It goes without saying that the majority of students of translation, contrary to what we expected, agree that equivalence is not a permanent concept though

they were taught from their first year that equivalence is one of the key concepts of translation studies. This fact puts to the fore the importance of uncertainty concept in the field of translation. Students are aware of the cognitive complexity of this practice; they reckon there is no absolute equivalence between the source and the target texts, but just a work of approximation and appropriation.

Moreover, dealing with unfindable words, participants used one strategy of translation; Explicitation, which is the fact of adding more words and making explicit what is implicit and hidden in the source text. it is the very used strategy because it is the one to which students feel secure and, to a certain extent, certain about what did they suggest**. The present finding leads us to consider explicitation as a means of overcoming uncertainty of students.**

As for the cognitive dimensions and insights to uncertainty concept, the questioned students were asked to describe their mental process of dealing with unfindable words. They all mentioned the necessity of going back to the original text and trying to get the definition of word in its source language, which is another way of manifesting uncertainty of students. **This checking is a strong evidence of uncertainty since the concept they were given was an ordinary and simple**

one "spam" but they relied on the definition of the concept in English in order to propose a translation.

Another fact that is worth studying is the kind of strategies that they perceive useful to deal with uncertainty. After they all agreed that they feel uncertain about translations they undertake, students suggest different strategies: proofreading, self-confidence, explicitation, addition, borrowing,… which constitute a mixture of cognitive and translational strategies.

The In-class Observation

The present case study takes place at the University of Mascara; the participants are students of Master Translation Arabic-English-Arabic. They were given a text titled "**Bank of England says no-deal Brexit would be worse than 2008 crisis**", taken from the Euronews Channel Website. Among the main reasons of choosing this corpus; the sum of terms and neologisms that the text transmits as well as the "up-to-date" aspect of the text since it is dealing with new information which makes uncertainty more intense than other old or ordinary texts. The experiment relies on two cognitive processes; the observation of students dealing with neologism and unfindable words and the description of students' dealing. Hence, the experiment was undertaken as follows:

1. Students were first asked to sum up the general idea of the text in English. The main purpose of this step is to test their level of understanding the utterance as well as to differentiate between the difficulties of understanding and the difficulties of reformulating,
2. They were asked to translate the text without any further explanation from the teacher,
3. Since the neologisms and the unfindable words were previously underlined, students were asked to describe how do they deal with these different particularities,
4. Not the final version but the rough papers were taken to be analyzed.

The text tackles the dire consequences that could result from the withdrawal of Great Britain from the European Union without a deal. It relies on the declaration of the Bank of England which signaled British economic situation would be worse than the 2008 crisis in case they do not reach a deal with EU. The text is suitable to our study in the sense that it offers a set of particularities and features that help us to test the uncertainty of students such as: terminology, phraseology, neologism,.. which constitute crucial tools to handle our research problem.

Hence, the results of our study can be analyzed as follows:

- **Understanding the Utterance:** after hearing students' summaries, it was evident that they did grasp the gist of the text. However, the problem with uncertainty appears when dealing with some details, especially reformulating the text into Arabic. We have the impression that students are afraid of; 1- the use of the appropriate equivalent since they all agreed that the text was more economic than a newspaper article. 2- Acronyms were also difficult to grasp such as GDP, hence they were forced to use online resources. 3- The complexity of some sentences with appositives which caused confusion like the sentence "*the gloomy figures were criticised by respected economists Paul Krugman, a former winner of the Nobel prize in economics, and Andrew Sentance, a former member of the bank's interest rate-setting committee, who said they were too severe.*" When they presented their summaries, students gave the impression that Paul Krugman and Andrew Sentence were too severe, the fact that mislead their understanding and, consequently, their translations.

- **Manifestation of Uncertainty:** uncertainty of students can easily be depicted through the use of footnotes, extra-explanations and brackets to give more information. The following examples have been selected:

Brexit has been translated into "انسحاب بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوربي" (the withdrawal of Great Britain from the EU), and they added between brackets (بريكسيت). This addition of the acronym in Arabic is a sign of uncertainty since students did not stop at giving the full explanation of the word 'brexit' but they added the phonetic transcription of the word in Arabic though the latter did not accept the use of acronyms.

No-deal Brexit: it is obvious that "no-deal" is used as an adjective. Hence, the problem is not with brexit, but brexit with no deal. However, students did not get this idea; they considered "no-deal" as a simple noun which altered they translations. Some students did not translate the adjective at all while others gave a different meaning:

انسحاب بريطانيا من الإتحاد الأوروبي ليس مهما/ انسحاب بريطانيا من الإتحاد الأوربي/ خروج اتفاق بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوربي / اتفاق بريطانيا على الخروج من الاتحاد الأوربي

Recession: students were prevented from the use of their dictionaries, thus they tried to guess the meaning through the context. They were uncertain at the level of expressing the same meaning in Arabic. Hence, they did not give the appropriate equivalent, but tried to explain in full statements e.g. حالة الركود، الأزمة الاقتصادية، التضخم (Inflation)

GDP: which is an abbreviation for Gross Domestic Product (الناتج المحلي الإجمالي). Students are not familiarized with such acronyms, thus, uncertainty was dominant in the sense that they tried to literally transcript the acronym in Arabic like "ج.د.ب" which is insignificant and irrelevant translation.

- **<u>The Impact of Uncertainty on the General Reception of the TT</u>**

Is uncertainty a translational error? Previous studies and literature on uncertainty show that this phenomenon is inevitable in the field of translation. thus, one cannot consider it as a translational error especially when it comes to students of translation. Besides, the impact of uncertainty on the reception of the target text is significant in the sense that it considerably affects the fluency and naturalness of the translated text and increases the level of exoticism. It goes without saying that the different students translated texts are far from being “transparent texts” i.e. texts that seem to be written in English but hybrid ones, the fact that makes their reception puzzling and ephemeral.

- **<u>Reasons of Students’ Uncertainty</u>**

The main reasons of students’ uncertainty can be summed up as follow:

1. Language-related deficiency: students are uncertain of some kinds of structures and features because their linguistic knowledge does not allow them to deal with the different situations that result from such characteristics.

2. Field-related deficiency: because the specialized texts have always constituted a challenge to translators, uncertainty problem cannot be excluded from this rule. In fact, students were not certain about the use of some kinds of terms and phraseology this is why they wanted to enhance their suggestions with more explanations, paraphrasing and footnotes. That was a way to resist from committing errors.

3. Cultural-related deficiency: since the text was taken from a news channel website, it deals with an up-to-date phenomenon (Brexit), normally students posses information about the topic, this could reduce the degree of uncertainty. However, the results show the opposite. Students were not able to grasp the key-word (Brexit) till after reading the whole text.

➢ **<u>Students Solutions</u>**

1. Expansion: a strategy that consists in using more words and expressions than the original text. It is the most obvious strategy since students who are uncertain about a given translation; try to add more words to show their teachers that they did grasp the intended meaning.

2. Omission: Some students tend to omit the passage(s) that they did not understand, or the one (s) that they were uncertain about. In spite of the controversial aspect of this strategy, especially at the level of faithfulness and integrity of the translation, it had always been considered as a strategy by translation scholars (type of adaptation).
3. Borrowing: it is the easiest and the most used by students. Acronyms like Brexit and GDP were all borrowed since they did not grasp the real meaning.

- **Types of uncertainty**

1. Knowledge uncertainty: the kind of uncertainty that results from ignorance of the general context and the topic tackled by the author. The more the text is specialized, the more uncertainty will be.

2. Cognitive uncertainty; mainly related to the different operations and processes required by the process of translation. We have concluded that students were not aware of the cognitive process of translation; the steps of translation, strategies of overcoming the different difficulties, dealing with terminology…

3. Linguistic uncertainty; the kind that is the most related to students and translation learners. This uncertainty results from any misunderstanding that is related to language deficiency .e.g. structural difficulties, vocabulary, syntactic hurdles…

Conclusion

The present paper handled the problem of uncertainty in the translation course from a cognitive perspective. It tried to bring an answer to the following question; "How is uncertainty manifested during a translation course?". For the purpose of the study, we selected students of master translation at the University of Mascara as case study. The study revealed that uncertainty is manifested through the obvious exoticism of students translated texts. In fact, they were unable to hide their uncertainty since the text was to some extent difficult for them to handle. Thus, strategies like; omission, expansion, footnotes, borrowing… were used. Needless to say that the overwhelming majority of students were unconsciously aware of their uncertainty. Nevertheless, they did not show it until they handed over their texts.

With regard to the importance of such topic, further studies are required to handle the problem of uncertainty from different perspectives. The main limitation of this study is that it is cannot measure the level of uncertainty since it differs from one student to another (with regard to their level, skills, knowledge, writing competencies).

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