Chapter 15
Psychology of Translation: Critical and Creative Thinking

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ABSTRACT

The process of translation is treated as a sequence of three principal stages (pre-translation source text analysis, translation itself, self-assessment/editing). The chapter is aimed at proving that the first and the third stages of the translation process are based on critical thinking, while the second stage (translation itself) rests upon creative thinking. Therefore, teaching critical thinking must be a necessary part of translator professional training, because it is not only important as such, but also leads students to acquisition of mature creative thinking, which is crucial for translation problem-solving. In this chapter, the problem of training translation quality assessment is analyzed, the difference between critical and creative thinking is discussed, and psychological mechanisms of their functioning in translation are treated as a cognitive process; the role of critical thinking in raising translators’ awarenesses and, consequently, translation quality is stressed.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sums up some of the author’s experience of teaching translation to students majoring in linguistics and English-Russian translation. It is also based on the research made from 2002 to 2005, which explains why some points of the chapter are described in retrospect; many conclusions of the research have now been reconsidered and reformulated in the light of the years passed since.

Translation and interpretation (T & I) theoretical studies, as well as T & I training, are all about quality. Indeed, anyone having some knowledge of a foreign language can more or less successfully translate and/or interpret both ways. The only difference between a trained (professional) and amateur translator/interpreter is in performance quality. Hence, translators-to-be must be facilitated to acquire professional thinking, which is understood in this chapter as their ability to adequately translate any text at a minimum time and effort.

To this end translation training should incorporate critical and creative thinking training. More precisely, students must be facilitated to acquire critical and creative thinking skills. The idea, though not new, is worth extending in its DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6615-3.ch015
practical part, for critical and creative thinking 
skills should not be taught “as such”, but rather 
as an integral part of translation studies. Ideally, 
critical thinking skills should be acquired through 
an academic subject or subjects; later, in their 
turn, they will contribute to the effectiveness of 
mastering translation skills.

According to Becker (1994), Bowell and Kemp 
(1992), teaching critical thinking skills is a 
necessary component of any education and a 
key to success. Being the opposite of dogmatic, 
stereotypical, mundane thinking, critical thinking 
forms a considerable part of a person’s general 
competence and provides protection from any 
manipulation or propaganda. From the viewpoint 
of psychology and theory of education critical 
thinking is a cognitive process necessary for 
complex tasks solving. From this perspective 
critical thinking is sometimes called convergent, 
logical, or deductive thinking. It is also characterized as reflective thinking, i.e. the one aimed at 
self-assessment (Hassel, 2004).

Treatment of critical and creative thinking as 
parts of complex tasks solving seems to be relevant 
for translation studies, for in terms of cognitive 
psychology translation is a complex task. With 
this in mind, it is important to concentrate on the 
following problems: translation quality, translation 
process structure, translation as a cognitive 
process, the role of critical thinking in translation 
quality improving. As a result, a definition 
of pre-translation source text analysis (PTSTA) 
as an important phase of the translation process will be provided in the light of critical thinking 
studies. At the end of the chapter some comments and recommendations on teaching critical 
thinking and PTSTA will be given. The chapter logic is circular: the primary goal of translator 
training is translation quality. PTSTA as well as 
post-translation editing (PTE) is crucial for the 
quality of translated text (TT). Critical thinking is 
the psychological basis for both PTSTA and PTE.

Besides, it contributes to the ripening of creative 
thinking, or translator’s insight. Consequently, it 
is crucial for translation quality.

The objectives of the chapter are:

1. To determine the criteria necessary for written translation quality assessment relevant 
   for translator training.
2. To define PTSTA in the light of critical thinking studies and to suggest its scheme.
3. To reveal the role of critical and creative thinking in the process of translation, and 
   thereby clarify the psychological mechanism of translation optimization.

The given objectives predetermine the chapter structure.

BACKGROUND

The translation process is one of those human intellec- 
tual activities that combine elements of both 
craft and high art. This is why translation quality 
assessment is considered to be one of the most 
difficult tasks, both theoretically and practically. 
This accounts for the long-standing controversy 
between translation theoreticians (e.g. Ковалева 
[Kovalyova], 2001; Комиссаров [Komissarov], 
[Turover], 1978) and practitioners (e.g. Качество 
переводов и его оценка [Translation quality and 
its assessment]) concerning the issue of translation 
quality. (There are few authors who, like Robin- 
son (1997), equally take into account linguistic 
and extralinguistic, practical and theoretical as-
pects which influence translators’ performance).

However, both theoreticians and practitioners 
would agree that unless one has a clear idea of 
translation quality it is impossible to determine 
the mechanisms of its improvement. Hence, the 
key problem of translation quality assessment 
and criteria should be treated both theoretically
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