



Collaborative Creativity with a Purpose: Understanding the Translation Reviser's Task

Annamari Korhonen
Tampere University

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I believe that one thing that all translation scholars agree on is that translation is a demanding cognitive task. When I think about the work of a translation professional, the mental image that comes to my mind is that they sit there staring at their text on the computer screen, thinking very hard. Which is actually a bit funny because in my own career as a translator, I rarely remember sitting and staring, at least for any length of time.

What did I do then? I was busy tapping the keyboard. And not only writing the target text, but searching information online, using the concordance search function of the translation memory software, and clicking between dictionaries, term banks and internet browsers. When I was done with the translation, I uploaded the file into the portal for the reviser to work on it next. Later, I got back the text in which the reviser had added some markup, and went through the changes, accepting them or sometimes rejecting them, and often making some other changes to the text.

Here we encounter the first concept that my research rests on: revision. Revision is a specific stage in the translation workflow, and it follows the production of the first version by the translator. Revision has often been called checking or proofreading, but those terms do not appropriately reflect the nature of the task. Revision is carried out by a translation professional, and its main purpose is to further improve the translation so that it meets the quality criteria of the translation company as well as those set by the client. The reviser engages in problem-solving and searches information just like the translator does.

Translators are often invisible, but revisers are even more so. Yet they have an important role in producing translations that meet the expectations. Translation studies literature seems to be somewhat lacking a theoretical understanding of what revisers do. There are surveys of practices (e.g., Rasmussen & Schjoldager 2011; Schnierer 2019), and there are prescriptive guides (Mossop 2014), but these works have not aimed to present a model of what the role of revision and revisers is in today's language industry.

One of the aims of this research project has therefore been to gain a better understanding of what revision work is, and what it can be. In what light should we see this work that is so often considered a necessary evil, an additional and unwanted cost item, or something that would ideally not be needed at all? What are the true benefits of

translation revision, and why is it an important step in the process? And on the other hand, how can language service providers make sure that it does not cost too much?

The object of my inquiry were revisers and their work, but as their task is so deeply intertwined with other parts of the production workflow, it seemed most useful to look at revisers from the perspective of collaboration: that is, the translation production system that translators and revisers together form. In this system, everything that the other participant does has a direct impact on the other's work. It is a discussion and a negotiation, it is a process of co-creating the translation, it is a system of distributed cognitive work. That is, it is a case of distributed cognition – which is the second important concept for my research.

The concept of distributed cognition first took me by surprise and seemed like a revolutionary way of thinking about cognitive functions. We are used to thinking about the brain as a computer that performs logical functions, and processes mental images or representations; we usually believe that this all happens within the brain, which we take to be an independent organ and alone responsible for thinking, remembering, making decisions, and performing all other cognitive functions. But in cognitive science, there are now different ways of conceptualizing what cognition is (see, e.g., Dawson 2013). Some cognitive scientists think that it is more accurate and useful to see cognition as a system that includes not only the brain but also the body and even objects that exist outside the person. Many work tasks, for example, are so complex that they are impossible to perform by using the brain alone. Translation is one of these tasks. In most translatorial action, the translators use digital tools such as the translation software and the translation memory database, and, most recently, translation engines. These assistive technologies allow professionals to work more efficiently and to achieve higher quality.

The theory of distributed cognition therefore offers us a framework that allows us to examine cognitive systems that are larger than what happens in the brain, and larger than one person. Many researchers have been interested in how an individual's cognitive functions extend to artefacts such as notebooks or other scaffolding devices. In the terminology that I have followed, this would be called individually distributed cognition (Perry 1999). However, in my dissertation, I have not examined cognitive systems that only include one person; instead, I have looked at a system with two members, a translator and a reviser. This type of system, which has more than one member, can be called a system of socially distributed cognition.

I have also considered some of the tools and, above all, communication channels that the translator and reviser use. Communication channels are particularly important because without them, there can be no system of socially distributed cognition. Such a system can only exist if the participants communicate with each other. Much of this work I carried out together with Dr Maija Hirvonen.

In the modern world and today's translation industry, it is clear that translation always takes place in a social environment, as part of a socio-cognitive assembly. Therefore, I am convinced that it is useful also for researchers to describe translation through such assemblies, instead of only describing isolated task performances of individual professionals. However, it is typical for specialised translation that the work is carried out so that translators and revisers do not meet each other during the projects, nor do they

discuss projects for example over the phone. There is often no time for such discussions in the fast-paced and efficient environment of language service provider companies, and often the work is outsourced so that neither the translator nor the reviser engaged in a specific project even works at the company; they may both be freelancers. This made me wonder: how can I say that a system of socially distributed cognition exists if the assumed participants of the system do not seem to communicate with each other? As I said, such a system cannot exist without communication.

It turned out that the answer to this question had been staring me in the face all along. Because there is pressure for efficiency, and because the participants do not work side by side, they normally make use of an efficient communication channel that does not interrupt their other work and ensures that each message is conveyed in the exact context that it applies to. This communication channel is the revision file that is sent between the translator and the reviser. Any problems are discussed and solved in that file, with little need for other communication.

The importance of the revision file was first noted in my third article, written together with Dr Maija Hirvonen (Korhonen & Hirvonen 2021), and I returned to take a closer look at it in the fourth article. The analysis of the files' characteristics and affordances, that is, the potential of action they offer as digital artefacts, proved that to understand the nature of cognitive work, we cannot ignore the tools that are used. They need to be accounted for and included in the analysis; this is a natural part of the research effort when applying the theory of distributed cognition.

When exploring the preconditions of revision work and the collaboration of translators and revisers, it was very clear that the work is carried out under a lot of pressure. Profitability, quality and schedules are all interrelated; they are also sometimes in conflict (Korhonen 2022). They form the framework that forces translation professionals to carefully consider their ways of working. But to look at professional translation and to only see these elements would be wrong. The work itself does not consist of pressure elements alone: it is also creative work. It is creativity for a purpose, the kind of creativity that is needed when performing a given task to achieve the best possible result. Translators and revisers develop solutions to translation items, evaluate alternative solutions, and choose the best ones. When two people distribute this creative process between them, as I described earlier, it becomes co-creation: the translator and the reviser also evaluate each other's solutions, and both give their input for the final product (Korhonen & Hirvonen 2021). When they do this, their different competencies complement each other; this is an essential characteristic of the process (Korhonen 2022). For example, one of them may be more familiar than the other with the client's terminological preferences and the subject matter. The language competence profiles of the participants may also be different. When translating from a language of low diffusion, such as Finnish, it also often happens that translators work into their second language. It would then be useful that the reviser would be a native speaker of the target language. In such cases, each participant would define their role in the creative process in accordance with what they are best at, and let the other participant take responsibility for their areas of expertise. In this sense, the system is flexible, and for it to work ideally, each

participant would have to be aware of their own areas of expertise, as well as those of the other participant.

Another aspect of creativity that I have discussed in the dissertation is related to the different genres of specialised translation. My interviewees generally recognised two major genre categories in specialised translation: the genres in which accuracy of the translation is a priority, for example technical manuals, and the genres in which smoothness, which could also be conceptualised as good style and high linguistic quality, is prioritised (Korhonen 2022). These categories first came up in my second article, and in the fourth one, I made an attempt to trace these differences using linguistic analysis. However, I have only made a rudimentary beginning in this area of research; the creativity that is required of a translator or a reviser merits much more research.

By doing academic research on how the translation industry and the professionals in it work, I want to help build bridges between the industry and the academia. As a translator myself, this has been my goal from the start of my doctoral journey. I want to increase the mutual understanding and sympathy of these two quite different realms; I want to show that we have common goals in ensuring meaningful work tasks for the professionals and excellent texts for the clients. I believe that researchers may help practitioners find new perspectives to their work. The researchers, in turn, need the help of practitioners to ensure the usefulness and validity of their results. We all want to safeguard the continued appreciation of translation professionals' work. Furthermore, as researchers, if we want to help the general public understand why translation professionals are so valuable, we must first ourselves be able to answer this question quite thoroughly. I hope my work can be seen as part of that effort.

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About the author

Annamari Korhonen defended her PhD dissertation entitled *Translation Revision as Part of Cognitive Translational Collaboration: Creativity under Pressure* at Tampere University on 15 March 2024. The dissertation is available at: <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-3333-1>
Email: annamari.korhonen@tuni.fi