

# **TRICKLET Workshop 2021**

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## **Model building in empirical translation studies**

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Book of Abstracts

## Panel I: Social Aspects

### In defence of the socio-cultural value of translation

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"The idea that machines could learn to do what translators do by applying machine learning and techniques for processing big data to the products of human experts is quite forlorn because the information simply is not there..... the intelligence and imagination that makes humans what they are, though crucial to the business of translation, is not encoded in the products." (Martin Kay 2017: 198)

1. There is an ongoing debate about the future of translation as a social-cultural and specifically human activity (Silvia Bernardini et al 2020), however with little common ground across different communities. Automatization in the form of machine(-aided) translation revolutionizes and possibly replaces human translation, at least for a range of practical applications. Digitalization and its two-faced characteristic as promise or threat is known from other forms of economic activity (cf. Greffrath 2021 and many others).

2. Translation as basic research continues to be essential and may be less endangered. Examples can be seen in studies of translation and cognition (Alves and Jokobsen. eds. 2021, Neumann and Serbina 2021, Steiner forthcoming), or of translation and language contact (Koel et al 2020). However, translation as a socio-cultural activity is my focus today.

3. Translation can be modelled on macro-, mezzo-, or micro-levels and at the same time as process or product. In all of these, the cultural value of translation does not lie in the product only, but also in the process. This process is fundamentally reconfigured, potentially fragmented and in the worst case de-qualified through automatization. The products delivered by current MT-technologies, however, are becoming increasingly useful for applied purposes. Unfortunately, they may have unintended and potentially undesirable consequences in the long run: for example de-qualifying the process of translation, or gearing of the textual product towards registerial prototypes, rather than towards creative variation.

4. The value of translation?

- Translation (and in similar ways text understanding, production and language learning) contributes to intercultural awareness individually,

- Translation of culturally significant texts is a unique source of cultural and conceptual development on the macro-level (Habermas 2019),

- Translation is a significant, even if at this stage still incompletely understood, force in language contact and change in unique ways.

=> These values - rather than only the market value of creating and selling the translated product - are under threat if automatization is implemented carelessly.

## 5. Requirements

- Investigate how automatization in the relevant past has impacted on other activities, identify positive and negative developments and bring this knowledge to bear on relevant discussions.
- invest in work-flow studies with due consideration of the particular character of beneficial human activity (software ergonomics)
- investigate the potentially harmful influence of mass-produced machine translation on language change (steering of language production towards prototypical register-conformity)
- avoid over-specialization of translator training relative to other forms of intercultural communication, and in terms of registers and genres.
- strengthen empirical and technological skills of translators and language experts.

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In this statement, I will foreground the relevance of social explanations for understanding empirically observable patterns in translation. Starting from the general premise that collective patterns can only be understood by linking them to the actions of individual members of the collective (and vice versa), I will argue that translation is performed out of a genuinely social need, that certain relevant factors may be out of reach for investigations focusing on the behavior during translating and that individual choices during translating are arguably best explained by social factors.

The agenda towards an empirically-based translation theory should therefore involve both: a sound cognitive approach accounting for the mental processes in the individual translator and an equally sound approach accounting for the collective dynamic that provides the socio-cultural conditions for translation.

Translation being essentially an instance of language use, I will argue that a usage-based, functional theory of language allows to not only develop deeper explanations for empirical observations about translation but is also compatible with an approach to translation that integrates factors of translation at the level of the individual and the collective.

# Theorising the sociocognitive synapse: Usage-based linguistics and translation

Sandra L. Halverson & Haidee Kotze  
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A central challenge for an empirical theory of translation is how to account for the irreducibly sociocognitive nature of translation, which (like all linguistic or semiotic activity) exists at the tautly interwoven nexus of cognition and affect, coordination and cooperation, and context and society. This challenge, however, is not unique to theorisations of translation: It is also at the heart of theorisations of language. In this presentation we reflect on the dichotomisation and dissociation of cognitive and social perspectives on translation, in relation to similar movements in linguistics more generally. We align the call for a reintegration of these (artificially separated) perspectives in translation studies to similar calls across other areas of linguistics. We argue that a theory of translation founded in usage-based linguistics provides the conceptual apparatus and empirical grounding for regenerating the synapse between cognition, language, and society, severed by disciplinary factionalising.

Against this background, we set out our proposal for a usage-based theory of translation: A model of translation that is commensurate with contemporary theorisations of, and empirical evidence for, the relation between linguistic representation, cognition, affect, and social experience with language. Subsequently, we illustrate how such a model may integrate diverse aspects of translation, theorised independently, focusing on concepts of constrained communication (Kotze 2020, in press), norms (Robinson 2020; Toury 2012), default translation (Halverson 2015, 2019) and learning and development processes (Ellis 2008; Schmid 2017).

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## Panel 2: Cognitive Aspects

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In line with Gideon Toury's ideas about the probabilistic nature of explanations in translation, I will explore to what extent linguistic theorising can help to further develop the explanatory foundations of empirical translation studies. In particular, I will focus on the potential impact of probabilistic linguistics and cognitive sociolinguistics for translation theory.

## The Butterfly Effect and Translation

Moritz Schaeffer & Silvia Hansen-Schirra  
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Large parts of the human translation are likely to be relatively automatic with only little human control. It is further likely that the output of these automatic processes feeds into and interacts with later, much more controlled processes. We show (Schaeffer *et al.*, 2019; Vardaro, Schaeffer and Hansen-Schirra, 2019) that errors in translated text are often recognised within a first fixation. Correction of these errors often occurs much further downstream in the translation process and may have an effect on how the target text is consumed by the reader. In other words, the largely automatic processes during a first fixation on a word may affect how a target text is processed eons later. Risku, Windhager and Apfelthaler (2013) provide a general framework to model these interconnections between a very large set of actors involved in the production and reception of translations. Translation Process Research (TPR) provides the means to carefully study minute effects in text processing during translation.

A large number of publications attempt to model what a good translation is or how to determine and quantify what a bad translation is (Mertin, 2006; Lommel, Burchardt and Uszkoreit, 2013; House, 2015; Moorkens, 2018). How translations are received in the target culture has been studied extensively by way of assessing intertextual effects and in the context of, e.g., polysystem theory (Even-Zohar, 1978), but the translational processes which take place on a millisecond scale in the translator's mind have not been related consistently to the quality of the product nor have they been related systematically to how target readers perceive this product. We call for a systematic study of the effect of automatic human translational processes, their interaction with translational decisions and human models of quality and the effect of all the latter on those who we, as translators, serve: our future readers.

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## **Towards an empirical theory of translation: insights from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective**

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In relevance-theoretic terms, translation task execution requires enough processing effort to generate the cognitive effects needed for the progressive construal of interpretive resemblance (GUTT 1991/2000) which is mapped onto counterpart translation units in source and target texts (ALVES 2003, 2007). Additionally, with the current growth of machine-aided support, processing effort in translation is now dependent not only on the translator's cognitive abilities but also on situated, distributed and extended factors (ALVES & JAKOBSEN 2020). To that extent, from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective, an empirical theory of translation needs to account for the gradual and progressive modification of interim and definite solutions which occur during translation task execution. Relevance theory, I would argue, can offer a framework to contribute to the formulation of an empirical theory of translation. Examples of translation-process data will be used to illustrate this argument and offer empirical evidence to support it.

*Andrea Wurm*  
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One of the information sources for an empirically informed theory of translation can be translation corpora. Their subgroup of Translation Learner Corpora, in particular longitudinal corpora, can shed light on the development of translation competence and therefore these corpora – if existent – are a means of observing theoretical assumptions in the deployment of translation competence on an empirical basis. Drawing on one of these Translation Learner Corpora, KOPTe, I conducted several studies combining corpus data and biographical, performance or longitudinal data for single translation trainees (cf. Wurm 2020). Results show accordance with assumptions such as "routinization allows for more creative solutions/faster processing" or "faster processing can lead to errors in the target text due to limited cognitive capacity" (cf. Shreve/Lacruz 2017: 130). Yet, with more complex biographical events like "a stay abroad leads to better translation quality", the data show no agreement. Cognitive processing of language and translation aspects together seems to be too complex to be observed in corpus data.

Translation (Learner) Corpora in combination with detailed metadata about translation trainees and translation situation can therefore help researchers to verify theoretical assumptions based or not on other empirical data, and not only in cognitive aspects, but also in the social or professional domain. However, specifically designed Translation Corpora with matching metadata are necessary to allow researchers thorough investigation of their particular research question. Moreover, the corpora would have to be considered in close relation to translation process data. But, other than these, they offer a broader empirical basis as they are easier to collect and process than experimental data including EEG, eyetracking, keylogging, etc. I am looking forward to discuss possible applications of specially designed Translation (Learner) Corpora contributing to building an empirical model of translation.

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## Panel 3: Professional Aspects/Workflow

### **From texts to ergonomics and back**

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The shift in focus from the product of translation activities to the process of translation production and more recently to the producers of those translations has been the driving force in the research that has been done at our institute over the last two decades. Initial, rather naïve considerations of translations produced by our students at various levels of training highlighted the diversity of possible solutions for even apparently straightforward source text segments, not to mention entire texts. Using data collection techniques of various degrees of sophistication and ecological validity, we have observed students and professionals producing translations and derived alluring insights into their decision-making, problem-solving, and cognitive processing. However, these are not always in line with what the participants themselves have told us about what they did and why. A simple explanation for this might be that retrospective self-report is an unreliable method to obtain information about the translation process. Another explanation, which has been developing gradually through our work on the ergonomics of translation, is that the constraints and facilitators involved in the process of producing translations are multifold, overlapping, and interacting. When the cognitive, physical, and organisational conditions are good, then translators and other agents in the process are in a better position to produce good work. Other factors that have been identified as impinging on their performance and choices, such as temporal, spatial, societal, discursive, and ethical aspects of the world they are embedded in, might be realized as traces in their texts. Understanding translation as a situated activity and cognition as embodied, embedded, enactive, extended, and affective (4EA) can help explain translators' behavior and might also help explain their translations.

## **Meaning, mind and mediation: why the study of editing is a critical step towards a holistic model of translation**

*Mario Bisiada*

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Translation is often understood as in some way involving a conversion of meaning stored in the mind to meaning expressed by language. The use of terms such as “think-aloud protocol” or “verbalisation” then suggests that mental content can somehow be accessed, even though that content is only accessible through language and thus always mediated just like any type of discourse. For this workshop, I want to adopt a provocative position by challenging mentalist approaches to meaning and thus to translation. I will argue that Translation Studies offers a useful approach to this question because it has long struggled with the “black box” issue of what’s going on in the translator’s mind while at the same time forcing us to look at the linguistic data available to us rather than at constructs of mind or mental representations. I will adopt the position that meaning resides fundamentally in the discourse rather than in the mind and that such a focus on the social is better equipped to explain meaning. I will connect these claims to my existing research on translation manuscripts and editing workflows by arguing that, if meaning is only in the discourse, the study of unpublished draft translations represents important and accessible data towards the final translation product and can thus greatly enrich what we call translation process research. In this sense, I would like to critically reflect on the question of whether manuscripts fit neatly into the traditional “product vs process” distinction, as they represent previous versions of final products and thus provide evidence on matters that are given importance to a holistic model of translation, which has to include a range of actors other than the translator.