PHD THESIS ABSTRACT

REVISION COMPETENCE

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1. THESIS SUBJECT, AIMS, CONTENTS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Thesis subject

This PhD thesis is about the revision of technical translations: an activity which is run of the mill for translation agencies but largely unknown to scholarship. That revision consists of the checking and correction of a translation is common knowledge but how it is affected by the subject, genre, length or language of the specific translation is not. When is comparison full and when is it partial? What makes an error? Does revision improve or destroy translation quality? Do revisers know anything that translators do not?

Such questions have been few and far between in Translation Studies, and the answers have been incomplete and/or dubious. The literature includes three monographs on revision: Horguelin & Brunette (1998), Mossop (2001), and Parra Galiano (2005). The first two present the tricks of the trade to both practitioners and future professionals. The third one creates a theory (partly based on the findings of previous researchers), on the one hand, and analyses revision as a means of quality assurance using three case studies, on the other. At the same time, none of these books tells the reader about how revisers actually work.

1.2. Thesis aims and hypotheses

This thesis sets out to fill in the above gap with empirical research as its main aim, and to promote reviser training, reviser testing and translator training, to make translation agency revision more effective, and to develop and standardise the Hungarian terminology of revision as its long-term aims. In order to narrow the scope of research subjects, the author advanced five hypotheses about the checking, correction and evaluation of technical translations:

> 1) Revision requires special knowledge, called *revision competence*.
> 2) Revision results in more changes than necessary.
> 3) Revision mostly results in word-level changes.
> 4) Revision pulls translations towards the target language rather than the source language.
> 5) As with translation, revision has universals.

1.3. Thesis contents

This thesis is comprised of eight chapters, a bibliography, a list of tables and a glossary with the following contents.

Chapter 2 is about the reviser: first about the dictionary definitions of the word (2.1.), then about his relationship with the translator (2.2.), his scope of work (2.3.1.), skills (2.3.2.), the principles underlying his work (2.4.) and about his potential social roles (2.5.).

Chapter 3 presents revision, but this time the dictionary definitions (3.1.) are completed with the interpretations of translation scholars (3.2.) and translation agencies (3.3.). This is where revision parameters, the criteria of translation checking are first mentioned (3.4.). This is followed by a typology of revision (3.5.) and its function at OFFI (Hungarian Office for Translation and Attestation) (3.6.), then by an overview of similar procedures (self-revision, proofreading, pre-editing, pre-translation, post-editing, adaptation) (3.7.). One subchapter is devoted to the role of revision in quality assurance (3.8.) and another one to the extent to which it may be regarded as a useful activity (3.9.). Revision requires various types of reading (3.10.) and writing (3.11.). All translations take their definitive shape via the four rhetoric-stylistic categories of change, i.e. addition, subtraction, transposition and transmutation (3.12.). Revision affects the language of a piece of writing and even the translator's use of language. Therefore, it is a *language management activity*, to use a term by Lanstyák (2008), which is related to language cultivation in several respects (3.13.). Finally, Chapter 3 explores two areas where revision can play a role: translators' skills development (3.14.) and translator training (3.15.).

The subject of Chapter 4 is the revised translation. The small number of definitions found in the literature and used by translation agencies (4.1.) is raised by the present author's proposed interpretations. Accordingly, a revised translation may be viewed as a text type (4.2.), a variety of language (4.3.), an improved or spoiled version of the draft translation (4.4.), and as the reflection of revision universals (4.5.).

Chapter 5 describes the selection of research methods (an analysis of two corpora via observation and experiment) and the five informants (5.1., 5.2.), the composition of the big corpus (5.3.), the examined six revision parameters and five revision operations (5.4.), and ends with the introduction of the concept of unit of revision (5.5.).

Chapter 6 analyses both corpora. Chapter 7 describes the personal and professional characteristics of the five revisers (7.1.), the properties of revision parameters and operations

based on the corpus surveys (7.2. and 7.3.), and goes on to test the five research hypotheses one by one (7.4.–7.8.).

Chapter 8 makes a proposal for the establishment of a new discipline: Revision Studies. Chapter 9 contains the bibliography and Chapter 10 the list of tables. This PhD thesis is also an attempt to help future scholars, therefore Chapter 11 lists and defines 99 Hungarian terms of revision with their English and Spanish equivalents, partly adopted from the literature with some modifications and partly based on the present author's ideas.

1.4. Theoretical background

In terms of research methodology, this thesis belongs to the positivist paradigm of science in that it strives to achieve internal coherence, lack of self-contradiction, verifiability and falsifiability, explaining and predictive power, and objectivity (Albert 2003). At the same time, its topics, the way they are exposed and the interpretation of research findings place it in the hermeneutic paradigm, whereby reality is not detached from individuals but created by them, both independently and jointly (Reeves 1997).

Revision is such a diverse phenomenon that research findings would only be distorted by the strict application of any single method. This explains why Chapters 2–4 present the precedents in the literature and their criticism, the author's own experience and ideas about certain topics and even practical matters mixed up with theory. Such diversity is also present in Chapter 7 because not even empirical research can make sure that conclusions are valid. Consequently, the findings that are obtained from the inevitable interpretation of data and are hence not objective anyway call for further hypotheses.

If we accept that "the theory of translation (…) is the *theory of* translation *practices: praxeology*, that is theorising, philosophising, thinking or speech ($\lambda o \gamma o \varsigma$) about the problems arising in translation practices ($\pi \rho \alpha \xi \iota \varsigma$)" (Albert 2003: 23 — emphases in the original), then any knowledge about revision should be placed in the category of "praxeology" rather than "pure science".

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

2.1. Corpus structure

This research was based on the manual analysis of the following two revision corpora. The first one was comprised of 81 Hungarian certified translations from English and German, all checked and corrected by five OFFI revisers. The overall length of the texts is 150 standard small pages (50 characters by 25 lines; 30 pages per person). The number of changes found is 784. The second corpus contains the five reviser's versions of the same 2.5-page translation with a total of 129 changes.

2.2. Research focus

Each revision change can be described in terms of both content and form. The former is called *revision parameter*, and the latter *revision operation*. What follows are the names and definitions of the six parameters and five operations chosen for the analysis:

Table 1: Names and definitions of the revision parameters identified in the corpora

Name	Definition
Editing	making the translation conform to editing rules as defined by the client or the translation agency
Equivalence	making the translation conform to source text meaning
Spelling	making the translation conform to target language spelling rules
Style	making the translation conform to target language stylistic and accuracy rules
Terminology	making the translation conform to target language terminology
Word order	making the translation conform to target language word order rules

Table 2: Names and definitions of the revision operations identified in the corpora

Name	Definition
Addition	extension of the translation with a new element
Annotation	formatting instruction or explanation on the translation's margin
Deletion	termination of a translation element
Rearrangement	changing the translation's word order
Replacement	substitution for a translation element

2.3. The manner of the analysis

The author coded all changes in the two corpora with the initials of all six parameters and five operations (e.g., *SD* = style + deletion), and summarised their combinations, then attempted to identify the reasons for the individual revisers' changes in increasing order of frequency. The analysis of the big corpus was followed by that of the small corpus (the experiment), which enabled the author to test the five hypotheses. Here are the figures of both corpora:

Table 3: Summary of the revision operations and parameters identified in the big corpus

	Annotation	Rearrangement	Deletion	Addition	Replacement	Total
Editing	4	5	7	17	15	**48** (6.12%)
Word order		53				**53** (6.76%)
Spelling			25	29	57	**111** (14.15%)
Equivalence		3	16	85	70	**174** (22.19%)
Style	1	7	32	46	94	**180** (22.95%)
Terminology		2	10	27	179	**218** (27.8%)
Total	**5** (0.63%)	**70** (8.92%)	**90** (11.47%)	**204** (26.02%)	**415** (52.93%)	**784**

The lines and columns in Tables 3 and 4 follow each other in an ascending order of the amounts of revision parameters and operations, top down and from left to right, respectively. The bottom line percentages show the share of operations, and those in the rightmost column the shares of parameters.

Table 4: The distribution of revision parameters in the small corpus

	Reviser 2	Reviser 3	Reviser 5	Reviser 1	Reviser 4	Total
Editing			1 (3.33%)		1 (3.03%)	**2** (1.55%)
Word order		4 (14.81%)	2 (6.66%)	2 (6.45%)	3 (9.09%)	**11** (8.52%)
Spelling	1 (12.5%)	2 (7.4%)	3 (10%)	2 (6.45%)	4 (12.12%)	**12** (9.3%)
Terminology	1 (12.5%)	3 (11.11%)	3 (10%)	11 (35.48%)	8 (24.24%)	**26** (20.15%)
Equivalence	2 (25%)	9 (33.33%)	7 (23.33%)	3 (9.67%)	13 (39.39%)	**34** (26.35%)
Style	4 (50%)	9 (33.33%)	14 (46.66%)	13 (41.93%)	4 (12.12%)	**44** (34.1%)
Total	**8** (6.2%)	**27** (20.93%)	**30** (23.25%)	**31** (24.03%)	**33** (25.58%)	**129**

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. The properties of revision parameters

Table 5: The distribution of revision parameters in the two corpora

	Big corpus	Small corpus	Average
Editing	6.12%	1.55%	**3.83%**
Word order	6.76%	8.52%	**7.64%**
Spelling	14.15%	9.3%	**11.72%**
Terminology	27.8%	20.15%	**23.97%**
Equivalence	22.19%	26.35%	**24.27%**
Style	22.95%	34.1%	**28.52%**

The six parameters under review belong to two large groups. The first contains Editing, Word Order and Spelling. Their overall proportion (23.19%) is below the next parameter. In other words, these occur most rarely in every reviser. Accordingly, the most frequent parameters are Equivalence, Style and Terminology.

Presumably, Editing is so rare because certified translations are made on a standard page which, as suggested by the name, leaves no room for manoeuvring in terms of fonts, letter size, spacing, margins, hyphenation, etc.

The reduced number of Word Order changes may be due to the three reasons listed by Klaudy (2004): lack of time, lack of guides for the correction of syntactic errors and missing knowledge of the appropriate syntactic rules.

What may account for the revisers' homogeneous performance with regard to Spelling is the set of stereotypical words used in certified translations, which probably calls for only a few spelling rules. The exact meaning of "a few" is still unknown.

The frequency of Equivalence and Style is nearly identical to the share of Terminology and even barely different from it. In other words, the five revisers set more or less the same store by faithfulness, stylistic appropriateness and terminological precision.

The parameter of Terminology has absolute primacy perhaps because terminological errors are binary, as termed by Anthony Pym (1992). It is relatively easy for a reviser to tell whether the translator has used a terminological unit correctly or wrongly. Of course, as with unilingual speech, in bilingual communication it is impossible to classify everything under the

headings of "correct" and "wrong", but in certified or, more generally, technical translations there are so many technical terms that revisers can be most effective in this field.

3.2. The properties of revision operations

Table 6: The distribution of revision operations in the two corpora

	Big corpus	Small corpus	Average
Annotation	0.63%		**0.31%**
Rearrangement	8.92%	8.5%	**8.71%**
Deletion	11.47%	6.97%	**9.22%**
Addition	26.02%	17.05%	**21.53%**
Replacement	52.93%	67.44%	**60.18%**

As shown by Table 6, Annotation has the lowest number of occurrences maybe because the five revisers regard all other operations as easier to understand. Rearrangement mainly affects Word Order, which may rarely be manipulated without further changes, and this requires so much additional work that the five revisers tend to avoid it. By contrast, the reason for the rarity of Deletion may be that it calls for caution; otherwise it may cause meaning errors.

Replacement has an absolute majority because it makes the life of both translators and revisers easier by preventing the time-consuming consideration of two risky operations, Rearrangement and Deletion. However, Replacement may also be interpreted as an addition and a deletion simultaneously. Therefore, the replacements found in the two corpora may be halved and added to the additions and deletions. This causes Addition to have a majority. According to the Explicitation Hypothesis, this is the operation which can mainly make a translation clearer and more explicit than the original. If it is proved that such increase helps readers process a translation with greater ease, then future researchers should see whether revision contributes to explicitation.

3.3. Hypothesis testing

The corpus analysis confirmed the author's supposition that revision competence is comprised of the following five components:

Table 7: The components of revision competence

Subcompetence	Definition
Ameliorative	the ability to improve translations
Evaluative	the ability to evaluate translations
Translation	the ability to supply translation omissions
Comparative-contrastive	the ability to compare translations and their originals
Corrective	the ability to correct translation errors

This survey did not look at revision as a process but as an end product. Therefore, it is only likely, by lack of real time observation and interviews, that the six reading and three writing techniques listed in subchapters 3.10 and 3.11 do exist; otherwise it would be hard to explain how revision changes are made.

Table 8: A revision reading typology

Type	Revision application
Checking reading	a quality (semantic and stylistic) check of translations
Gist reading	a perusal of source and target language background materials during work
Proofreading	a quantity (formal and spelling) check of translations
Scanning	a search for the source text correspondents of problem spots in translations
Skimming	a preliminary reading of source texts and a follow-up reading of revised translations
Translation reading	interpretation of problem spots in source texts

Table 9: A revision writing typology

Type	Revision application
Translation writing	the supplying of translation omissions
Correction	a quality (semantic and stylistic) correction of translations
Proof-writing	a quantity (formal and spelling) correction of translations

In both corpus surveys, each revision change was viewed as the unit of a parameter and an operation. Revision competence includes the checking of six levels of language (Editing, Equivalence, Spelling, Style, Terminology, Word Order) and five interventions (Addition, Annotation, Deletion, Rearrangement, Replacement).

In summary: revisers apply five (or, by different standards, four) skills, six reading and three writing techniques, identify (at least) six parameters, and perform five interventions, i.e. possess a peculiar competence. This confirms Hypothesis 1.

The five revisers made several changes that are not warranted by the subject or language of the translations. Underlying such changes may be individual preferences and subconscious habits that do not affect the normal use of certified translations. Therefore Hypothesis 2 on the changes of which there are more than necessary has been verified.

Certified translations are mostly technical texts that are primarily comprised of terms. This favours revision changes on word level rather than on sentence level. On the other hand, words are easier to spot than any other text element, and the relevant rules are also simpler to remember, check and correct. Consequently, it is fair to say that revision mostly results in word-level changes. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 has also been proved.

Of the six parameters under review one is linked to the source language (Equivalence); and each of the other five (Editing, Spelling, Style, Terminology, Word Order) relates to the target language. If such relationships are marked with a ✓, and their lack with an X, then the confirmation of Hypothesis 4 may be represented as follows:

Table 10: Confirmation of Hypothesis 4

	Source language	Target language
Editing	X	✓
Equivalence	✓	X
Spelling	X	✓
Style	X	✓
Terminology	X	✓
Word Order	X	✓

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of 913 changes made by five revisers has proved Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4. Each of these assumptions relates to a general characteristic, i.e. a universal of revision. They have been verified individually, therefore altogether they confirm even more that revision has universals or — given the small number of informants — tendencies.

4. NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS OF THE THESIS
AND THEIR POTENTIAL USES

This is the first PhD thesis:

- to summarise in Hungarian all scholarly publications on revision;

- to present the revision practices of Hungarian translation agencies;

- to provide a detailed description of OFFI's translation process;

- to develop a model of revision competence, principles, parameters, operations and universals;

- to develop the most elaborate ever revision typology;

- to develop a revision reading and writing typology;

- to build and analyse the first two Hungarian revision corpora;

- to verify five revision hypotheses via empirical research;

- to standardise and extend the Hungarian terminology of revision.

The above findings may be used in translator and reviser training, the evaluation of translator and reviser examination results, and in making translation agency revision more effective. The findings demonstrate that revisers' activities are an unexplored area of bilingual speech with plenty of research gaps, e.g. To what extent do revisers' stated principles reflect their actual revision practices? How is revision affected by text type and length and by the individual language variety of revisers? Of course, such questions require the analysis of the highest possible number of types of revised translations (religion, fiction, philosophy, press, etc.) and the involvement of the highest possible number of revisers.

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