Narrative Intelligence and Translation Quality

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction
Translation studies as an interdisciplinary domain of research cannot afford to neglect the link between translation and psychology. The psychological aspect of translators can be related to those areas in which they deal with mental and cognitive processes during the translational process. One of the prominent factors of such cognitive processes is intelligence (Gardner, 2004 as cited in Brown, 2007) which plays a critical role in the conduct of learning and completing language-related tasks such as translation. Translation is an intelligent activity which involves complex conscious and unconscious processes on the part of the translator (Robinson, 2007). It can readily be admitted that among the so many mental factors contributing to the task of translation, intelligence plays the critical role in translatorial success; however, little is known about the role of narrative intelligence (NI), “the capacity both to formulate (compose, narrate) and to follow (understand, read) the story of our own life” (Randall, 1999, p. 13), in relation to translation. The human makes sense of the world around them through narratives (Bruner, 1987; Randall, 1999). The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the level of NI on the translation quality from English to Persian, on the participants who are native speakers of Persian. The current study was an attempt to address the following questions: 1) Is there a significant correlation between the participants’ translation quality and their narrative intelligence? 2) Is there a significant difference between the translation qualities of the participants with high versus low narrative intelligence?

2. Theoretical Framework
This research is based on Randall’s taxonomy of NI. To Randall (1999), narrative intelligence consists of the following five subcategories, each of which

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incorporates to our vision of an event. *Emplotment* is the ability of editing what is happening or what has happened through our senses, shortening an event, handling what is recognized as conflict or trouble, and prioritizing what seems to be relevant from irrelevant in the situation to fulfill the present aim of a narrator. *Characterization* is the ability to sum up, and to characterize a working picture of ourselves and others based on the existing and evolving evidence. *Narration* is believed by Randall (1999) to be the heart of narrative intelligence. By narration a person “conveys to others what is going on, has gone, or may go on, sensitive to what they understand in terms of ‘logical’ between events, causes and consequences” (p. 13). *Genre-ation* is the ability to arrange the event in rather expected patterns (e.g., tragic, comic, ironic). This is true for both narrating and experiencing the events. *Matization* is the ability to recognize the main ideas of the story from repeated happenings in the event, and to provide explanations about why something has happened several times.

3. Method

As for the sample, 104 female and male Iranian final year undergraduate students of English translation participated in this study. Based on a criterion sampling technique, only those students were invited to participate who were native speakers of Persian and had learnt English as a foreign language. As another criterion, only those students were invited with a GPA of 17.5 or higher out of 20. The participants’ age ranged from 21 to 37 (*M*=23.40, *SD*=3.47). To measure the participants’ NI, the Narrative Intelligence Scale (NIS) designed by Pishghadam, Baghaei, Shams, and Shamsaei (2011) was utilized. A passage in English was used for translation from the foreign language to mother language. The passage contained 150 words to assess the translation quality of students in this study. The researchers used the holistic translation quality assessment model validated by Waddington (2001).

4. Results & Discussion

Regarding the first research question, it was found that there exists a correlation between participant translators and their NI. Obviously, translators who know how to convey the meaning into their mother language are more successful; translators who are well familiar with a network of cognitive approaches to translation can reach a working interpretation of the foreign text. Moreover, it was found that out of the five subscales of NI, characterization had the highest correlation with translation quality. Characterization refers to presenting a complete “working picture” of oneself in the process of narrating stories (Randall, 1999, p.18). Regarding the second research question, if there is a significant difference between the translation qualities of high and low narrative intelligence translators, it was revealed that there exists such a significant difference. It was concluded that the high narrative intelligence translators had a better performance on their translations than the low narrative intelligent translators.
5. Conclusion & Suggestions
Initially, the results of the study indicate the considerable role of narrative in cognitive and mental processes of translation. Therefore, training translators on how to develop such NI abilities seems quite relevant and even necessary. Also, in the context of translator education in universities, there seems to be a gap in the curriculum of translator education programs in terms of how to develop and enhance cognitive abilities and narrative intelligence among students. Furthermore, translator training programs can employ the fruitful results of NI improvement in education; they can become more practice-based rather than theory-oriented. Further research on the role of NI on translation and a variety of its related issues may be quite necessary, such as the relationship between NI and its subcategories with literary translation, specialized translation, and professional translation which seem inconclusive and open to research.

Keywords: Narrative intelligence, Translation quality, English, Persian.

References


