Rethinking the Role of Rejection Sensitivity and Quality of Translation

Gholam Reza Parvizi[a],*

[a]Department of English Language, Alborz University, Qazvin, I. R. Iran.
*Corresponding author.

Received 18 September 2016; accepted 6 November 2016
Published online 26 December 2016

Abstract
The translator’s psychological traits have scarcely been researched in empirical translation studies. This study presents findings from an empirical study in which a quasi-experimental approach is employed to study the topic. The study seeks out any probable correlations between rejection sensitivity of translation trainees and translation quality. The population of the study included students of Translation Technique in Soroush language institute- Sanandaj. The analysis was based on Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire by Feldman and Downey (1994) that was administered to translation trainees to estimate their scope of rejection sensitivity; they were then asked to translate extracts of two short stories—“Father and I” and “The Rocking Horse Winne”. The translations were rated and the results were compared with their responses to the rejection sensitivity questionnaire. The results revealed different scopes of rejection sensitivity, experienced by translation students, which might be of use to both translator trainees and teachers to become more acutely aware of the different and individual ways in which students can approach target texts. Although context-bound, the article will demonstrate how the application of an instrument drawn from psychology to a number of translation students permits the suggestion that students’ rejection sensitivity can influence their performance in translation. It considers the argument that translation studies can benefit from importing concepts and methodologies from the field of psychology, but also that novice translators need to become acutely aware of the different and individual ways in which they impact on target texts, and the resulting target readers’ perceptions of their work.

Key words: Rejection sensitivity; Individual differences; Quality of translation; Translation assessment

INTRODUCTION
Much has been said about the role of psychological factors in learning a second/foreign language and an extensive body of research has been carried out, approaching this issue from different perspectives and in a multitude of various contexts. However, the impact that different psychological traits might have aspects of vocational or recreational performance of learners has been a somehow neglected area for educators and researchers. One of the major areas in which ESL/EFL learners can apply their knowledge of English is the vast realm of translation. Professionals in the field have managed to examine a multitude of different factors and elements believed to impede or assist the formation of a “good” translation (Farahzad, 2003; Palumbo, 2009). Unfortunately, the probable effect of psychological factors related to translators, professional or aspiring, involved in the task have not been adequately shed light on.

In a conference paper, Tymoczko (2007) highlighted the need for translation studies to open up to ideas from other cultural traditions, and to enlarge translation by developing new concepts and new ways of thinking about this field of study, as it would give translation new validity and models for practice.

Many translation studies scholars are what Gile calls disciplinary immigrants (2008) who have imported theories and principles from sociology, cultural studies, linguistics etc.. Jean Piaget’s early work in cognitive
psychology, for example, has inspired scholars such as Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) to investigate specific translating and interpreting mental processes using a cognitive approach. The links between translation studies (TS) and the field of psychology have become even more prominent in recent years, as illustrated in a recent issue of Meta entitled Traductologie: Une science cognitive [Translation studies: A cognitive science] (2007).

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary also crystallizes the link between the two fields, by defining psychology as: the scientific study of the human mind and its functions, the mental characteristics or attitude of a person, and the mental factors governing a situation or activity (Hubacher-Davidson, 2009). As studying translators and how they function is an activity in which people are involved, the insights and benefits to be gained by adopting a psychological approach are therefore clear. Whereas cognitive psychology has been explored in TS (De Groot, 2000; Lee-Jahnke, 2005, amongst others), there are many more areas of synergy that arguably deserves further attention. Process research, for example, could be further developed to take account of a branch of psychology that has largely been overlooked thus far: personality psychology.

Much of the research on individual differences in translation education has demonstrated the influence of affective variables, including attitudes, motivation, and translators’ personalities on translation quality. A recent addition to the affective constructs is rejection sensitivity (RS), which is emerging as a concept useful in accounting for individuals’ differences.

Naturally, the general tendency is to consider translation as a task that anybody can do with the help of a dictionary. However, the fact is that producing a written text, using another text as a basis, is a much more complex phenomenon. This complexity becomes more evident when the text in question deals with specialized subjects. When words belonging to the so-called General English appear next to specific terms and within a specific context, they contain nuances that must be accounted for in the final translation. The translator must take into account the contextual clues embedded in the discourse in order to avoid ambiguities in the produced document (Khatib, 2011). In this bewildering territory, and amidst of so many perspectives and theories, what role does the translator’s fear of rejection play in the final outcome of translation.

In order to find out answer to the question mentioned above, the present study was carried out with the hope of investigating the probability of a relationship between the translators’ rejection sensitivity and the quality of their translations. If there appears to be any relationship at all, educators can think of ways in which they can impede students’ sensitivity to rejection with the aim of elevating the quality of their translations.

1. WHAT IS MEANT BY REJECTION SENSITIVITY?

Downey and colleagues (Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001; Feldman & Downey, 1994) have proposed a processing dynamic, rejection sensitivity, to account for the influence of rejection experienced by the self as an individual on subsequent close relationships. In this article, theory and research are extended on Rejection Sensitivity to account for the personal and educational consequences of becoming the subject of rejection, affecting the way students approach unfamiliar phrases/structures of the text to be translated. Rejection sensitivity is defined as a cognitive—affective processing dynamic (Mischel & Shoda, 2002) whereby people anxiously expect, readily perceive, and intensely react to rejection in situations in which rejection is possible. The basic structure of this processing dynamic generalizes readily to rejection based on membership in a social group; however, the origins trigger features, and consequences should differ across domains to reflect the different ways and contexts in which personal rejection and status-based rejection are communicated.

Drawing on attachment approaches to social relationships, Downey and Feldman (1996) proposed that when repeated experiences in close relationships (e.g., with parents or important peers) communicate rejection rather than acceptance; individuals may develop anxious expectations of rejection directed toward them as individuals. Such rejection, especially when experienced as painful and distressing, can generate anxious expectations that future status-based rejection will occur.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

An intact group, with an aggregate of 32 male and female students of Translation Technique in Soroush Language Institute, Sanandaj formed the participants for the study. The participant all had Persian as their official language and concentrated on translating either from English into Persian or vice versa. The students had already been familiar with fundamental theories of translation. Therefore, the researcher was insured that they know the basic details of translation and that they all shared almost the same level of knowledge in the field. This way, their performance in the translations they were assigned to do could not have been attributed to the lack of familiarity with the task of translating.

In order to check the homogeneity of the participants, and that they entered the experience of translation with the same level of English proficiency, a Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) was administered. The choice of this test, as a means of assuring our homogeneous subjects, seemed to be appropriate, since...
CELT is one of the very few valid and reliable instruments not including a listening comprehension section. The evaluation of listening comprehension skill was found as irrelevant to the objectives of the researcher as it played no part in the process of translation. After performing statistical procedures on the scores, gained from CELT, it was revealed that ratios of skewedness and kurtosis, over their respective standard errors, were within the ranges of plus and minus 1.96. Thus, it was concluded that the CELT enjoys a normal distribution and that our population was of a homogeneous level of English proficiency.

### 2.2 Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

The RSQ-Personal (Downey & Feldman, 1996) assesses anxious expectations of rejection by significant others due to individual characteristics (as distinct from characteristics due to membership in a social group). The questionnaire consists of 18 hypothetical situations in which rejection by a significant other is possible (e.g., “You ask your friend to do you a big favor”). For each situation, people first indicate their concern or anxiety about the outcome (e.g., “How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to help you out?”) on a 6-point scale ranging from very unconcerned (1) to very concerned (6). They then indicate the likelihood that the other person would respond in an accepting fashion (e.g., “I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to help me out.”) on a 6-point scale ranging from very unlikely (1) to very likely (6). The score for acceptance expectancy is reversed to index rejection expectancy. One obtains a score for each situation by multiplying the expected likelihood of rejection by the degree of anxiety about the outcome of the request. A total score is computed by averaging the scores for all 18 situations. The measure is reliable and normally distributed, with distinctive predictive validity (Downey & Feldman, 1996). A total of 32 participants completed the RSQ-Personal.

### 2.3 Material

After reviewing and considering a number of different text types, two stories were selected, of each an extract of almost ten lines were given to the participants in order to be translated from English into Persian. The stories were selected as the focus participants whose renderings were to be rated. Three raters were asked to examine the quality of translations and to score them according to Method C of Waddington’s (2001) proposed method of evaluation of translations.

### 2.4 Procedure

The participants were asked to focus on the act of translation as an extracurricular activity at home and were provided with a sufficient amount of time to spend on the task. Knowing that their course’s evaluation would not be jeopardized in the aftermath of their less than perfect translations, students could concentrate on the task away from inhibitions and negative affective factors.

Moreover, allocation of sufficient time for completion of the task to minimized the intimidation and pressure of the assignment, giving all students the equal chance of employing all knowledge and intuition they had at their disposal.

After the completion of the translations, 29 students, who had handed their translations on both extracts, were selected as the focus participants whose renderings were to be rated. Three raters were asked to examine the quality of the translations and to score them according to Method C of Waddington’s (2001) proposed method of evaluation of translations.

#### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waddington Scale for Holistic Method C</th>
<th>Quality of expression in TL</th>
<th>Degree of task completion</th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in the “target language”. There may be minor lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two significant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Large sections read like a piece originally written in the “target language”. There are a number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Almost completely successful</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be continued
Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Accuracy of transfer of ST content</th>
<th>Quality of expression in TL</th>
<th>Degree of task completion</th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Certain parts read like a piece originally written in the “target language” but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies, thorough revision required to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Almost the entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Totally inadequate transfer of ST content; the translation is not worth revising.</td>
<td>The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in the “target language”.</td>
<td>Totally inadequate</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. RESULTS

Both raters based their evaluations of the renderings on clear objectives of the proposed assessment method. In order to avoid any inconsistencies in the criteria and the implications of personal preferences in ratings, the correlation between the two ratings was estimated. The inter-rater reliability for the two raters was calculated as $.38 (P=0.037, <.05). The result indicates that there was a statistically significant agreement between the two raters who rated the students’ translations (Table 2).

Table 2
Inter-Rater Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rater 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rater 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant level at 0.05 (2-tailed).

Afterwards, in order to probe any probable significant relationship between students’ rejection sensitivity and the quality of their translations, a Pearson correlation was run. The Pearson R was -.446 (p =.011<.01). .278. Based on these results, it can be concluded that there was indeed a significant reverse relationship between students’ level of rejection sensitivity and the quality of their translations. The descriptive statistics of Pearson correlation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rater 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of rejection sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>-.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant level at 0.05 (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Chesterman (1997) lists four kinds of ethical relationships at stake in translation: clarity, truth, understanding, and trust. In Pym’s view (2015) only trust is in any way germane to translation as the maintenance of a shared illusion, at least when understood as interpersonal trust (rather than institutional trust, for example). He regards the rest as broad essentialist idealisms, since they conceptually involve measurements in relation to an idea of absolute clarity, absolute truth, and absolute understanding, rather than in relation to a fallible communication partner. As such, they have no reason to be shared, are not necessary for the formulation of translation maxims, and in any case remain conceptually incompatible with translation as a constant transformation of language, allowing for no transparency to absolute truth and understanding. While trust is of importance to these scholars, what role does the fear of rejection of the translator play in the final outcome of translation? In fact, translation is an intricate, complex act, being influenced by so many factors, one of which is psychological ones. Among psychological factors, those which are related to translators’ doubts are indicative of their inabilities to render a definite equivalent for the source text item.

In this paper, we found out that when students have fear of rendering non-acceptable translations, they are more probable for producing less than good translations. Given the operational difficulties of measuring rejection sensitivity as a highly subjective experience and also the limitations of the present study especially in terms of sample size and of the scope of tested genres and tasks involved, any generalization presented here must inevitably be treated as tentative but still suggestive of some important issues in translation psychology. The first conclusion regards the adequacy of the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire. On the whole, it can be concluded that the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire is a reliable instrument to gauge sensitivity to rejection, which may be indicative of the participants’ true experiential states.

Other findings of the study regard the very role of rejection sensitivity. As it was found, there is an inverse relationship between high levels of rejection sensitivity and translation quality. Whatever the source of these students’ sensitivity to rejection, it must be remembered
that although sensitivities—in any sort of it—are difficult to change once they are formed, their reformation is never impossible. Hence, if students’ sensitivities to rejection are shown to be in an inverse correlation with the quality of their translations, an effort put on instilling strategies of coping with rejection seems to be a sound investment. Along educating these students on the technicalities of translation, the implementation of practical and effective methods of risk-taking and not being sensitive to hand in improper renderings of texts could greatly influence their performance on translation. Being enlightened about the negative effect being sensitive to rejection could have on the outcome of their translations; students can embrace the task of translation with less negativity.

Teachers and translation instructors can contribute to the implementation of acceptance to rejection by applying an effective methodology and the appropriate selection of materials to be covered. The pieces chosen for translation should be appealing enough to create a willingness in learners to be actively engaged in the process of reading and therefore utmost care should be taken regarding learners’ interest and expectations of this selection, all aiming at minimizing their fear of choosing an improper equivalent, therefore, minimizing their sensitivity to rejection.

Creating an amiable ambience can help students to voice their personal interpretations of texts, away from anxieties of harsh and de-motivating criticisms traditionally practiced in translation classes. In such an environment students become willing to amalgamate their versatile thoughts and opinions to approximate an understanding of the text to be translated.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the results, it can be concluded that there was an inverse relationship between high levels of rejection sensitivity and quality of translations. Therefore, teachers may encourage translation students to take a minimum level of rejection sensitivity by integrating appropriate teaching techniques because if they continue sensitivity to rejection, they become stalled by anticipated criticism from others or by self-criticism that they themselves supply. When they do not have enough practice, their translation development becomes seriously stunted. Future research studies can be planned to investigate the relationship between rejection sensitivity and other translation skills and in relation with different genres. Also, studies with a larger sample size could be carried out to consolidate the findings. The interaction between rejection sensitivity, tolerance ambiguity and translation quality could also be another potential area of research.

**REFERENCES**


