The Translator's Cognitive Decision Making

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Abstract:

The translator goes in his translation process through different phases which makes his work so complex. Gouadec distinguishes a total of 156 sequences of potential operations in a translation process. In other words, I propose the three c's to describe the work phase of a translator: **Chance, choice and change.** So whenever the chance of translating knocks his door, the translator had better seize the opportunity which is like a cloud and will not last long. Then he will surely show signs of change provided that he makes the right choice and takes the convenient decision. However, the ability to choose among multiple available alternatives is not always a piece of cake.

In short, is the cognitive decision made by any translator based on a careful analytical deliberation, or on a hidden, unseen, mysterious and instinctive thought?

Sometimes, the translator is at the roundabout with various roads and he is undecided about the right destination he should follow. He finds himself in a dilemma about which word or expression he has to select. Thus, he thinks about it for a while and many ideas are hanging over his head.

Suddenly, he is in favour of a particular option. So what happened in his black box?

When, for instance, the translator is in front of two words such as : "دخل" and "ولج" , then he opts for one of them and forgets about the other, bearing in mind that the two words in Arabic are not really identical and have different meanings.

Is it an intuitive choice? Or, is it a matter of real awareness and a beforehand acquired knowledge? Or, is it simply an act of inability to get the adequate solution to solve the problem?

Is it always possible to have a logical description and explanation for the adopted choice?

Key words: Decision making; Problem solving; Choice; Intuition; Awareness; Translation process.

اتخاذ القرار المعرفي عند المترجم

ملخص :

إن ميلاد نص مترجم مخاض عسير يمر عبر عمليات جد معقدة، ولقد أحصى قواديك Gouadec ما عدده مائة وست وخمسون(156) سلسلة من العمليات الممكنة في إطار إنجاز أي عملية ترجمية. ولمعرفة هذه المراحل التي يحتاجها المترجم لإنتاج هذا النص الجديد، أقترح الخطوات الثلاث التالية: **الفرصة، الاختيار والتغيير**.

فكلما سنحت الفرصة للمترجم أن يخوض غمار الترجمة ومداعبة النصوص ومحاكاتها، كان لزاما عليه أن ينتهزها لأن الفرص كالسحب لا تلبث أن تنجلي. ثم تأتي ساعة الحسم عندما يجد المترجم نفسه عند مفترق

الطرق، فلا مناص له سوى اختيار بديل واحد من بين بدائل شتى. وأخيرا يأتي التغيير المأمول ليمضي المترجم على شهادة ميلاد نص جديد قد يفوق في جودته قيمة النص الأصلي.

ولكن هناك أسئلة تطرح نفسها أثناء هذا المخاض وقبل هذا الميلاد، ولعل أبرزها:

هل يبنى القرار المعرفي للمترجم على حدس مجهول الهوية والمصدر؟ أم أنه قرار مبني على معارف دقيقة واختيار واع؟ أم أنه لا هذا ولا ذاك ولكنه مجرد عجز عن إيجاد حلول لمشكلات ترجمية طارئة؟

ومثال بسيط على ذلك الكرّ والفرّ والأخذ والرد الذي ينتاب المترجم حين يحتار بين استعمال لفظي: "دخل" و "ولج"، فينحاز إلى أحدهما وتنطلق أنامله في كتابته، مع العلم أن كلتا المفردتين لا تحملان نفس المعنى بالتدقيق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اتخاذ القرار، حل المشكلات، الاختيار، الحدس، الوعي، عملية الترجمة.

What is translation?

The New Oxford Dictionary defines "Translation" as:

- ✓ the process of translating words or text from one language into another;
- ✓ the written or spoken rendering of the meaning of a word, speech, book or other text, in another language [...] (Oup)

As Shuttleworth and Cowie also provide a simple and vague meaning of translation:" *An incredibly broad notion which can be understood in many different ways. For example, one may talk of translation as a process or a product, and identify such sub-types as literary translation, technical translation, subtitling and machine translation; moreover, while more typically it just refer to the transfer of written texts, the term sometimes also includes interpreting.*"(Shuttleworth)

We have always considered translation as the act of replacing the original text in the source language by its equivalent in the target language; it is a kind of "writing without composing "(Kaplan 138-152). It is thus a communication bridge between the source text and its producer from one side and the other world within a different tongue. Add to this that it is an open door to different unlocked cultures, traditions, religions and thoughts. It is a kind of visa granted by the translator to a foreign reader to enter and visit that new world and explore its mysteries. Juliane House explained:" It is through translation that lingua-cultural barriers can be overcome. So translation is one of the most important mediators between societies and cultures". (House p14)

Moreover, several features shape the word translation; some of them are purely linguistic whereas others are extra linguistic as House reported:" Some of

the interacting factors we need to consider when looking at translation are:

- the structural characteristics, the expressive potential and the constraints of the two languages involved in translation;
- the extra-linguistic world which is 'cut up' in different ways by source and target languages;
- the source text with its linguistic-stylistic-aesthetic features that belong to the norms of usage holding in the source lingua-cultural community;
- the linguistic-stylistic-aesthetic norms of the target lingua-cultural community;
- the target language norms internalized by the translator;
- intertextuality governing the totality of the text in the target culture;
- traditions, principles, histories and ideologies of translation holding in the target lingua-cultural community;
- the translational 'brief ' given to the translator by the person(s) or institution commissioning the translation;
- the translator's workplace conditions;
- the translator's knowledge, expertise, ethical stance and attitudinal profiles as well as her subjective theory of translation;
- the translation receptors' knowledge, expertise, ethical stance and attitudinal profiles of the translator as

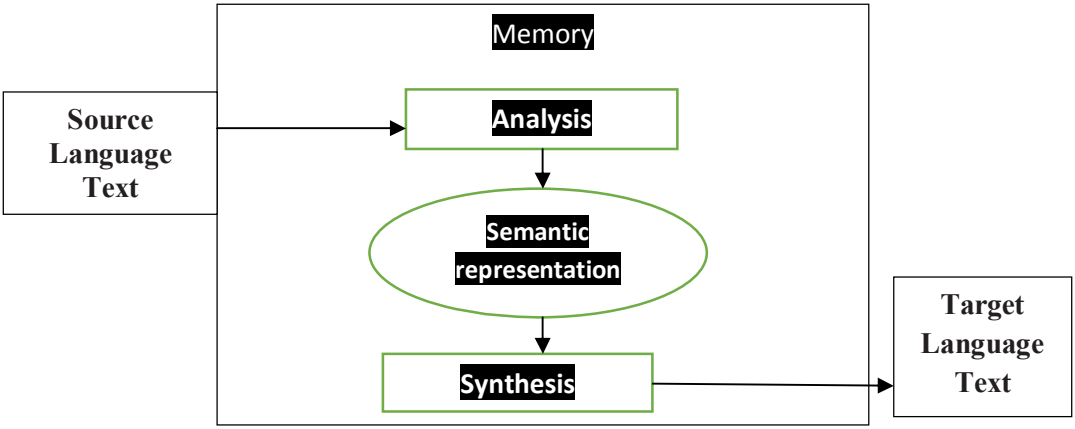
well as their subjective theories of translation".(House P 13-14)

Translation as a Process:

> "*The translation process is the cognitive activity of producing a target text in one language, based upon a source text in another language*".(Yves Gambier P 406)

Before being a product, translation is an act and a process. It is not simply replacing words from the source language by their equivalent in the target language, but importantly searching the meaning within a specific context and particular circumstances. It implies some extra linguistic parameters that overstep the language itself.

Bell, in his book "Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice " gave a very simple description of the translation process:"The transformation of a source language text into a target language text by means of processes which take place within memory. [1] The analysis of one language-specific text (the source language text, the SLT) into a universal (non-language specific semantic representation) and [2] the synthesis of that semantic representation into a second language-specific text (the target language text, the TLT). (Bell 20-21)



(Bell pp21)

Main Characteristics of the Translation Process

Jeremy Munday mentioned eight main features of the translation process within the cognitive models:

1. The existence of basic stages related to understanding and re-expression. Additionally, some of the models postulate a non-verbal stage such as the ITT's deverbalization phase, Bell's semantic representation or Gutt's interpretive resemblance.

2. The need to use and integrate internal (cognitive) and external resources.

3. The role of memory and information storage.

4. The dynamic and interactive nature of the process, which encompasses linguistic as well as non-linguistic elements.

5. The non-linear nature of the process

6. The existence of automatic and non-automatic, controlled and uncontrolled processes.

7. The role of retrieval, problem-solving, decision-making and the use of translation-specific strategies in the unfolding and management of the process.

8. The existence of specific characteristics, depending on the type of translation.
(Munday, The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies P 62)

Translation as a cognitive process:

> "*Obviously، there is more to translation than just associating words in one language with those in another. Cognitive scientific approaches to translation try to understand and explain the workings of translators' minds*". (Risku p1)

In the last thirty years, many researches have been interested in translation as a mental process, in other words they focus more on what is happening in the translator's mind (black box). They have used multiple methods to explore that mental and cognitive process and

elicit more concrete information. As Jeremy Munday stated that:" Apart from being an act of communication and a textual operation, translation/interpreting is also the result of the cognitive processing carried out by translators/interpreters". (Munday, The Routledge companion to translation studies P 54). Houston added something similar:" Translation is both a cognitive procedure which occurs in a human being's, the translator's, head, and a social, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural practice".(House P12)

The first introspective method has been known as The Think Aloud Protocols (TAPS) which consists of **doing and knowing**, i.e. the translator is asked to verbalize what is going on in his head while translating in one single action trying to catch two birds with one stone. Mona Baker explains: "In the 198o, experimental methods began to be borrowed from psychology to gain access to what goes in the translator's mind. The most popular of these has been the 'think-aloud' (or 'thinking-aloud') method, which involves asking a translator to translate the text and, at the same time, to verbalize as much of his or her thoughts as possible".(Baker P 266). To use Kirsten Mamkjær and Kevin Windle words: "The first empirical process studies relied primarily on methods known as 'introspective methods' or 'verbal reporting', which include 'concurrent' (i.e. thinking aloud or think-aloud protocols, TAPs) and 'retrospective

verbal reports' as well as 'introspection proper'". (Windle 98)

Börsch also confirmed saying: "researchers increasingly tend towards believing that think-aloud and self-observational procedures are the only way to get access to what happens inside human beings when thinking or acting" (Börsch 203)

Mona Baker commented on this data collection method:"In sum, although think-aloud protocols cannot help us unravel all the mysteries of translation, they do provide access to valuable information about the nature of translating. Other methods of acquiring such information include interviews, questionnaires and team translation (translators working in pairs or in small groups; House 1988, Matrat 1995). Complementary evidence collected from different sources is likely to provide the most complete and reliable picture of the content of the 'black box'" (Baker P 267). However, in his book 'Pathways to Translation: Pedagogy and Process Translation Studies' Kiraly mentioned some of the cons of this method: "One of the main criticisms of introspective data is that the findings can never be complete; not all of the mental processes associated with a cognitive task will be verbalized". (Kiraly P 41)

Later on, we witnessed the emergence and succession of other instruments such as the diary studies,

questionnaire studies, interview studies, dialogue protocols besides other hard quantitative methods of data collection include keyboard logging, eye tracking and screen recordings. (Windle 98)

My Three C's of Translation

By the three **C's** of translation, I mean: **Chance**, **Choice** and **Change**.

1. **C**hance: I assume that this stage begins when the translator receives the work he is supposed to translate, i.e. his first contact with the client. It is the whole observable process that precedes the real act of translating.
2. **C**hoice: This stage comprises three sub-stages:
   a. Comprehension
   b. Decision making
   c. Transfer
3. **C**hange: This the final step which consists of two other sub-stages:
   a. Reconstruction
   b. Evaluation (checking)

The Role of the Translator in the Translation Process

> *"Since the translator himself is the focal element in translating,... his role is central to the basic principles and procedures of translating"* (Nida 145)

The main role of any translator is being a trustworthy mediator between two languages and two different worlds "The translator expresses content understood from a source text and becomes a co-author for the target text, but before translating the source text he or she has to grasp the message(Yves Gambier pp151)". However, he is sometimes influenced by other uncontrolled factors such as thoughts, beliefs, emotions and feelings "Intellectual honesty requires the translator to be as free as possible from personal intrusion in the communication process. The translator should never tack on his own pressions or distort the message to fit his own intellectual and emotional outlook. ... This being the case, he must exert every effort to reduce to a minimum any intrusion of himself which is not in harmony with the intent of the original author and message" (Nida pp 154).

Cognition?

If we just point our browser to the dictionary and search the word '**cognition**', we shall get the following:

NOUN: *[mass noun]*

1 The mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.

1.1 [*count noun*] A perception, sensation, idea, or intuition resulting from the process of cognition.(Oup)

"Cognition is the refining of knowledge and the justifying of decisions through rationales. Rationales are thoughts linked by such techniques as reason and logic. They impact how we view things, both tangible and intangible. Cognition gives us a way to express ourselves, to express our desires, wants and needs (Lehr)".

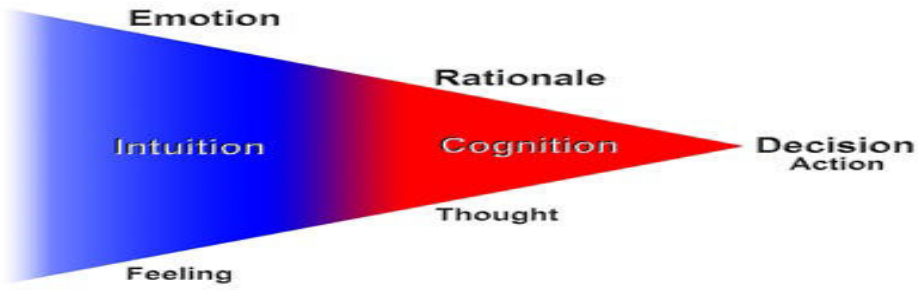
So we can simply refer to 'cognition' as a mental process of thinking.

The role of intuition and cognition in the translation process

> " *You are translating along, and stumble briefly on a word. "What was that in the target language?" All of a sudden it comes to you, out of nowhere, it seems, and your fingers type it. How do you know it's right? Well, you just know. It feels right. It feels intuitively right* (*Robinson)*" (Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow pp 64)

The definition of intuition has always been a controversy. "Intuition was defined by Jung (1971) as a primary mode of perception operating subconsciously" (Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow pp 63). Lehr focuses on the impact of emotions:"Intuition is the acquiring of knowledge and the making of decisions through emotions. Emotions are feelings that go beyond our senses of touching, smelling, seeing, hearing and

tasting". However, we should not neglect the role that cognition plays in making decisions "Intuition and cognition go hand in hand as night and day, rain and shine, and warm and cold do (Lehr)."



(Lehr)

And as far as translation is concerned, some people argue that nothing should come out of nothing"Nothing should be left to chance; and since intuition is often equated with guessing, and guessing with randomness or chance, this means that nothing in translation should be left to intuition" (Robinson). Whereas others such as Munday argued "Translation isnot scientific and there is always an element of choice and poetic taste (Munday, Style and Ideology in Translation pp 227)". Thus, what to do when the translator is in between two choices? He is torn in two and unfortunately cannot get it right off the top of his head "In 1989, Weaver commented that, when faced with a choice between two words, the translator hears the

words in some corner of his mind and likes the sound of one better than the other (Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow pp 64)".

In a nutshell, the translator should spare no effort to train and develop his intuitions"The difference between a good translator and a mediocre one is not, in other words, that the former translates carefully, consciously, analytically, and the latter relies too heavily upon intuition and raw feels. Both the good translator and the mediocre translator rely heavily on analysis and intuition, on conscious and subliminal processing. The difference is that the good translator has *trained* his or her intuitions more thoroughly than the mediocre one, and in relying on those intuitions is actually relying on years of internalized experience and intelligent reflection (Robinson pp 221)"

Recalling From the Memory (Remembering)

There are three kinds of memory: Sensory memory which the stimuli we get from the environment. The second is the short term memory within a short capacity where the brief and less organized information is stored for less than 30 seconds. The third is long term with a lager capacity and where the items, which are more organized, are kept for a long time. As shown in figure1, the best way to keep your data for longer periods in the long term memory is through constant repetition. Needless to say that the process of getting the stored

information when needed is the most difficult task for any translator whether novice or experienced.

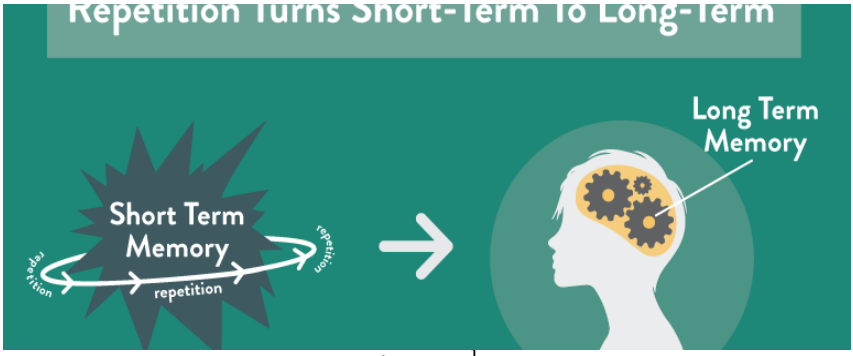


Figure1:[1]

Bell Roger proposed three main stages for retrieving and recalling information from the memory :(Bell 258-263)

1. Stage one: Pre-processing the question
2. Accessing the data base
3. Finding the answer

Decision Making

Decision making is the choice we make between several attainable alternatives towards achieving a goal. The business dictionary provides us with the following definition: "The thought process of selecting a logical choice from the available options. When trying to make a good decision, a person must weigh the positives and

[1]https://article1000.com/short-term-memory-long-term-memory/

negatives of each option, and consider all the alternatives. For effective decision making, a person must be able to forecast the outcome of each option as well, and based on all these items, determine which option is the best for that particular situation (Inc)"

Decision Making from a Cognitive Perspective

> "*To act is easy, to think is hard;* ***to act*** *according to our* ***thought*** *is troublesome*". *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Think, decide, and then act [2]

Our actions are merely the reflection of our thoughts as the quote goes:"You are what you think", and the actions we take are the fruits, either sweet or bitter, of

[2]This is a personal sequence diagram

the decisions we make. Thus, it is needless to say that all the choices we adopt require certain cognitive processes "Every response to any conceivable cognitive task-signal detection, memory recognition, conceptual categorization, problem solving-must be approved by a decision process"(Jerome Busemeyer xi)

Wills mentioned six stages of decision making adapted from Corbin:

1. Problem identification

2. Problem clarification (description)

3. Research on, and collection of, background information

4. Deliberation of how to proceed (pre-choice behavior)

5. Moment of choice

6. Post-choice behaviour (evaluation of translation results) (Wilss pp 188)

Programed vs. non-Programed Decisions

Decision-making processes can be classified according to many features. Jungermann et al. (2005: 38) base their categorization on the degree of consciousness, concentration, necessary new information, flexibility, time involved, and on the

types of mental representations and cognitive processes.(Susanne Göpferich pp 60)

Programed Decisions (routinized): It is a kind of repetitive and automatic process governed by the everyday routine. " In translation, such a process typically takes the form of: 'reads source text (henceforth ST), types TT' or 'reads ST, self-dictates TT'. The advantage of routinized decisions lies in the fact that, due to the low cognitive investment involved, the decider has free cognitive capacity left for other activities."

Non-Programed Decisions: They are decisions we make when confronted with new, complex and unusual situations. Contrary to the programed decisions, they need more concentration and reflection. These non-programed decisions require more time, experience and creative skills.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

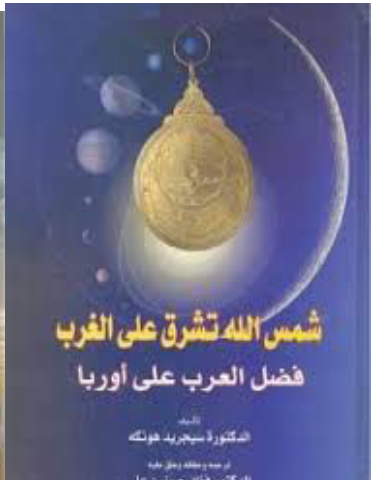
> "*the translation process is seen as commencing with identifying a translation problem and ending with finding a satisfactory solution*"(Krings pp.263-276)

The American Writer and Editor Dorothea Brande (1893 - 1948) once said:"A problem clearly stated is a problem half solved". Otherwise stated, problem solving is one of the most important stages of decision making. Needless to say that the role of the translator, before making any choice, is to identify and explore the problem and make it clearer by freeing it from any obscurities."Wilss considers cognitive psychology the most appropriate framework for the study of translation as a cognitive activity. He argues that translation is an intelligent type of behaviour to be considered from the perspective of problem solving and decision making and upon which other mechanisms, suchas creativity and intuition, also play a role" (Yves Gambier pp 31)

Factors that affect decision making

Sigrid Hunke wrote a very fascinating book called "Allah's sun over the Occident", it was about the cultural influences which the Europeans inherited from the Arab world. The book was translated into Arabic, and here are the two translations:

1. شمس **العرب** تسطع على الغرب	المترجم: فاروق بيضون/ كمال دسوقي
2. شمس **الله** تشرق على الغرب	المترجم: فؤاد حسين علي
3. Le soleil d'Allah brille sur l'occident	المترجم: Solange de Lalène

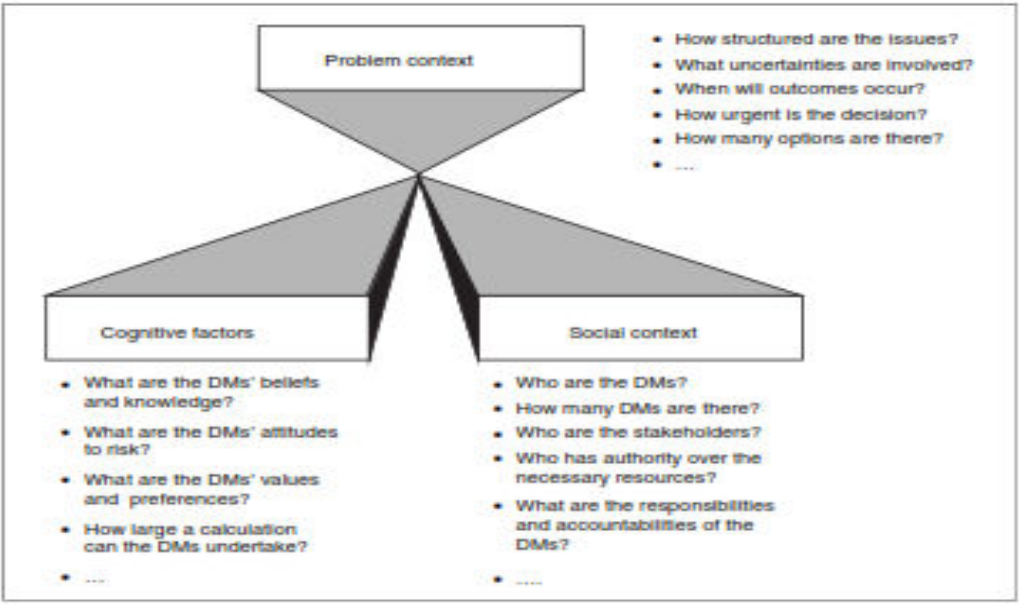


Khaled El Ghanami commented on the first translation saying that a translator may intervene and change the title of a book in accordance with his political and ideological affiliation.

" ويحدث أحياناً أن يتدخل المترجم فيغير عنوان الكتاب بناء على توجهه الأيديولوجي ودعماً لخطه السياسي. كتبت البروفسورة المتخصصة في الدراسات الدينية وعلائقها النفسية "زيغرد هونكه" كتاباً يحمل العنوان (Allahs sonne über dem abendland) شمس الله

تشرق على الغرب وبعنوان فرعي Unser arabisches Erbe "تراث أمتنا العربي" فإذا بعنوان الكتاب الرئيس يتغير ويشتهر باسم مختلف "شمس العرب تسطع على الغرب " (الغنامي).

People make different decisions according to the different situations in which they find themselves" There are many other ways in which decisions differ, however: the context of the problem, the abilities, skills and dispositions of the people involved and the social context in which they find themselves"



Factors that affect decision making
Source: Payne *et al.* (1993).

(Simon French pp 3- 4)

Anger and Hunger:

When it comes to decision taking, a translator might be compared to a judge who should not pass a judgement between two in a state of an empty stomach, or whenever he feels angry and cannot keep his temper in check. Thus, I personally think that anger and hunger are important emotional elements that can affect the translator's behaviour.

The Paranoidal Translator (المترجم المتردد (الموسوس:

Some translators are handcuffed by their fear of failure. They are all the time suspicious and doubtful about their translations. Hence, this paranoia in translation has a negative impact on their work.

The Practical Side of the Study

The practical side of the study is the different translations of the meaning of the Holy Quran. This choice is based on the fact that my doctorate thesis is about: "The Cognitive Approaches in the Translation of the Religious Text". I shall give examples to highlight the translators' choices concerning several linguistic and extra-linguistic levels.

Belief-Based Decisions

1. One concrete example is George Sales's[3*] translation of the meaning of the Quran: 'THE KORAN:

[3*] George Sale (1697 in Canterbury, Kent, England – 1736 in London, England) was an Orientalist and practising solicitor, best known for his 1734 translation of the Qur'an into English. He was also author of The General Dictionary, in ten volumes, folio.

COMMONLY CALLED THE ALKORAN OF MOHAMMED (Sale)'. For instance, when he translated the verse (21) from El Bakara chapter: {يا أيها الناس}, into '**O men of Mecca**' which means people of Mecca. He also translated the beginning of verse (143) from the same chapter:{كذلك جعلناكم}[4]into **'We make you O Arabians'**, i.e. O Arabs, in order to confirm that the Islam and the Quran is for the Arabs only.(علي 15-16ص)

2. Another example is J.M. Rodwell's** translation of the holy Quran entitled: "The Koran: translated from the Arabic, the surahs arranged in chronological order, with notes and index" in which he ordered the Surats, contrary to the original version in Arabic, according to their chronological order.(علیص19)

Vocabulary-Based Decisions

The verse	Marmaduke Pickthall	Khan/al-Hilali	Muhammad Asad	Yusuf Ali
"فَإِذَا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ" *El Kiyama chapter Verse:07*	But when **sight** is confounded. (Pickthall)	When the **eye** is dazzled. (Hilali)	But (on that Day) when the **eyesight** is by fear confused. (Asad)	At length, when the **sight** is dazed. (Ali)

[4] القرآن الكريم "رواية ورش عن نافع من طريق الأصبهاني"

**Reverend John Medows Rodwell (1808 - 1900); Title: The Koran; Originally Published in 1861

It is noticed that almost the four translations (decisions) are different. '**Sight'** and **'eyesight'** may be better equivalents to the original word **'**(إلياسص16)

Lack of In-Depth Knowledge of the Source Language

In order to reproduce the tone and the context of the original text, the translator should have a good command and a clear understanding of the language he is translating. A good example is Palmer's translation of the holy Quran.

The holy Quran	Palmer's translation
[للفقراء الذين أحصروا في سبيل الله لا يستطيعون ضربا في الأرض] آية 273 من سورة البقرة	"The poor who are straitened in God's way and cannot knock about the earth." (Palmer)

Palmer' translation was far from the original text because of his little knowledge of the Arabic language "I must again remind the reader of the remarks in the Introduction that the language of the Quran is really **rude** and **rugged**, and that although the expressions employed in it are now considered refined and elegant, it is only

because all literary Arabic has been modelled on the style of the Quran."[5]

Conclusion:

Translation, in fact, is a long ongoing cognitive process. It is mainly based on taking right decisions. In order to solve problems, a good translator ought to possess a maximum of stored knowledge (the know-what), and the best adequate way to apply it (the know-how). He should also be able to make the exact choices when faced with countless of alternatives. Finally, he'd better be more objective regardless the text he is translating.

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[5]Palmer, *The Quran, Introduction*, p. lxxvii

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