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MEMORY SYSTEM INSTRUMENTS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

Translation, similarly to any other cognitive process, involves memory at all phases and levels. In this article we discuss and explore aspects of underlying memory systems in translation processing.

In the case of translation learning, we are dealing with a situation in which the following generalizations apply:

there is an existing knowledge system (the L1);

the L2 learner has considerably greater cognitive abilities and schematic knowledge than the first language learner;

a qualitatively different talent for learning languages is no longer available;

ongoing performance may have an impact upon the nature of translation processing;

the role of memory functioning in an effective way to translation must not be underestimated.

Here we would like to address the latter one and discuss the relations between all the memory system instruments in translation processing.

There are different views as to: a) how input and working memory interact, and b) the extent to which some input is processed on-line, directly by long term memory during translation processing [1].

The latter challenges us to tackle a series of more interesting questions which spotlight particular aspects of language functioning.

For example:

What factors influence how input is processed?

If memory capacities are limited, what reduces the efficiency of input processing?

How can features of input be made more likely to be processed during translation?

What role does awareness of the contents and operation of working memory play?

Are language systems qualitatively different from the other systems?

How can the working memory \ long-term memory connection produce change in long-term memory, rather than simply the transfer of information?

What types of analysis are performed on working memory material, and how useful are these?

What is the nature of the long-term memory storage system — is it redundantly structured? Parsimonious? Modular?

Do all people use similar processing systems in similar ways while translating?

Can output be based on more than one system?

Recent developments in psycholinguistics suggest interesting answers to some of the questions mentioned above. They definitely have significant implications for both second language acquisition and language teaching [2; 3; 5].

More recently, a number of researchers have drawn on work in cognitive psychology to reanalyze the functioning of input in terms of attentional processes [4; 7]. The scholars propose three principles for input processing. These are:

Principle 1: Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form. Learners process content words in the input before anything else. Learners prefer processing lexical items to grammatical items for semantic information. Learners prefer processing more meaningful morphology before less or non-meaningful morphology, for example, simple past regular endings rather than redundant verbal agreement.

Principle 2: For learners to process form that is non-meaningful, e.g. third person -s, they must be able to process informational or communicative content at no or little cost to attentional resources.

Principle 3: Learners process default strategies that assign the role of agent to the first noun (phrase) they encounter in the sentence. This is the “first noun” strategy, but the “first noun” strategy can be overridden by lexical semantics and event probabilities. Learners will adopt other processing strategies for grammatical role assignments only after their developing system has incorporated other cues (e.g. case marking, acoustic stress etc).

VanPatten argues that the processing approach is compatible with some clear pedagogic goals. It suggests the usefulness of training language learners in effective processing, to make them more able to notice relevant cues in the input so that form-meaning links are more likely to be attended to [7].

In a similar vein, Schmidt proposes the crucial construct of noticing to start to account for the way in which a) not all input has equal value and b) only that input which is noticed then becomes available for intake and effective processing [6].

All those discussions mentioned in this article and many others regarding the problem which are going to come will make a lot to improve effective translation activity.

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