The Deliberate Practice: Translation and Expertise

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Abstract

The field of expertise studies in cognitive psychology proposes that expert performance in cognitive skill domains such as chess, computer programming, or systems analysis is enabled by distinctive cognitive resources that allow "consistently superior performance on a specified set of representative tasks for the domain that can be administered to any subject" (Ericsson and Charness 1997). These resources are accumulated within the framework of deliberate practice, engagement in regular activities that are specially designed to improve performance. The cognitive resources that underlie expertise arise from the operation of pattern recognition, problem representation, "chunking", schematization and knowledge proceduralization processes on the contents of episodic memory over long periods of deliberate practice. The cognitive changes that characterize expertise are held to be consistent across domains. If this is the case, we should expect translation experts to exhibit some of the same cognitive characteristics as experts in other fields. We should be able to both identify and quantify cases of deliberate translation practice and record their effects. Research methods used in expertise studies to verify claims of cognitive changes during novice to expert development should be replicable in translation research. Looking at the expertise studies literature and its findings could provide new directions for research for those interested in translation competence and its relationship to the poorly defined notion of translation expertise. Thus, this paper proposes a theoretical framework for situating translation expertise within empirical translation studies.