

An Ergonomic Perspective of Professional Translation

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An Ergonomic Perspective of Professional Translation

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Translation can be understood as a language product, as an activity, or as an important sector of the economy, but it always involves people interacting with texts, translation aids, and other people. Professional translators perform the demanding cognitive act of producing reader-appropriate texts in a target language while simultaneously processing information from the source text and juggling their clients', employers', and society's expectations of translation (Tourey 2012; Chesterman 2013). At the modern translation workplace, the increasingly heavy reliance on language technology has added to the complexity of this dynamic system (O'Brien 2012). An ergonomic perspective (Lavault-Olléon 2011) can contribute to understanding how physical, cognitive, and organisational factors impinge on professional translation. This presentation will draw on a large corpus of translation processes, commentaries, and interviews collected from commercial, institutional, and freelance workplaces over the last few years in Switzerland and will link them to the results of a recent international survey on the ergonomics of the translation workplace. For example, the intensive interaction with computers that has become a hallmark of professional translation has serious implications for translators' health and well-being because of less than optimal physical ergonomics. We have also found evidence that language technology tools, designed to relieve translators of tedious tasks and increase efficiency, may actually be constraining translators' creativity because important aspects of cognitive ergonomics have been neglected. In addition, the segmentation of the translation process risks sidelining humans to repairing machines' mistakes instead of empowering them to do the creative work that machines cannot handle. Improvements in organisational ergonomics should be directed towards incorporating more effective feedback loops in every stage of the process. By encouraging and enabling translators to take increased ownership of language technology, organisations could optimise the deployment of human and technical resources and ultimately ensure the quality of translation.

Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow is a professor of translation studies at the ZHAW Institute of Translation and Interpreting (IUED). Born and raised in Canada, she completed a Ph.D. in experimental linguistics at the University of Alberta before settling in the Zurich area of Switzerland. Her research interests include cognitive translatology, translation processes, cognitive ergonomics, human-computer interactions, workplace practice, translation didactics, translation in the news, and conceptual transfer. She has been principal investigator of the interdisciplinary research project *Cognitive and Physical Ergonomics of Translation*, a follow-up of the *Capturing Translation Processes* study. Several recent and forthcoming publications document the results of those projects, and she co-edited special issues of *Target* (25:1) and *Translation and Interpreting Studies* (8:2; 9:1).