3 The translator as learner

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THESIS: translation is intelligent activity involving complex processes of conscious and unconscious learning; we all learn in different ways, and institutional learning should therefore be as flexible and as complex and rich as possible, so as to activate the channels through which each student learns best.

The translator's intelligence

The question posed by Chapter 2 was: how can the translator maximize speed and enjoyment while not minimizing (indeed if possible while enhancing) reliability? How can the translator translate faster and have more fun doing it, while gaining and maintaining a deserved reputation as a good translator?

At first glance the desires to translate faster and to translate reliably might seem to be at odds with one another. One commonsensical assumption says that the faster you do something, the more likely you are to make mistakes; the more slowly you work, the more likely that work is to be reliable. The reliable translator shouldn’t make (major) mistakes, so s/he shouldn’t try to translate fast.

But increased speed, at least up to a point, really only damages reliability when you are doing something new or unfamiliar, something that requires concentration, which always takes time. “Old” and “familiar” actions, especially habitual actions, can be performed both quickly and reliably because habit takes over. You’re late in the morning, so you brush your teeth, tie your shoes, throw on your coat, grab your keys and wallet or purse and run for the door, start the car and get on the road, all in about two minutes – and you don’t forget anything, you don’t mistie your shoes, you don’t grab a fork and a spoon instead of your keys, because you’ve done all these things so many times before that your body knows what to do, and does it.

And there are important parallels between this “bodily memory” and translation. Experienced translators are fast because they have translated so much that it often seems as if their “brain” isn’t doing the translating – their fingers are. They recognize a familiar source-language structure and they barely pause before their fingers are racing across the keyboard, rendering it into a well-worn target-language structural equivalent, fitted with lexical items that seem to come to them automatically, without conscious thought or logical analysis. Simultaneous interpreters don’t seem to be thinking at all – who, the astonished observer wonders, could possibly think that fast? No, it is impossible; the words must be coming to the interpreter from somewhere else, some subliminal or even mystical part of the brain that ordinary people lack.
It should be clear, however, that even at its most “habitual” or “subliminal,” translation is not the same sort of activity as tying your shoes or brushing your teeth. Translation is always intelligent behavior – even when it seems least conscious or analytical. Translation is a highly complicated process requiring rapid multilayered analyses of semantic fields, syntactic structures, the sociology and psychology of reader- or listener-response, and cultural difference. Like all language use, translation is constantly creative, constantly new. Even translators of the most formulaic source texts, like weather reports, repeatedly face novel situations and must engage in unexpected problem-solving. And most translation tasks are enormously more complex than those. As William H. Calvin writes in How Brains Think (1996: 1, 13):

Piaget used to say that intelligence is what you use when you don’t know what to do . . . If you’re good at finding the one right answer to life’s multiple-choice questions, you’re smart. But there’s more to being intelligent – a creative aspect, whereby you invent something new “on the fly.” . . . This captures the element of novelty, the coping and groping ability needed when there is no “right answer,” when business as usual isn’t likely to suffice. Intelligent improvising. Think of jazz improvisations rather than a highly polished finished product, such as a Mozart or Bach concerto. Intelligence is about the process of improvising and polishing on the timescale of thought and action.

This book is about such intelligence as it is utilized in professional translation. It seeks both to teach you about that intelligence, and to get you to use that intelligence in faster, more reliable, and more enjoyable ways. This will entail both developing your analytical skills and learning to sublimate them, becoming both better and faster at analyzing texts and contexts, people and moods: better because more accurate, faster because less aware of your own specific analytical processes. In this chapter we will be exploring the complex learning processes by which novices gradually become experienced professionals; in Chapter 4 we will be developing a theoretical model for the translation process; and in Chapters 5 through 11 we will be moving through a series of thematic fields within translation – people, language, social networks, cultural difference – in which this process must be applied.

The translator’s memory

Translation is an intelligent activity, requiring creative problem-solving in novel textual, social, and cultural conditions. As we have seen, this intelligent activity is sometimes very conscious; most of the time it is subconscious, “beneath” our conscious awareness. It is no less intelligent when we are not aware of it – no less creative, and no less analytical. This is not a “mystical” model of translation. The sublimated intelligence that makes it possible for us to translate rapidly, reliably, and enjoyably is the product of learning – which is to say, of experience stored in memory in ways that enable its effective recall and flexible and versatile use.
This does not mean that good translators must memorize vast quantities of linguistic and cultural knowledge; in fact, insofar as we take “memorization” to mean the conscious, determined, and rote or mechanical stuffing of facts into our brains, it is quite the opposite. Translators must be good at storing experiences in memory, and at retrieving those experiences whenever needed to solve complex translation problems; but they do not do this by memorizing things. Memory as learning works differently. Learning is what happens when you’re doing something else – especially something enjoyable, but even something unpleasant, if your experience leaves a strong enough impression on you. Translators learn words and phrases, styles and tones and registers, linguistic and cultural strategies while translating, while interpreting, while reading a book or surfing the Internet, while talking to people, while sitting quietly and thinking about something that happened. Communicating with people in a foreign country, they learn the language, internalize tens of thousands of words and phrases and learn to use them flexibly and creatively in ways that make sense to the people around them, without noticing themselves “memorizing.” Translating the texts they are sent, interpreting the words that come out of a source speaker’s mouth, they learn transfer patterns, and those patterns are etched on their brains for easy and intelligent access, sometimes without their even being aware that they have such things, let alone being able to articulate them in analytical, rule-governed ways. All they know is that certain words and phrases activate a flurry of finger activity on the keyboard, and the translation seems to write itself; or they open their mouths and a steady stream of target text comes out, propelled by some force that they do not always recognize as their own.

**Representational and procedural memory**

Memory experts distinguish between *representational memory* and *procedural memory*. Representational memory records what you had for breakfast this morning, or what your spouse just told you to get at the store: specific events. Procedural memory helps you check your e-mail, or drive to work: helps you perform skills or activities that are quickly sublimated as unconscious habits.

And translators and interpreters need both. They need representational memory when they need to remember a specific word: “What was the German for ‘word-wrap’?” Or, better, because more complexly contextualized in terms of person and event (see below): “What did that German computer guy last summer in Frankfurt call ‘word-wrap’?” They need procedural memory for everything else: typing and computer skills, linguistic and cultural analytical skills for source-text processing, linguistic and cultural production skills for target-text creation, and transfer patterns between the two.

Representational memory might help a translator define a word s/he once looked up in a dictionary; procedural memory might help a translator use the word effectively in a translation. Representational memory might help a student to reproduce
a translation rule on an exam; procedural memory might help a student to use that rule in an actual translation exercise with little or no awareness of actually doing so.

While both forms of memory are essential for translation, their importance is relatively specialized. Procedural memory is most useful when things go well: when the source text makes sense, is well-formed grammatically and lexically; when the translation job is well-defined, its purpose and target audience clearly understood; when editors and users and critics either like the translation or do not voice their criticisms. Representational memory is most useful when things go less well: when a poorly written source text requires a conscious memory of grammatical rules and fine lexical distinctions; when the translation commissioner is so vague about a job that it cannot be done until the translator has coaxed out of her or him a clear definition of what is to be done; when rules, regularities, patterns, and theories must be spelled out to an irate but ill-informed client, who must be educated to see that what seems like a bad translation is in fact a good one.

To put that in the terms we’ll be using in the remainder of this book: procedural memory is part of the translator’s subliminal processing; representational memory is a part of the translator’s conscious processing. Procedural memory helps the translator translate rapidly; representational memory is often needed when perceived problems make rapid translation impossible or inadvisable.

**Intellectual and emotional memory**

Brain scientists also draw a distinction between two different neural pathways for memory, one through the hippocampus, recording the facts, the other through the amygdala, recording how we feel about the facts. As Goleman (1995: 20) writes:

If we try to pass a car on a two-lane highway and narrowly miss having a head-on collision, the hippocampus retains the specifics of the incident, like what stretch of road we were on, who was with us, what the other car looked like. But it is the amygdala that ever after will send a surge of anxiety through us whenever we try to pass a car in similar circumstances. As [Joseph] LeDoux [a neuroscientist at New York University] put it to me, “The hippocampus is crucial in recognizing a face as that of your cousin. But it is the amygdala that adds you don’t really like her.”

The point to note here is that amygdala arousal – “emotional memory” – adds force to all learning. This is why it is always easier to remember things that we care about, why things we enjoy (or even despise) always stick better in our memories than things about which we are indifferent. The strongest memories in our lives are always the ones that had the most powerful emotional impact on us: first kiss, wedding day, the births of our children, various exciting or traumatic events that transform our lives.
This also has important consequences for translators. The more you enjoy learning, the better you will learn. The more pleasurable you find translating, editing, hunting for obscure words and phrases, the more rapidly you will become proficient at those activities. (Really hating the work will also engrave the activities indelibly on your memory, but will not encourage you to work harder at them.) Hence the emphasis placed throughout this book on enjoyment: it is one of the most important “pretranslation skills,” one of the areas of attitudinal readiness or receptivity that will help you most in becoming – and remaining – a translator.

**Context, relevance, multiple encoding**

Students of memory have also shown that what you remember well depends heavily on the context in which you are exposed to it, how relevant it is to your life (practical use-value, emotional and intellectual associations), and the sensory channels through which it comes to you (the more the better).

**Context**

The setting in which a thing is found or occurs is extremely important for the associations that are so crucial to memory. Without that context it is just an isolated item; in context, it is part of a whole interlocking network of meaningful things. For example, in Chapter 7 we will be taking a new look at terminology studies, based not on individual words and phrases, or even on larger contexts like “register,” but on working people in their workplaces. Contextualizing a word or phrase as part of what a person doing a job says or writes to a colleague makes it much easier to remember than attempting to remember it as an independent item.

The physical and cultural context in which the learner learns a thing can also be helpful in building an associative network for later recall. Everyone has had the experience of going in search of something and forgetting what they were looking for – then having to return to the exact spot in which the need for the thing was first conceived, and remembering it instantly. The place in which the item was initially moved to long-term memory jogged that memory and the item was recalled. Students tested on material in the room where they learned it tend to do better on the test than those tested in another room. “It seems that the place in which we master information helps recreate the state necessary to retrieve it, probably by stimulating the right emotions, which are very important influences on memory” (Gallagher 1994: 132).

This phenomenon involves what is called “state-dependent learning” – the peculiar fact that memories retained in a given mental or physical state are most easily recalled in that state. People who learn a fact while intoxicated may have great difficulty remembering it while sober, and it will come to them immediately, almost miraculously, when under the influence again. It may be difficult to remember the
most obvious and ordinary everyday facts about work while relaxing in the back
yard on Saturday; when someone calls from work and you have to switch “states”
rapidly, the transition from a Saturday-relaxation state to a workday-efficiency state
may be disturbingly difficult.


The basic principle that links our places and states is simple: a good or bad
environment promotes good or bad memories, which inspire a good or
bad mood, which inclines us toward good or bad behavior. We needn’t even be
consciously aware of a pleasant or unpleasant environmental stimulus for it
to shape our states. The mere presence of sunlight increases our willingness to
help strangers and tip waiters, and people working in a room slowly permeated
by the odor of burnt dust lose their appetites, even though they don’t notice
the smell. On some level, states and places are internal and external versions
of each other.

Interpreters have to be able to work anywhere, requiring them to develop the
ability to create a productive mental state regardless of external conditions;
translators tend to be more place-dependent. Their work station at home or at the
office is set up not only for maximum efficiency, dictionaries and telephone close at
hand, but also for maximum familiarity, at-homeness. They settle into it at the
beginning of any work period in order to recreate the proper working frame of mind,
going through little rituals (stacking paper, tidying piles, flipping through a dictionary,
sharpening pencils) that put them in a translating mood. What they learn there they
remember best there; thus the notorious difficulty of translating while on vacation,
or at someone else’s work station. It's not so much that the computer keyboard is
different; it’s that everything is different. All the little subliminal cues that put you

A group of translation scholars from various places in North and South America
have gathered in Tlaxcala, Mexico, for a conference on scientific-technical
translation. One night at dinner talk turns to travel, and to everyone’s surprise the
Cuban interpreter who has told stories of the collapse of the societal infrastructure
in Cuba has been to more exotic places than anyone else present: Bali, Saudi
Arabia, etc., always on official (interpreting) business. She starts describing the
places she’s seen, the people she’s met, the words she’s learned – and is disturbed
to discover that she has forgotten an Arabic word she learned in Riyadh. Playfully,
a dinner companion from the US unfolds a paper napkin off the table and holds
it in front of her mouth like a veil. Her eyes fly open in astonishment and the word
she was looking for bursts out of her mouth; she laughs and claps her hands over
her mouth as if to prevent further surprises.
in the proper frame of mind are absent — with the result that it is often very difficult to get the creative juices flowing. Translators who travel extensively now rely increasingly on portable work stations, especially laptop computers; the computer and other related paraphernalia then become like magic amulets that psychologically transform any place — an airport gate area, an airplane tray table, a hotel bed — into the external version of the internal state needed to translate effectively.

Relevance

The less relevant a thing is to you, the harder it will be for you to remember it. The more involved you are with it, the easier it will be for you to remember it. Things that do not impinge on our life experience “go in one ear and out the other.” This is why it is generally easier to learn to translate or interpret by doing it, in the real world, for money, than it is in artificial classroom environments — and why the most successful translation and interpretation (T&I) programs always incorporate real-world experience into their curricula, in the form of internships, apprenticeships, and independent projects. It is why it is generally easier to remember a word or phrase that you needed to know for some purpose — to communicate some really important point to a friend or acquaintance, to finish a translation job — than one you were expected to memorize for a test. And it is why it is easier to remember a translation theory that you worked out on your own, in response to a complex translation problem or a series of similar translation jobs, than one that you read in a book or saw diagrammed on the blackboard. This will be the subject of Chapters 5–10.

Multiple encoding

The general rule for memory is that the more senses you use to register and rehearse something, the more easily you will remember it. This is called multiple encoding: each word, fact, idea, or other item is encoded through more than one sensory channel — visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, gustatory, olfactory — which provides a complex support network for memory that is exponentially more effective than a single channel. This principle, as the rest of this chapter will show, underlies the heavy emphasis on “multimodal” exercises in this book — exercises drawing on several senses at once.

The translator’s learning styles

Translation is intelligent activity. But what kind of intelligence does it utilize?

Howard Gardner (1985, 1993), director of Project Zero at Harvard University, has been exploring the multiplicity of intelligences since the early 1980s. He argues that, in addition to the linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligence measured by IQ tests, there are at least four other intelligences (probably more):
• musical intelligence: the ability to hear, perform, and compose music with complex skill and attention to detail; musical intelligence is often closely related to, but distinct from, mathematical intelligence

• spatial intelligence: the ability to discern, differentiate, manipulate, and produce spatial shapes and relations; to “sense” or “grasp” (or produce) relations of tension or balance in paintings, sculptures, architecture, and dance; to create and transform fruitful analogies between verbal or musical or other forms and spatial form; related to mathematical intelligence through geometry, but once again distinct

• bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: the ability to understand, produce, and caricature bodily states and actions (the intelligence of actors, mimes, dancers, many eloquent speakers); to sculpt bodily motion to perfected ideals of fluidity, harmony, and balance (the intelligence of dancers, athletes, musical performers)

• personal intelligence, also called “emotional intelligence” (see Chapter 6): the ability to track, sort out, and articulate one’s own and others’ emotional states (“intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” intelligence, respectively; the intelligences of psychoanalysts, good parents, good teachers, good friends); to motivate oneself and others to direct activity toward a desired goal (the intelligence of all successful professionals, especially leaders). And, of course:

• logical/mathematical intelligence: the ability to perceive, sort out, and manipulate order and relation in the world of objects and the abstract symbols used to represent them (the intelligence of mathematicians, philosophers, grammarians)

• linguistic intelligence: the ability to hear, sort out, produce, and manipulate the complexities of a single language (the intelligence of poets, novelists, all good writers, eloquent speakers, effective teachers); the ability to learn foreign languages, and to hear, sort out, produce, and manipulate the complexities of transfer among them (the intelligence of translators and interpreters)

This last connection, the obvious one between translators and interpreters and linguistic intelligence, may make it seem as if translators and interpreters were intelligent only linguistically; as if the only intelligence they ever brought to bear on their work as translators were the ability to understand and manipulate language. It is not. Technical translators need high spatial and logical/mathematical intelligence as well. Interpreters and film dubbers need high bodily-kinesthetic and personal intelligence. Translators of song lyrics need high musical intelligence.

Indeed one of the most striking discoveries made by educational research in recent years is that different people learn in an almost infinite variety of different ways or “styles.” And since good translators are always in the process of “becoming” translators – which is to say, learning to translate better, learning more about language and culture and translation – it can be very useful for both student translators and professional translators to be aware of this variety of learning styles.
An awareness of learning styles can be helpful in several ways. For the learner, it can mean discovering one’s own strengths, and learning to structure one’s working environment so as to maximize those strengths. It is hard for most of us to notice causal relationships between certain semiconscious actions, like finding just the right kind of music on the radio and our effectiveness as translators. We don’t have the time or the energy, normally, to run tests on ourselves to determine just what effect a certain kind of noise or silence has on us while performing specific tasks, or whether (and when) we prefer to work in groups or alone, or whether we like to jump into a new situation feet first without thinking much about it or hang back to figure things out first. Studying intelligences and learning styles can help us to recognize ourselves, our semiconscious reactions and behaviors and preferences, and thus to structure our professional lives more effectively around them.

An awareness of learning styles may also help the learner expand his or her repertoire, however: having discovered that you tend to rush into new situations impulsively, using trial and error, for example, you might decide that it could be professionally useful to develop more analytical and reflective abilities as well, to increase your versatility in responding to novelty. Discovering that you tend to prefer kinesthetic input may encourage you to work on enhancing your receptiveness to visual and auditory input as well.

In *Brain-Based Learning and Teaching*, Eric Jensen (1995a) outlines four general areas in which individual learning styles differ: context, input, processing, and response (see Figure 1). Let us consider each in turn, bearing in mind that your overall learning style will not only be a combination of many of these preferences but will vary from task to task and from learning situation to learning situation. What follows is not a series of categorical straitjackets; it is a list of general tendencies that flow more or less freely through every one of us. You may even recognize yourself, in certain moods or while performing certain tasks, in each of the categories below.

**Context**

It makes a great deal of difference to learners where they learn – what sort of physical and social environment they inhabit while learning. Some different variables, as presented in Jensen (1995a: 134–8), are discussed below.

**Field-dependent/independent**

Just how heavily do you depend on your immediate physical environment or context when you learn?

Field-dependent learners learn best in “natural” contexts, the contexts in which they would learn something without really trying, because learning and experiencing are so closely tied together. This sort of learner prefers learning-by-doing, hands-on work, on-the-job training to school work or learning-by-reading. Field-dependent
Figure 1 Learning styles
The translator as learner

CONTEXT

CONCEPTUAL

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CONTEXT

RESPONSE

internally-referenced

externally-referenced

dependent

independent

relationship-driven
language-learners learn best in the foreign country, by mingling with native speakers and trying to understand and speak; they will learn worst in a traditional foreign-language classroom, with its grammatical rules and vocabulary lists and artificial contexts, and marginally better in a progressive classroom employing methodologies from suggestopedia (accelerated learning (Lozanov 1971/1992)), total physical response (Asher 1985), or the natural method (Krashen and Terrell 1983). Field-dependent translators will learn to translate by translating— and, of course, by living and traveling in foreign cultures, visiting factories and other workplaces where specialized terminology is used, etc. They will shun translator-training programs and abstract academic translation theories; but may feel they are getting something worthwhile from a more hands-on, holistic, contextually based translator-training methodology.¹

Field-independent learners learn best in artificial or “irrelevant” contexts. They prefer to learn about things, usually from a distance. They love to learn in classrooms, from textbooks and other textual materials (including the World Wide Web or CD-ROM encyclopedias), or from teachers’ lectures. They find it easiest to internalize predigested materials, and greatly appreciate being offered summaries, outlines, diagrams and flowcharts. (In this book, field-independent learners will prefer the chapters to the exercises.) Field-independent language-learners will learn well in traditional grammar-and-vocabulary classrooms; but given the slow pace of such classrooms, they may prefer to learn a foreign language by buying three books, a grammar, a dictionary, and a novel. Field-independent translators will gravitate toward the classroom, both as students and as teachers (indeed they may well prefer teaching, studying, and theorizing translation to actually doing it). As translation teachers and theorists they will tend to generate elaborate systems models of translational or cultural processes, and will find the pure structures of these models more interesting than real-life examples.

Flexible/structured environment

Flexible-environment learners like variety in their learning environments, and move easily and comfortably from one to another: various degrees of noisiness or silence, heat or cold, light or darkness; while standing up and walking around, sitting in comfortable or hard chairs, or lying down; in different types of terrain, natural or artificial, rough or smooth, chaotic or structured (e.g., in a classroom, with people every which way or sitting quietly in desks arranged in rows and columns). Flexible-environment language-learners will learn well both in the foreign country and

¹ Note that the connections between specific learning styles and preferences among language-learners, translators, and interpreters offered in this chapter are best guesses, not research-based. The primary research in this fascinating branch of translation studies remains to be done.
in various kinds of foreign-language classroom. Flexible-environment translators will prefer to work in a number of different contexts every day: at an office, at home, and in a client’s conference room; at fixed work stations and on the move with a laptop or a pad and pencil. They will gravitate toward working situations that allow them to work in noise and chaos some of the time and in peace and quiet at other times. Flexible-environment learners will often combine translator and interpreter careers.

Structured-environment learners tend to have very specific requirements for the type of environment in which they work best: in absolute silence, or with a TV or radio on. If they prefer to work with music playing, they will usually have to play the same type of music whenever they work. Structured-environment translators will typically work at a single work station, at the office or at home, and will feel extremely uncomfortable and incompetent (slow typing speed, bad memory) if forced temporarily to work anywhere else. Many structured-environment translators will keep their work stations neat and organized, and will feel uncomfortable and incompetent if there are extra papers or books on the desk, or if the piles aren’t neat; some, however, prefer a messy work station and feel uncomfortable and incompetent if someone else cleans it up.

**Independence/dependence/interdependence**

Independent learners learn best alone. Most can work temporarily with another person, or in larger groups, but they do not feel comfortable doing so, and will typically be much less effective in groups. They are often high in intrapersonal intelligence. Independent translators make ideal freelancers, sitting home alone all day with their computer, telephone, fax/modem, and reference works. Other people exist for them (while they work) at the end of a telephone line, as a voice or typed words in a fax or e-mail message. They may be quite sociable after work, and will happily spend hours with friends over dinner and drinks; but during the hours they have set aside for work, they have to be alone, and will quickly grow anxious and irritable if someone else (a spouse, a child) enters their work area.

Dependent learners, typically people high in interpersonal intelligence, learn best in pairs, teams, other groups. Most can work alone for short periods, but they do not feel comfortable doing so, and will be less effective than in groups. They like large offices where many people are working together on the same project or on similar projects and often confer together noisily. Dependent translators work best in highly collaborative or cooperative in-house situations, with several translators/editors/managers working on the same project together. They enjoy meeting with clients for consultation. Dependent translators often gravitate toward interpreting as well, and may prefer escort interpreting or chuchotage (whispered interpreting) over solitary booth work — though working in a booth may be quite enjoyable if there are other interpreters working in the same booth.
Interdependent learners work well both in groups and alone; in either case, however, they perceive their own personal success and competence in terms of larger group goals. They are typically high in both intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. Interdependent translators in in-house situations will feel like part of a family, and will enjoy helping others solve problems or develop new approaches. Interdependent freelancers will imagine themselves as forming an essential link in a long chain moving from the source-text producer through various client, agency, and freelance people to generate an effective target text. Interdependent freelancers will often make friends with the people at clients or agencies who call them with translation jobs, making friendly conversation on the phone and/or meeting them in person in their offices or at conferences; phone conversations with one of them will give the freelancer a feeling of belonging to a supportive and interactive group.

Relationship-/content-driven

Relationship-driven learners are typically strong in personal intelligence; they learn best when they like and trust the presenter. “WHO delivers the information is more important than WHAT the information is” (Jensen 1995a: 134). Relationship-driven learners will learn poorly from teachers they dislike or mistrust; with them, teachers will need to devote time and energy to building an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect before attempting to teach a subject; and these learners will typically take teaching and learning to be primarily a matter of communication, dialogue, the exchange of ideas and feelings, only secondarily the transmission of inert facts. Relationship-driven language-learners tend also to be field-dependent, and learn foreign languages best in the countries where they are natively spoken; and there prefer to learn from a close friend or group of friends, or from a spouse or family. The focus on “people” and “working people” in Chapters 6 and 7 of this book will be especially crucial for this sort of learner. Relationship-driven translators often become interpreters, so that cross-cultural communication is always in a context of interpersonal relationship as well. When they work with written texts, they like to know the source-language writer and even the target-language end-user personally; like interdependent translators, they love to collaborate on translations, preferably with the writer and various other experts and resource people present. Relationship-driven freelancers imagine themselves in personal interaction with the source-language writer and target-language reader. It will feel essential to them to see the writer’s face in their mind’s eye, to hear the writer speaking the text in their mind’s ear; to feel the rhythms and the tonalizations of the source text as the writer’s personal speech to them, and of the target text as their personal speech to the reader. Robinson (1991) addresses an explicitly relationship-driven theory of translation as embodied dialogue.

Content-driven learners are typically stronger in linguistic and logical/mathematic than in personal intelligence; they focus most fruitfully on the information content.
of a written or spoken text. Learning is dependent on the effective presentation of information, not on the learner’s feelings about the presenter. Content-driven language-learners prefer to learn a foreign language as a logical syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic system; content-driven student translators prefer to learn about translation through rules, precepts, and systems diagrams (deduction: see Chapter 4). Content-driven translators focus their attention on specialized terms and terminologies and the object worlds they represent; syntactic structures and cross-linguistic transfer patterns; stylistic registers and their equivalencies across linguistic barriers. Content-driven translation theorists tend to gravitate toward linguistics in all its forms, descriptive translation studies, and systematic cultural studies.

Input

The sensory form of information when it enters the brain is also important. Drawing on the psychotherapeutic methodology of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Jensen (1995a: 135–6) identifies three different sensory forms in which we typically receive information, the visual, the auditory, and the kinesthetic (movement and touch), and distinguishes in each between an internal and an external component.

Visual

Visual learners learn through visualizing, either seeking out external images or creating mental images of the thing they’re learning. They score high in spatial intelligence. They may need to sketch a diagram of an abstract idea or cluster of ideas before they can understand or appreciate it. They tend to be good spellers, because they can see the word they want to spell in their mind’s eye. People with “photographic memory” are visual learners; and even when their memory is not quite photographic, visual learners remember words, numbers, and graphic images that they have seen much better than conversations they have had or lectures they have heard.

Visual-external learners learn things best by seeing them, or seeing pictures of them; they like drawings on the blackboard or overhead projector, slides and videos, handouts, or computer graphics. Visual-external language-learners remember new words and phrases best by writing them down or seeing them written; a visual-external learner in a foreign country will spend hours walking the streets and pronouncing every street and shop sign. Visual-external learners may feel thwarted at first by a different script: Cyrillic or Greek characters, Hebrew or Arabic characters, Japanese or Chinese characters, for much of the world Roman characters – these “foreign” scripts do not at first carry visual meaning, and so do not lend themselves to visual memory. As long as the visual-external learner has to sound out words character by character, it will be impossible to memorize them by seeing them written in the foreign script; they will have to be transliterated into the native
script for visual memory to work. Visual-external translators usually do not become interpreters; in fact, it may seem to them as if interpreters have no “source text” at all, because they can’t see it. If diagrams or drawings are available for a translation job, they insist on having them; even better, when possible, is a visit to the factory or other real-world context described in the text. Translation for these people is often a process of visualizing source-text syntax as a spatial array and rearranging specific textual segments to meet target-language syntactic requirements, as with this Finnish–English example (since visual-external learners will want a diagram):

![Diagram of road construction](image)

**[Karttaan](on merkitty) [punaisella symbolilla] [tienrakennustyöt] ja [sinisellä] [pääilystystyöt]**

[New road construction] [is marked] [on the map] [in red], [resurfacing] [in blue]

This sort of translator may well be drawn to contrastive linguistics, which attempts to construct such comparisons for whole languages.

**Visual-internal** learners learn best by creating visual images of things in their heads. As a result, they are often thought of as daydreamers or, when they are able to verbalize their images for others, as poets or mystics. Visual-internal learners learn new foreign words and phrases best by picturing them in their heads — creating a visual image of the object described, if there is one, or creating images by association with the sound or look or “color” of a word if there is not. Some visual-internal language-learners associate whole languages with a single color; every image they generate for individual words or phrases in a given language will be tinged a certain shade of blue or yellow or whatever. Visual-internal translators also constantly visualize the words and phrases they translate. If there is no diagram or drawing of a machine or process, they imagine one. If the words and phrases they are translating have no obvious visual representation — in a mathematics text, for example — they create one, based on the look of an equation or some other associative connection.

**Auditory**

Auditory learners learn best by listening and responding orally, either to other people or to the voices in their own heads. Learning for them is almost always accompanied by self-talk: “What do I know about this? Does this make sense? What can I do with this?” They are often highly intelligent musically. They are excellent mimics and can remember jokes and whole conversations with uncanny precision. They pay close attention to the prosodic features of a spoken or written text: its pitch, tone, volume, tempo. Their memorization processes tend to be more linear than those of visual learners: where a visual learner will take in an idea all at once,
in the form of a spatial picture, an auditory learner will learn it in a series of steps that must be followed in precisely the same order ever after.

**Auditory-external** learners prefer to hear someone describe a thing before they can remember it. Given a diagram or a statistical table, they will say, “Can you explain this to me?” or “Can you talk me through this?” Auditory-external language-learners learn well in natural situations in the foreign culture, but also do well in language labs and classroom conversation or dialogue practice. They are typically very little interested in any sort of “reading knowledge” of the language; they want to hear it and speak it, not read it or write it. Grammars and dictionaries may occasionally seem useful, but will most often seem irrelevant. “Native” pronunciation is typically very important for these learners. It is not enough to communicate in the foreign language; they want to sound like natives. Auditory-external learners tend to gravitate toward interpreting, for obvious reasons; when they translate written texts, they usually voice both the source text and their emerging translation to themselves, either in their heads or aloud. They make excellent film-dubbers for this reason: they can hear the rhythm of their translation as it will sound in the actors’ voices. The rhythm and flow of a written text is always extremely important to them; a text with a “flat” or monotonous rhythm will bore them quickly, and a choppy or stumble rhythm will irritate or disgust them. They often shake their heads in amazement at people who don’t care about the rhythm of a text — at source-text authors who write “badly” (meaning, for them, with awkward rhythms), or at target-text editors who “fix up” their translation and in the process render it rhythmically ungainly. Auditory-external translators work well in collaborative groups that rely on members’ ability to articulate their thought processes; they also enjoy working in offices where several translators working on similar texts constantly consult with each other, compare notes, parody badly written texts out loud, etc.

**Auditory-internal** learners learn best by talking to themselves. Because they have a constant debate going on in their heads, they sometimes have a hard time making up their minds, but they are also much more self-aware than other types of learners. Like visual-internal learners, they have a tendency to daydream; instead of seeing mental pictures, however, they daydream with snippets of remembered or imagined conversation. Auditory-internal language-learners also learn well in conversational contexts and language labs, but typically need to rehearse what they’ve learned in silent speech. Like auditory-external learners, they too want to sound like natives when they speak the foreign language; they rely much more heavily, however, on “mental” pronunciation, practicing the sounds and rhythms and tones of the foreign language in their “mind’s ear.” Auditory-internal learners are much less likely to become interpreters than auditory-external learners, since the pressure to voice their internal speech out loud is much weaker in them. Auditory-internal translators also care enormously about rhythms, and constantly hear both the source text and the emerging target text internally. In addition, auditory-internal translators may prefer to have instrumental music playing softly in the background while they work,
and will typically save one part of their mental processing for a running internal commentary: “What an idiot this writer is, can’t even keep number and gender straight, hmm, what was that word, I know I know it, no, don’t get the dictionary, it’ll come, wonder whether the mail’s come yet, Jutta hasn’t written in weeks, hope she’s all right . . .” Not only is this constant silent self-talk not distracting; it actually helps the auditory-internal translator work faster, more effectively, and more enjoyably.

**Kinesthetic**

Kinesthetic learners learn best by doing. As the name suggests, they score high in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Their favorite method of learning is to jump right into a thing without quite knowing how to do it and figure it out in the process of doing it. Having bought a new machine, visual learners will open the owner’s manual to the diagrams; auditory learners will read the instructions “in their own words,” constantly converting the words on the page into descriptions that fit their own mind better, and when they hit a snag will call technical support; kinesthetic learners will plug it in and start fiddling with the buttons. Kinesthetic learners typically talk less and act more; they are in touch with their feelings and always check to see how they feel about something before entering into it; but they are less able to articulate their feelings, and also less able to “see the big picture” (visual learners) or to “think something through and draw the right conclusions” (auditory learners).

But remember that we all learn in all these different ways; we are all visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. These categories are ways of describing tendencies and preferences in a complex field of overlapping styles. As we have seen before, you may recognize yourself in some small way in every category listed here.

**Kinesthetic-tactile** learners need to hold things in their hands; they typically learn with their bodies, with touch and motion. They are the ones who are constantly being warned not to touch things in museums; they can’t stand to hang back and look at something from a distance, or to listen to a guide drone on and on about it. They want to feel it. Kinesthetic-tactile language-learners learn best in the foreign country, and in the classroom in dramatizations, skits, enacted dialogues, and the like. They find it easiest to learn a phrase like “Open the window” if they walk to a window and open it while saying it. In the student population, it is the kinesthetic-tactile learners who are most often neglected in traditional classrooms geared toward auditory and visual learning (and an estimated 15 percent of all adults learn best tactiley). Kinesthetic-tactile translators and interpreters feel the movement of language while they are rendering it into another language: as for auditory learners, rhythm and tone are extremely important for them, but they feel those prosodic features as ripples or turbulence in a river of language flowing from one language to the other, as bumps or curves in a road (see Robinson 1991: 104–9). To them it seems as if texts translate themselves; they have a momentum of their own, they flow out of
groups of people or off the page into their bodies and out through their mouths or fingers with great force. The translator’s or interpreter’s job feels more like “steering” or “channeling” the flow than like producing a target-language equivalent for source-language words and phrases. Problem words or phrases stop or hinder the flow, act like a bottleneck or a rocky snag; when this happens kinesthetic-tactile translators may well check dictionaries or list synonyms in their heads, but their primary sensation is one of trying to restart the flow. The analytical processes that help translators determine the nature of a source-language problem and develop a target-language solution are important to kinesthetic-tactile translators too, but those processes are usually much more deeply sublimated in them than they are in visual and auditory learners, and it may seem to them as if the problems simply disappear, or as if the solutions come to them from some external source. When they “visualize” individual words and phrases, they do so in terms of touch and movement: they can imagine their hands touching a thing, picking it up, turning it over, hefting it, feeling its contours; they “feel” themselves moving toward or around or away from it.

*Kinesthetic-internal* learners use their feelings or “experiences” as a filter for what they learn. Things or ideas that “feel good” or give the learner “good vibes” are easy
Small-group work

Most educators agree that human beings learn better by doing than by listening. The most effective lectures, therefore, will also get the audience involved in doing something actively, even if it is only a thought exercise. By this logic, practical hands-on small-group seminars ought to be the perfect pedagogical tool.

But again, it’s not so much the tool itself that makes the difference as how you use it. Many small-group exercises and discussions are just as boring as sitting in a monotonous lecture. Students given a boring task to perform or topic to discuss in a group will quickly shift to more interesting topics, like their social life; or, if forced to stay on task, will go through the required steps grudgingly, resentfully, and thus superficially and mechanically, learning next to nothing. For small-group work too, therefore, it is important to take into consideration how the brain functions:

1. **Variety.** Variety is the spice of life for good physiological reasons: when things don’t change, the brain ignores them. Traditional teachers have begun to blame television for young people’s short attention spans and need for constant change and excitement; but it really isn’t television’s fault, nor is it even a new phenomenon. It is a deepseated human need, part of the brain’s
evolutionary structure. A classroom that uses lots of small-group work will only be interesting and productive for students if the nature of the work done keeps changing. If students are repeatedly and predictably asked to do the same kind of small-group work day after day (study a text and find three things to tell the class about it; discuss a topic and be prepared to summarize your discussion for the rest of the class), they will quickly lose interest.

**Collaboration.** It might seem as if this should go without saying: when students work together in small groups, of course they are going to collaborate. But it is relatively easy for one student in a group to assume the “teacher’s” role and dominate the activity, so that most of the other students in the group sit passively watching while the activity is completed. This is especially true when the group is asked to come up with an answer that will be checked for correctness or praised for smartness: when the teacher puts pressure on groups to perform up to his or her expectations, their conditioned response will be to defer to the student in the group who is perceived as the “best” or “smartest” – the one who is most often praised by the teacher for his or her answers. Collaboration means full participation, a sense that everyone’s contribution is valued – that the more input, the better.

**Openendedness.** One way of ensuring full participation and collaboration is by keeping group tasks openended, without expecting groups to reach a certain answer or result. The clearer the teacher’s mental image is of what s/he expects the groups to produce, the less openended the group work will be; the more willing the teacher is to be surprised by students’ creativity, the more they will collaborate, the more they will learn, and the more they will enjoy learning. Openended tasks leave room for each student’s personal experience to emerge – an essential key to learning, as students must begin to integrate what is coming from outside with what they already know. When the successful completion of a task or activity requires every student to access his or her personal experience, also, whole groups learn to work together in collaborative ways rather than ceding authority to a single representative. (All of the topics for discussion and exercises in this book are openended, with no one right answer or desired result.)

**Relevance.** Group work has to have some real-world application in students’ lives for it to be meaningful; it has to be meaningful for them to throw themselves into it body and soul; they have to throw themselves into it to really learn. This emphatically does not mean only giving students things to do that they already know! Learning happens out on the peripheries of existing knowledge; learners must constantly be challenged to push beyond the familiar, the easy, the known. Relevance means simply that bridges must constantly be built between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the easy and the challenging, the things that already matter to students and the things that don’t yet matter but should.
State of mind. This follows from everything else – part of the point in making group work varied, collaborative, open-ended, and relevant is to get students into a receptive frame of mind – but it is essential to bear in mind that these things don’t always work. An exercise that has worked dozens of times before with other groups leaves a whole class full of groups cold: they sit there, staring at their books, doodling on their papers, mumbling to their neighbors, rolling their eyes, and you wonder whatever could have happened. Never mind; stop the exercise and try something else. No use beating a dead horse. There are many receptive mental states: relaxed, happy, excited, absorbed, playful, joking, thoughtful, intent, exuberant, dreamy. There are also many nonreceptive mental states: bored, distracted, angry, distanced, resentful, absent. The good teacher learns to recognize when students are learning and when they are just filling a chair, by remaining sensitive to their emotional states.

Multimodal experience. It is often assumed that university classrooms are for intellectual discussions of important issues – for the spoken and written word. Drawing, singing, acting, dancing, miming, and other forms of human expression are for the lower grades (and a few selected departments on campus, like art or theater or music). Many university teachers will feel reluctant to use many of the exercises in this book, for example, because they seem inappropriate for university-level instruction. But the brain’s physiological need for multimodal experience does not disappear after childhood; it continues all through our lives. Studies done on students’ retention of material presented in class have shown that the more senses a student uses in processing that material, the better s/he will retain it (see Figure 8). The differences are striking: students who only hear the material (for example, in a lecture), retain only 20 percent of it. If they only see it (for example, in a book), they retain 30 percent of it. If they see it and hear it, by reading along in a book or rereading lecture notes, or if the lecture is accompanied by slides or other visual aids, they retain 50 percent of it. If in addition to seeing it and hearing it they are able to talk about it, in class discussions or after-class study groups, retention goes up to 70 percent. And when in addition to seeing it, hearing it, and talking about it, they are able to do something with it physically, act it out or draw a picture or sing a song about it, retention soars to 90 percent. Undignified? Perhaps. But what is more important, dignity or learning?

Some teachers may find these “shifts” in their teaching strategies exciting and liberating; for others, even a slight move in the direction of a more student-centered classroom may cause unpleasant feelings of anxiety. To the former, the best advice is to do whatever feels right: use the book as a springboard or muse rather than as a straitjacket; let the book together with your students and your own instincts lead
to an approach that not only works but keeps working in different ways. To the latter, the best advice is to try this approach in small doses. Teachers can use the book more traditionally, by having students read the chapters and take exams on the subject matter, with perhaps an occasional teacher-led discussion based on the discussion topics at the end of every chapter. But the true core of the book is in the exercises; it is only when teachers let students try out the ideas in the chapters through multimodal experiences with the exercises that the book will have its full effect. If, however, the exercises – and the “less academic” classroom atmosphere that results from their extensive use – arouse all your suspicions or anxieties, teach the book mostly traditionally, but let the students do one or two exercises. And keep an open mind: if they enjoy the exercises, and you enjoy watching them enjoy themselves, even if you are not convinced that they are learning anything of value, try a few more. Give the exercises a fair chance. They really do work; what they teach is valuable, even if its value is not immediately recognizable in traditional academic terms.

All the discussion topics and exercises presume a decentered or student-centered classroom, in which the teacher mainly functions as a facilitator of the students’ learning experiences, not as the authority who doles out knowledge and tests to make sure the students have learned it properly. Hence there are no right or wrong answers to the discussion topics – no “key” is given here in the appendix for teachers who want to use these topics as exam questions – and no right or wrong experiences to derive from the exercises. Indeed I have deliberately built in a tension between the positions taken in the chapters and the discussion topics given at the end of the chapters: what is presented as truth in the chapter is often questioned in the

Figure 8 Channels of learning  
Source: Adapted from Irmeli Huovinen’s drawing in Vuorinen 1993: 47
discussion topics at the end. The assumption behind this is that human beings never accept anything new until they have tested it against their own experience. The assumption that facts or precepts or theories can or should simply be presented as abstract universal truths for students to memorize is based on a faulty understanding of human neural processing. The brain simply does not work that way.

Tied to this brain-based pedagogical philosophy is the progress in Chapters 5–10 (and in Chapter 11 backwards) through the three phases of Charles Sanders Peirce’s “duction” triad: abduction (guesses, intuitive leaps), induction (practical experience), and deduction (precepts, theories, laws). The idea here is that precepts and theories are indeed useful in the classroom – but only when they arise out of, and are constantly tied back to, intuitions and practical experiences. The second half of the book integrates a number of different translation theories – especially linguistic, functional, descriptive, and postcolonial ones – into an experiential approach to becoming a translator by helping students to experience the steps by which a theorist derived a theory, or by having them redraw and rethink central diagrams to accommodate divergent real-world scenarios. Everyone theorizes; it is an essential skill for the translator as well. What turns many students off about translation theory, especially as it is presented in books and articles and many classrooms, is that it tends to have a “completeness” to it that is alien to the ongoing process of making sense of the world. The theorist has undergone a complex series of steps that has led to the formulation of a brilliant schema, but it is difficult for others, especially students without extensive experience of the professional world of translation, to make the “translation” from abstract schemas to practical applications, especially to problem-solving strategies. The wonderful thing about the act of schematizing complex problems visually or verbally is the feeling of things “locking into place,” “coming together,” “finally making sense”: you have struggled with the problem for weeks, months, years, and finally it all comes into focus. Presented with nothing more than the end-product of this process, however, students aren’t given access to that wonderful feeling. Everything just seems “locked into place” – as into prison.

In this sense theorizing translation is more important for the translation student than theories of translation as static objects to be studied and learned. Our students should become theorists themselves – not merely students of theories. This does not mean that they need to develop an arcane theoretical terminology or be able to cite Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Benjamin and Heidegger and Derrida; what it means is that they should become increasingly comfortable thinking complexly about what they do, both in order to improve their problem-solving skills and in order to defend their translational decisions to agencies or clients or editors who criticize them. Above all they need to be able to shift flexibly and intelligently from practice to precept and back again, to shuttle comfortably between subliminal functioning and conscious analysis – and that requires that they build the bridges rather than standing by passively while someone else (a teacher, say, or a theorist)
builds the bridges for them. This does not mean reinventing the wheel; no question here of handing students a blank slate and asking them to theorize translation from scratch. All through Chapters 6–10 existing theories will be explored. But they will be explored in ways that encourage students to find their own experiential pathways through them, to build their own bridges from the theories back to their own theorizing/translation.

Seventy-five percent of teachers
are sequential, analytic presenters
that’s how their lesson is organized . . .
Yet 100% of their students
are multi-processors

(Jensen 1995a: 130)

* * * * *
1 External knowledge: the user’s view

The main idea in this chapter is to perceive translation as much from the user’s point of view as possible, with two assumptions: (1) that most translation theory and translator training in the past has been based largely on this external perspective, and (2) that it has been based on that perspective in largely hidden or repressed ways. Some consequences of (1) are that many traditional forms of translation theory and translator training have been authoritarian, normative, rule-bound, aimed at forcing the translator into a robotic straitjacket; and that, while this perspective is valuable (it represents the views of the people who pay us to translate, hence the people we need to be able to satisfy), without a translator-oriented “internal” perspective to balance it, it may also become demoralizing and counterproductive. A consequence of (2) is that important parts of the user’s perspective, especially those of timeliness and cost, have not been adequately presented in the traditional theoretical literature or in translation seminars. Even from a user’s external perspective, translation cannot be reduced to the simplicities of “accurate renditions.”

Discussion

1 Just what else might be involved in translation besides “strict accuracy” is raised in this first discussion topic. The ethical complexities of professional translation are raised in more detail in Chapter 2 (pp. 25–8); this discussion can serve as a first introduction to a very sensitive and hotly contested issue. The more heavily invested you are in a strict ethics of translation, the harder it will be for you to let the students range freely in this discussion: you will be tempted to impose your views on them. It is important to remember that, even if your views reflect the ethics and legality of most professional translation, students are going to have to learn to make peace with those realities on their own terms, and an open-ended discussion at this point, when the stakes are low, may help them do so. Also, of course, traditional ethics do not cover all situations; they are too narrow. As professionals, students will have to have a flexible enough understanding of the complexities behind translation ethics to make difficult decisions in complicated situations.

2 Here it should be relatively easy to feed students little tidbits of information about the current state of machine translation research and let them argue on their own.

Exercises

1 This exercise works well in a teacher-centered classroom; it is a good place to start for the teacher who prefers to stay more or less in control. Stand at
the board, a flipchart, or an overhead projector (with a blank transparency and a marker) and ask the students to call out the stereotyped character traits, writing each one down on the left side of the board, flipchart, or transparency as you hear it. Then draw a line down the middle and ask the students to start calling out user-oriented ideals, writing them down on the right side as you hear them. When they can think of no more, start asking them to point out similarities and discrepancies between the two lists. Draw lines between matched or mismatched items on the two sides. Then conduct a discussion of the matches and mismatches, paying particular attention to the latter. Try as a group to come up with ways to rethink the national characteristics that don’t match translator ideals so that they are positive rather than negative traits. The idea is to shift students’ focus from the external perspective that sees only problems, faults, and failings to an internal perspective that seeks to make the best out of what is at hand. The students must not only be able to believe in themselves; they must be able to capitalize on their own strengths, without feeling inferior because they do not live up to some abstract ideal.

Another way to run this exercise is in small groups: break the class up into groups of four or five and have each group do the exercise on its own; then bring them all together to share their discoveries with the whole group.

2 This can be done as a demonstration exercise in front of the class: ask for volunteers, have them plan what they’re going to do, and do it while the other students watch; then discuss the results with the whole class. Or it can be done in smaller groups, each group planning and enacting their own dramatization. A demonstration exercise leaves the teacher more control, but also gives fewer students the actual experience.

3 Here the important thing is pushing the students to generate as much complexity as possible. Some groups may be tempted to set up a tidy one-to-one correspondence between the specific types of reliability listed in the chapter and specific translation situations; encourage them to complicate this sort of neat tabulation, to find problems, conflicts, differences of opinion and perception, etc. Professionals need considerable tolerance for complexity; this exercise is designed to begin building that tolerance.

4 Here the temptation may be to settle things too quickly and easily. Set a minimum time limit: their negotiations must last at least ten or fifteen minutes. The longer they negotiate, the more complications they will have to imagine, present, and handle.

2 Internal knowledge: the translator’s view

This chapter offers the first tentative statement of a position that will be developed throughout the book: the internal viewpoint of the practicing translator. It is an attempt to reframe the user’s requirements – reliability, timeliness, and cost – in
terms that are more amenable to translators’ own professional self-perceptions: as professional pride, income, and enjoyment.

**Discussion**

1 This first discussion topic is designed to help students address a common misperception: that translators translate, period. Many student translators believe implicitly that there are clear boundaries between translation and other text-based activities, and that they will never be asked to cross those boundaries – or if they are, that they should naturally refuse. This is a chance for you to correct these misperceptions with anecdotes from your own experience and knowledge of the professional field; but those anecdotes will have the greatest impact on students if they are presented as obstacles to their simplistic notions, problems for them to digest, rather than as truths that bring the discussion to a halt.

2 Here again, your own anecdotes will be helpful – especially ones that complicate an oversimplistic assumption about “improving” a text.

3 (a) Given that agency people often have to deal with under-qualified and semi-competent freelancers, and grow frustrated with the inflated claims freelancers make about themselves and the poor-quality work they send in, the satire was probably written by somebody who has worked for (or owned) a translation agency for many years. It might, however, have been written by a freelancer who felt contemptuous of his or her competition.

(b) Mario’s education has nothing to do with translation skills, language skills, or – unless he is planning to specialize in gardening translations – subject-area knowledge. Someone looking to hire a translator is likely to look for a degree in translating, a degree in foreign languages, or a degree in some specialized subject (law, medicine, engineering, business) along with experience in the field and considerable time spent abroad – or preferably some combination of the three. S/he would also prefer any experience to be professional, geared toward a demanding marketplace, rather than the kind of dubious work a fifteen-year-old might do to earn money for cigarettes. “Mnemonic” means memory-oriented, like learning rhymed jingles. Not only did Mario not learn important skills or subject-area knowledge in school; he doesn’t even remember much of the “mnemonic” things he studied.

(c) Localization is the hot new market in the translating field; to established professionals in the field is has a bit of the “wildcatter” (unregulated) air about it. Big money has been made there, some of it by people without a lot of solid linguistic grounding or subject-area competence. The satire here implies that Mario became a localizer because he wasn’t competent and didn’t want to work very hard.


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