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The translator–reviser relationship in specialised translation

Insights from an interview study

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Revision (i.e., the verification of a human translation by a second person) takes place between two people: the translator and the reviser. The relationship between them is worth studying, as it is considered significant in handbooks, texts from practitioners, and competence models, and has been little studied so far in the field of specialised translation. In this article I report on an interview study ($n = 45$) conducted in Switzerland to analyse how the actors in this relationship communicate and how being revised is perceived by translators. The study shows that in the contexts studied, translators and revisers communicate extensively when revision takes place between colleagues. Furthermore, it highlights that revision can be a highly emotional process for translators, who mentioned occasional feelings of anger, aggrievement, and discouragement. Finally, the data suggest that appropriate communication can significantly mitigate the negative feelings that the translators expressed during the interviews.

Keywords: revision, translator–reviser relationship, interview, institutional translation, specialised translation, translation teams

1. Introduction

Simply put, revision can be defined as "revising somebody else's draft translation" (Künzli 2007a, 116). It is key to ensuring the quality of translations — a perspective that is supported by the ISO standard on translation services (ISO 2015), which considers revision to be mandatory. The importance of this is echoed in the literature, which has flourished over the last twenty years after remaining fairly modest until around 2007 (Riondel 2022). Topics covered include revision definition and terminology (Brunette 2000; Lee 2006; Scocchera 2013; Künzli 2014); revision practices studied indirectly, mainly through questionnaires (Robert 2008; Morin-

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Hernández 2009; Rasmussen and Schjoldager 2011; Scocchera 2015a; Schnierer 2019), or directly using corpora (McDonough Dolmaya 2015; Bisiada 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Solum 2018); revision quality, in connection with profiles, task specifications, text genres, or methods (Künzli 2006a, 2007a; Robert 2012; Robert and Van Waes 2014; Van Rensburg 2017; Ciobanu, Ragni, and Secară 2019; Daems and Macken 2021; Nitzke and Gros 2021); and revision competence (Künzli 2006b; Hansen 2008; Rigouts Terryn et al. 2017; Robert, Remael, and Ureel 2017; Robert et al. 2017, 2018; Robert, Ureel, and Schrijver 2022; Robert, Schrijver, and Ureel 2024).

Revising entails two related, but distinct sub-tasks: checking a translation and subsequently editing it when a problem has been detected (see definitions provided in Künzli 2014, 3; Robert and Remael 2016, 580–581; Mossop 2020, 115). Revision is sometimes grouped together with post-editing (i.e., the editing of machine translation output) and self-revision (i.e., the verification of a human translation by the translators themselves), since all three activities entail the two above-mentioned sub-tasks (see, for example, Mossop 2020). However, revision is specific in that it involves two people: a translator and a reviser. Because two people are involved, revision can give rise to a third sub-task: justifying or explaining the changes made (in writing or orally).

Communication features prominently in (a) revision handbooks (Horguelin and Pharand 2009; Mossop 2020), (b) models of revision competence (Künzli 2006b; Hansen 2008; Robert, Remael, and Ureel 2017), and (c) works by practitioners of revision (Oueillet Simard 1984; Graham 1989; Rochard 2004, 2009; Ko 2011) (see Section 2 for more details). By contrast, empirical studies on the translator–reviser relationship remain scarce. In literary translation, recent works have described the different actors and steps of a translation project (Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpi 2019; Feinauer and Lourens 2021), analysed notes and comments written by translators and revisers (Scocchera 2015b; Feinauer and Lourens 2017; Solum 2017), investigated the issue of who gets the final say on texts (Zlatnar Moe and Žigon 2020; Zlatnar Moe, Južnič, and Žigon 2021), and interpreted the acceptance/rejection of changes by translators (Siponkoski 2013; Solum 2018). In specialised translation, one survey has included questions on translator–reviser communication (Schnierer 2019) and a few studies have analysed the revision process in light of the symbolic relationship between the reviser and the other actors (translator, source text author, client), either from the perspective of the reviser's loyalty (Künzli 2006a, 2007b), or from a cognitive approach to investigate the translator–reviser collaboration (Korhonen and Hirvonen 2021; Korhonen 2022).

This article aims to enhance our understanding of the translator–reviser relationship by addressing the following questions in the context of specialised translation:

- What form of communication takes place around revision?
- How do translators perceive being revised?
- How does the post-revision communication influence the perception of revision by translators?

To answer these questions, I draw on an interview study on specialised translation conducted for my PhD (Riondel 2023). This article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the literature on the translator–reviser relationship and puts forward why revision can be seen as a collaborative activity. Section 3 describes the study on which this article is based. Section 4 is the results section and presents the analyses of the different types of communication that take place between translators and revisers in the contexts studied (Section 4.1), the perception of being revised as expressed in interviews (Section 4.2), and the impact of post-revision communication on how being revised is perceived among study participants (Section 4.3). Section 5 discusses the main results and Section 6 provides the conclusion.

2. Literature review

In non-technical language use, a 'relationship' can be defined as "the way in which two or more people feel and behave towards each other."[1] The perspective taken in this article is aligned with this definition. Here, the 'relationship' comprises behaviours as well as feelings or affects. More precisely, a relationship encompasses the way translators and revisers behave towards each other, especially the way they communicate, and more immaterial aspects, such as their opinions on each other, the cognitive collaboration (see Korhonen 2024), and the affective dimension (on affects in translation, see Koskinen 2020). Those aspects are distinguished for the sake of clarity but are often interwoven: for example, (im)polite communication influences how a relationship is perceived (Solum 2017). This section is divided into two sub-sections: the first looks at how the translator–reviser relationship is addressed in the literature, while the second describes the symbolic connections that revisers maintain during the revision process, notably with a view to collaboration between translators and revisers.

1. *Cambridge Dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/relationship. Accessed July 4, 2024.

2.1 The translator–reviser relationship in the literature

The relationship between translators and revisers is tackled in revision handbooks, revision competence models, works from practitioners, as well as empirical studies, mainly in the field of literary translation.

As for handbooks, Horguelin and Pharand (2009) devote an entire chapter to the subject. This attention to the social dimension is logical since didactic revision has a key role in the book. 'Didactic revision' consists of making suggestions and corrections to the draft translation in order to improve the translator's skills. In this type of revision, the reviser is encouraged to explain the changes to the translator, as learning is enhanced when the rationale behind the changes is made clear to the translator (see Horguelin and Pharand 2009, 3–4, 41–43; and in English, Brunette 2000, 170–171). In addition, Horguelin and Pharand (2009, 80–81) list the qualities that a reviser must have to do a good job: judgement, sociability, respect of others, modesty, and patience. Under sociability, they include the ability to show empathy and diplomacy. In his handbook, Mossop (2020, 198–203) addresses the relationships between translators and revisers and gives advice to revisers. He argues that translators and revisers are not competing to determine who translates better. In addition, revisers should bear in mind that the translator is a 'qualified writer' who knows more about the text. They have to accept approaches to translation and stylistic choices that are different from their own and should be able to justify the vast majority of changes, keeping in mind that 'it sounds better my way' is not a valid justification. Mossop adds that changes based on personal preferences are detrimental to relationships. According to him, being able to explain changes is a way of earning respect from revisees, as is acknowledging one's mistakes.

Three existing revision competence models put considerable weight on skills related to the translator–reviser relationship. In the first model (Künzli 2006b), interpersonal competence is one of three key competences, along with strategic competence and professional and instrumental competence. In the second model (Hansen 2008), the two competences specific to revision, as opposed to translation, relate to developing a positive relationship with the translator: the ability to show fairness and tolerance, and the ability to explain the changes made to the translation. The third model (Robert, Remael, and Ureel 2017), based on the first two, features an interpersonal sub-competence as well as psycho-physiological components, which in addition to an ability to show fairness and tolerance, as proposed by Hansen (2008), also include more general attitudes like patience or respect for others.

Practitioners who have written on revision have called on both of the actors involved to communicate: Graham (1989, 64) recommends organising discus-

sions between the translator and reviser after revision and considers tact and diplomacy as fundamental qualities for the reviser when communicating with the translator. Oueillet Simard (1984,7) argues that dialogue is essential, especially with young translators; Rochard (2009,9) advocates giving feedback to the translator as often as possible; and Ko (2011,133) considers it important in general for translators and revisers to be *able* to communicate. This is not always the case; for example, Nord (2018,145–146) describes a personal revision situation where communication between herself and the translators was impossible — a configuration she finds counterproductive.

Advice about translator–reviser communication may originate in revision's potential for conflict, something that is frequently mentioned in the literature. Künzli (2006b,15) draws from an experiment to argue that revision is often characterised by conflict, while Solum (2017,14–15) collects stories of conflicts in interviews with literary translators and revisers in the context of revision projects that are nonetheless going rather well. More specifically, the literature shows that superfluous changes (Künzli 2006a,96; Hansen 2008,270) or a lack of guidelines, such as in the form of a revision brief (Yousif 2009,12), can generate conflict.

Interactions between translators and revisers have been studied empirically, initially through questions in surveys (Scocchera 2015a; Schnierer 2019). In her study of translation agencies in Austria, Schnierer (2019,201–205) shows that interaction between actors is the norm: eighteen out of thirty-one agencies surveyed (58%) stated that there is always some contact between revisers and translators, while twenty-four out of thirty-one (77%) mentioned that translators often or always get some feedback. In her study of literary translation in Italy, Scocchera (2015a,131–133, 182–188) reports that twenty-eight out of fifty-five translators (51%) insert comments or set up a file for the editor or reviser, notably in order to explain a choice, justify a deviation from the original text, or point out an error in the source text; almost all revisers write comments (22/25, or 88%), with a small majority for the translator (if not, for the editor), mainly to explain revision choices; fourteen out of twenty-five revisers (56%) sometimes or always communicate with the translator during revision.

Still in the field of literary translation, there have also been studies that address comments inserted in a translation and the different steps in a translation project. Scocchera (2015b) illustrates what a genetic approach to revision might look like. Using a revision task she was entrusted with, she gives examples of potential traces of the revision process (comments, corrections proposed by the reviser, and modifications by the translator). Solum (2017) analyses comments written by revisers. In her study, comments are mainly used to explain a change or suggest a change instead of modifying the translation in the body of the text with or without explanation. They are also used to respond to a translator's com-

ment and to praise a translation choice or discuss a topic relating to the text (rather than the revision). Feinauer and Lourens (2017, 2021) study three translation projects, observing that they involve different steps and actors (including translator, reviser, editor, and source text author). In their first study, they analyse the comments inserted by the different actors to highlight that, in almost half the cases, the comments signal loyalty to the target language, followed by loyalty to the source text (Feinauer and Lourens 2017). In their second study, they identify six types of revision, which they distinguish according to the person who intervenes in the text and the (non)use of the source text: *translator-revision, author-revision, reviser-revision, source-text-informed editor-revision, unilingual editor-revision*, and *proofreader-revision* (Feinauer and Lourens 2021). In the very specific context of non-lucrative literary translation, Marin-Lacarta and Vargas-Urpi (2019) show that the different revision and checking stages after translation give rise to much communication and extensive collaboration between the actors. To sum up, the translator–reviser relationship is deemed important in the literature, not least because revision holds the potential for conflict.

2.2 The presence of others during the revision process and its impact on the revised translation

A relationship is not restricted to communication between the people involved, but also includes opinions, attitudes, and affects. In a process-product analysis, Künzli (2006a, 2007b) analyses how revisers feel about their loyalty to the source text author, the client, the translator, and themselves. He shows that revisers sometimes have to make a trade-off between the desire to do a good job and the need to be cost-effective.

Different authors have considered the translator–reviser relationship as a collaboration (Rochard 2004; Prioux and Rochard 2007; Korhonen and Hirvonen 2021; Korhonen 2022). Rochard (2004, 59–60, 68) and Prioux and Rochard (2007, 39, 41 note 4) use the metaphor of enquiry, as developed by the American philosopher, psychologist, and educationalist Dewey (1910). According to Rochard (2004, 59–60), translation is like an enquiry, in that translators are faced with a problem (translating the text). To solve this, they gather clues and formulate hypotheses and test them against reality until they arrive at the solution that seems most reliable. The reviser, on the other hand, takes up the investigation where the translator left off and finishes it (Rochard 2004, 60, 68; Prioux and Rochard 2007, 39). Korhonen and Hirvonen (2021) view translation as a creative process during which the translator and the reviser collaborate to produce a translation. In their analysis, which is inspired by the socially distributed cognition approach (see Perry 1999), Korhonen and Hirvonen (2021) consider the draft

translation as an artefact, which is a cognitive resource, as well as a medium of communication for translator and reviser. More generally, they show that revisers do not work in 'cognitive isolation' (270), even when there is no direct contact between the translator and the reviser. Furthermore, Korhonen (2022) shows that the cognitive effort that the reviser makes depends on factors such as the genre of the text, the translator's competence and experience, and the client's needs and requirements.

The collaboration that has been described impacts the text. In a revised translation, it is impossible to know how much of the text has been revised when we look at the final result (Jakobsen 2019, 65). Therefore, a revised translation can be considered as having multiple authorship. To put it in Bisiada's (2018b, 305) words, translation is "a multi-agent activity" (i.e., an activity in which both the translator and the reviser are involved). The topic of multi-authorship raises the question of who makes the decisions, a question that has been addressed in the field of literary translation by Zlatnar Moe and Žigon (2020) and Zlatnar Moe, Južnič, and Žigon (2021). Zlatnar Moe and Žigon (2020) first showed that translators normally have the final say, but do not always choose to do so. Zlatnar Moe, Južnič, and Žigon (2021) adopted a broader view of the relationships between translators, revisers, and editors (people who supervise a translation project), pointing out that revisers generally have the least influential position, while translators, who hold the copyright to the translated text, often carry a great deal of authority. Editors, for their part, appear to have significant power but have little influence in practice, especially since they do not always master the source language. They can also leave the final choices to the translators. Siponkoski (2013) and Solum (2018) examine what happens to revisional changes (rejection, acceptance, acceptance with amendments) as a way of shedding light on relationships in a context where the translator has the final say. Siponkoski (2013) shows that the two translators who were well-established as translators of Shakespeare's works were more likely to reject suggestions than the two translators who were translating Shakespeare for the first time; the latter rejected very few suggestions. By contrast, Solum (2018) points out that the translators accepted most of the revisers' suggestions (87%), with no significant difference between the less and more experienced groups of translators.

The work reviewed in this sub-section shows that translators and revisers maintain a relationship, even when there is no direct communication between them, because they work together to produce a translated text. The study reported in Section 3 was carried out as part of a PhD focusing on the relationship between translators and revisers (Riondel 2023).

3. An interview study on different areas of specialised translation in Switzerland

This section details the methodology adopted for the study (Sections 3.1 to 3.4.) and describes the contexts studied (Section 3.5).

3.1 A qualitative study on practices and perceptions

In order to investigate the topic in depth, I opted for qualitative research, "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell 2009, 4). In this approach, context is paramount, because a phenomenon can only be fully understood and interpreted if analysed in context (Becker 1998, 75–83). This is why the study addressed not only the translator–reviser relationship, but also revision as a whole (management, practices, and perception). For these two topics, both practices and perceptions were included: practices and perceptions of (a) the translator–reviser relationship and (b) revision at large. The rationale for this choice was that practices and perceptions inform the reality and are interrelated: perceptions both drive practices and are shaped by them (Abric 2011a, 17–18, 24) and provide information on the meaning that practices have for the agents (Olivier de Sardan 2008, 321).

To do so, I conducted an interview study in Switzerland. Interviews are well known as a research method for studying perceptions, attitudes, and motivations, and are traditionally combined with observations to study practices (Olivier de Sardan 2008; Maxwell 2013), but interviews can be used for researching practices too (Blanchet and Gotman 2007; Rubin and Rubin 2012; Kaufmann 2016). For that purpose, two conditions must be met, according to Kaufmann (2016, 71–72): (a) gathering different points of view and comparing them, and (b) making sure that there are no major distortions due to the position of the people involved (researcher and participants).

During data production, I tried to include as much diversity as possible, an important aspect for validity in qualitative research (Becker 1998; Blanchet and Gotman 2007; Saldaña 2011; Flick 2018). Diversity related both to the choice of translation departments and to the selection of participants within teams in order to gather as many different points of view as possible. The study followed mainly an inductive path (on induction, see Brinkmann and Kvale 2018, 118–119; Gibbs 2018, 6–7). A preparatory stage took place before the actual interviews (Internet research, informal talks, and six exploratory interviews). This stage was useful to prepare the data production, especially by informing the interview guides. The data already produced were then used to gradually adapt the interview guides, define missing profiles, and detect patterns in the data. This emergent design is

typical for qualitative studies, where the stages of a research project are not linear but rather iterative and cyclical (Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl 2016). The research project, however, was not only guided by inductivity: my understanding of the topic was shaped by the literature and my prior knowledge, which stems from my education and professional experience. After graduating in Specialised Translation, I did a five-month internship at the Swiss Confederation as a German to French translator, then worked as a freelancer before going back to academia to complete a PhD. Therefore, I had direct experience of the object of study, since I had been both a revisee and, to a lesser extent, a reviser. More generally, I belonged to the group studied, like other 'practisearchers', to use a term coined by Gile (1994). In order to avoid over-simplification, it is worth remembering that we are often insiders *and* outsiders at the same time, because (a) identities are multiple and evolutive, and (b) groups are not homogenous (Griffith 1998). A sentence by a French anthropologist about ethnology 'at home' encapsulates my relationship to the field rather well: "The culture in which [the researcher] has chosen to work is neither entirely his own nor completely unfamiliar, just as for his informants the researcher is neither truly familiar nor entirely a stranger" (Zonabend 1985, 37; my translation). Indeed, I felt both familiar with most experiences described in interviews and distant with regards to the daily life of the participants, since my professional routine did not focus on translation anymore, but on research and teaching.

I engaged reflexively with the production and analysis of data, as reflexivity is an important means of validity in qualitative research (Altheide and Johnson 2011; Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl 2016). First, I assessed my position critically: I realised my opinion of the Swiss Confederation was rather positive, based on my enjoyable experience as an intern and freelancer; I had no particular preconception towards private companies with in-house translators; and I had quite a negative attitude towards international organisations and translation agencies, the former because they tend to underestimate junior translators and the latter because they are known for their low rates and short deadlines. Then, I took field notes throughout the research project to reflect on how the data were produced and how my position was changing along the research journey. I never felt any 'split loyalties' (Koskinen 2008, 9), except on one occasion, maybe because I chose to study departments with which I had not worked and to meet participants whom I did not know beforehand.

3.2 Forty-five 'responsive interviews'

The dataset is made up of forty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in eleven settings belonging to two categories (institutional and private),

each featuring two types of contexts: in the institutional sector, the Swiss Confederation and the international organisations in the Geneva region; in the private market, companies with in-house translators and the language industry (translation agencies and freelancers). The forty-five interviews can be broken down as follows: twenty-eight translator-revisers, ten department heads, four translators who do not revise, two project managers, and one proofreader (see Table 1). The forty-two translators were translators into French ($n=30$), German ($n=8$), and Italian ($n=4$). The meetings took place between March 2019 and February 2021, were held in French ($n=41$) and German ($n=4$), and lasted on average 1h13 min.

Table 1. Study participants by category and native language

	French	German	Italian	Spanish	Total
Department heads	5	2	3		10
Translator-revisers	21	6	1		28
Translators who do not revise	4				4
Subtotal translators	30	8	4		42
Project managers		1		1	2
Proofreader	1				1
Total					**45**

Interviews were conducted according to the concept of 'responsive interviewing' (Rubin and Rubin 2012),[2] an approach to in-depth interviewing in which interviewees are considered to be 'conversational partners' and interviewers adapt to the conversation (i.e., they listen then respond to what interviewees say). Rubin and Rubin (2012, 36–37) call on interviewers to involve themselves in the conversation in order to build reciprocity. In 'responsive interviewing', the researcher — participant relationship is characterised by mutual respect and trust (36, 92). Respect means, among other things, that the tone of the interview is friendly, supportive, and gentle (36–37) and that the interviewer does not exercise pressure to get an answer to a question (88). As for trust, it notably implies that what is said in interviews is considered true for the interviewees (7). Interviews addressed the professional backgrounds and tasks of the interviewees, revision management, revision methods, attitudes to revision, communication around revision, and relationships with colleagues. Meetings were mainly organised at the participants' regular workplace to minimise inconvenience for the participants. This choice

2. A more detailed description of the method can be found in Rubin and Rubin (2012, xv–xvi, 7, 10, 36).

also originated in the wish to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible and to give me a sense of the participants' working environment. After each meeting, I took notes on how the interview had gone, highlighting any strong ideas, surprising elements, or puzzling features.

Interviews are socially constructed interactions (Blanchet and Gotman 2007; Gonthier 2011). The effect of social expectations during interviews are traditionally described as 'social desirability bias' and 'social conformity bias', which refer respectively to the wish of the interviewee to present a positive self-image and to show that they belong to a standard, socially accepted situation (Gonthier 2011, 51). In this particular study, social pressure can go either way: participants may want to emphasise the importance of revision and stress the care with which translations are produced, just as they may want to minimise revision and highlight an efficient work organisation. In the interviews, the discourse of the participants sometimes deviated from social expectations, with interviewees expressing criticism about their workplace, evoking unpleasant experiences with colleagues, or describing practices that might be considered controversial, like monolingual revision or very limited recourse to the source text in bilingual revision. The social constraints on interviewees may have been mitigated by the fact that I was younger, less experienced, and earning less money than most of the participants. This may have counterbalanced the fact that I came from a university, an institution with some prestige and authoritative power.

3.3 A thematic analysis driven by the 'template analysis' method

As generally recommended, data analysis began during data production (Maxwell 2013, 104; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014, 70; Brinkmann and Kvale 2018, 136; Gibbs 2018, 4). In order to become familiar with the material and start the analysis, I progressively transcribed the interviews (verbatim) and summarised them (in the form of a list of the main points of the meeting in a length of one to three A4 pages). During the stage especially dedicated to data analysis, I did two full rounds of coding with QDA Miner Lite,[3] free software that features the main functionalities of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS; i.e., writing memos, coding, and retrieving coded interview excerpts). I carried out a thematic analysis inspired by the template analysis method (King 2004, 2012). This technique provides a balance of deduction and induction, since the coding starts with a preliminary list of codes (deduction), while the codebook evolves along with the coding (induction). The method

3. Available at https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/. Accessed on May 30, 2024.

also includes other characteristics: it is compatible with different epistemological stances; it has mainly been used for interview data; and it is especially relevant to contrast the opinions of different kinds of staff (King 2004, 2012).

3.4 Accuracy and lies in interviews

Using interview data to study practices calls for a brief discussion on accuracy in interviews. The relation between interview data and reality and truth is a broad topic that goes far beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say here that lies are quite rare in interviews, at least according to authoritative interview handbooks (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 38–39, 66–67; Kaufmann 2016, 63, 66). In a non-confrontational interview, participants are seldom in a situation where they have to take the risk of lying (it is very unpleasant to be caught in a lie) and can easily say something general if they want to elude a specific question (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 38–39, 66–67). This does not mean that everything that is said during the interview is true: participants' statements may be erroneous or false, but these are usually stories they tell themselves and in which they sincerely believe (Kaufmann 2016, 67). Furthermore, people may believe in two contradictory things that are equally true for them (Rubin and Rubin 2012, 67). More generally, participants' words are true in the sense that they correspond to the truth of their perception. With regard to individual practices, I did not question what participants told me during the interview as long as the message was explicit, non-contradictory, and plausible, since qualitative interviewing implies a partnership based on mutual trust. As for work organisation and revision policies (i.e., collective practices), the research process allowed me to cross-check information, since the topics that were discussed generally featured in more than one interview.

3.5 Description of the contexts studied

Four translation departments were studied in depth and make up the cases of this article as well as the PhD on which it is based. Here, I refer to cases as defined by Dumez (2015, 45–53). In Dumez's approach, a case is complex and can be defined theoretically, empirically, or both, and size is not a relevant definition criterion. A case is part of a larger whole and is composed of smaller elements (which may themselves be proper cases), and there are always other cases of the same rank. However, not everything is a case: as Stake (2005, 444) notes, a case must be sufficiently specified and delimited. The first case is located in the Swiss Confederation, which employs more than 400 translators working in about thirty teams (Pini 2017, 218–219). It is a medium-sized French translation department and six of its staff members were interviewed. The department has two speci-

ficities: (a) team members revise texts produced by other teams within the institution and (b) in-house translated texts are revised orally (see below and Allain 2010). The second case is another medium-sized French translation department in the same institution, where nine interviews were conducted. The third case is a large French translation department located in an international organisation based in Geneva, where eleven translators and revisers and a proofreader were interviewed. In this sector, 'translator' and 'reviser' are two distinct positions: 'translators' do not revise, but their output is revised; conversely, 'revisers' revise texts from 'translators' but their own output is not revised (self-revised translators; see Mossop 2020, 190). The fourth case is a small German (and French) translation department in a private company operating in the field of finance, where four of the five staff members were interviewed.

The dataset is not limited to cases. It also includes settings that have been studied in less detail. In the Swiss Confederation, five interviews were organised with heads of other departments (mainly Italian speaking) to put the two cases in that institution into perspective. In the private sector, four interviews were conducted in the medium-sized translation department of a bank (mainly English and German) with various specificities, including translation and revision into L2 and L3, much localisation, editing of original texts, and an agile approach to project management (on this approach, see Dunne 2011, 162–168). This fifth team cannot be considered as a proper case, as it is too different from the other four to provide sufficient cross-unit comparability (Saldanha and O'Brien 2013, 212). The differences were not anticipated and only became apparent during the meetings. This shows that it is sometimes only possible to characterise the cases studied once the study has been completed (Dumez 2015, 50). Finally, I conducted five interviews in the language industry with people who did not know each other. I met a project manager in one agency (Agency 1), and, in another agency, a project manager and the only staff member who translates and revises (in a team of around ten people; Agency 2). I also interviewed two freelancers who regularly work with agencies (not the ones mentioned above). In the dataset as a whole, interviews with revisers working in a team are comparable as are interviews with heads of departments, regardless of whether they were conducted in a case or not.

The study received ethical approval from the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Geneva (approval No. 10). All participants signed an information and consent form. The form described how research and data would be managed and specified that participants could ask not to be recorded and could withdraw from the study afterwards, which none of them opted to do. The next section addresses the findings of the study related to the translator–reviser relationship.

4. Results

The thematic coding resulted in the identification of a vast array of themes, which is consistent with the wide range of topics addressed in the interviews, as mentioned in Section 3.2. I grouped the themes into eleven over-arching topics, starting with the organisation of work within teams and concluding with evolution in revision experiences and practices throughout the participants' careers. The three over-arching topics that were most useful to address the research questions are: (a) revision practices, (b) translator–reviser relationship, and (c) emotions about revising and being revised.

Overall, the thematic analysis revealed the diversity and the ambiguity of revision (Riondel 2023). Diversity mostly applies to the organisation of work, revision methods, revision task (adaptation to the situation), and communication around revision (for the latter, see Section 4.1; for the other aspects, see Riondel 2024a). As for ambiguity, it is especially prevalent in relation to two issues: (a) the perception of being revised (translators may feel secure and/or aggrieved) and (b) the effect of revision on a translation department (it can strengthen a team or cause tensions). The rest of this section addresses the different forms of communication between translators and revisers (Section 4.1), the annoyance of translators when being revised (Section 4.2), and the impact of post-revision communication on the translators' perception (Section 4.3).

4.1 Communication around revision

This section describes the communication that takes place between translators and revisers before, during, and after revision in the contexts studied. The results deal mainly with collective practices, which were discussed in more than one interview to help increase certainty by cross-checking sources.

In all the cases included in this study, revision gives rise to much interaction. In the first department of the Swiss Confederation that was studied in detail, revision is carried out orally, using a procedure known as 'cross-reading' (*relecture croisée*; Allain 2010) or 'concordance rereading' (*revisión de concordancia*; Parra Galiano 2005, 22), which I prefer to call 'oral revision'. In oral revision, the translator reads the translation to the reviser, who simultaneously reads the original text (see the most comprehensive analysis to date by Allain [2010], a translation department manager who introduced the technique to his team, as well as Riondel [2024b]).[4] According to the interviews conducted, oral revision is practiced as fol-

4. The technique is also briefly mentioned by Drugan (2013, 128, 130–131) and Mossop (2020, 202).

lows in the team studied: when the reviser has a question or a suggestion, the translator stops reading and the two professionals exchange their views. Communication thus takes place during the revision itself. In addition, the justification of changes may have a more prominent role than in other revision methods, because revisers have to explain to their colleague why they want to modify the translation. In the department studied, oral revision is highly appreciated: the technique is approved of by the six professionals met in this context. The greatest advantage put forward in the interviews is that it allows the revision process to go relatively quickly, while also providing the opportunity to discuss a point when necessary.

In all other departments of the study, revision is carried out the traditional way (i.e., in writing). In the second department of the Swiss Confederation that was studied, communication is extensive both before and after revision. Before revision, the translator may write comments in the margins of the text, highlight passages where there are doubts, or provide information to the reviser — orally or in writing — when transmitting the text to them. After revision, the translator and the reviser usually have a short discussion to finalise the text. In the international organisation studied, translators are expected to write numerous comments in the margins. They are required to use comments to indicate the references they have consulted (documents or terminological database), highlight any previously translated texts that have been reproduced verbatim or paraphrased, and detail aspects that have been discussed with an experienced colleague. Comments may also be used to justify a particular translation, explain a choice that is not intelligible as such, or express doubts. After revision, revisers fill out an evaluation sheet and may insert revision comments in the file or provide oral feedback to the translator. In the case of the in-house department of the financial company, communication takes place mainly through comments, at both the translation and revision stages. However, if the translator has questions or does not agree with the changes made in revision, they will talk to the reviser.

The above examples come from translation teams in the institutional sector (three departments) or the private sector (one department). The study also deals with professional contexts in which revision does not take place between team members, as the dataset includes two freelancers and two translation agencies which do not translate or revise at all (Agency 1) or only exceptionally (Agency 2): they only do project management and entrust the translation and revision to freelancers or another agency. In Agency 1, translators and revisers know who is in charge of the other task and can communicate directly. In Agency 2, translators can write comments for revisers. The two freelancers who were interviewed also mentioned that the translator generally has the opportunity to comment on some aspects of the translation. Results relating to this specific situation are limited and further investigation would be required to describe the whole language industry

sector with any degree of certainty. That being said, in the contexts studied with freelance translator–revisers, there is also some translator–reviser communication, although to a lesser extent than within translation teams. There is of course far less communication than during the oral revision process or if a discussion takes place after revision. Nevertheless, comments offer an opportunity to pass on important information. In the next section, I leave the question of communication aside and look at the emotional and conflictual dimensions of revision.

4.2 Being revised: A highly annoying and potentially conflictual activity

During the interviews, the participants associated being revised with two major perceptions, one positive and one negative: it provides a feeling of security, but it is also annoying. This section addresses the feeling of annoyance that may stem from revision, one of the most significant results of the study, starting with its implications for individuals and continuing with its impact on relationships.

The feeling of annoyance that revision can trigger, ranging from mild to strong, was often mentioned during the interviews and took different forms. Some participants expressed their personal feelings, others spoke of the experience of colleagues, while still others commented on revision in general. Four participants said that being revised felt very annoying, while three others described it as unpleasant or even unsettling. Four other translators reported being upset by stylistic changes. If we move away from the feelings voiced by participants and look at opinions expressed in interviews, four interviewees said that revision is simply annoying *per se*, to varying degrees. Finally, eleven other participants mentioned either that revision could be (very) unpleasant or possibly offensive under certain circumstances, or that it could cause tension or conflict in a team. Even if these opinions were very prevalent, the participants were not unanimous about the annoyance of revision. Two participants — the one with the least translation experience (1.5 years) and one of the department heads with the most experience — explicitly said that they did not mind being revised. It is worth noting that the feeling of annoyance resulting from revision was rarely raised directly in interviews. Therefore, not every interviewee expressed their view on the subject.

The first example illustrates a situation where a mild feeling of annoyance resulted from being revised. Example (1) comes from an interview with a professional with eight years of experience working in the second case in the Swiss Confederation, a department where revision is well accepted globally compared with the other cases studied.

(1) Sometimes it may also have something to do with ego. There are passages where you think you did quite well and then you realise that the reviser did not think it was a good idea at all, well, it's not… it's quite unpleasant.[5]

This comment shows that the translator's ego might be at stake when revision takes place, as they submit their work to the appraisal of their colleague. Here, receiving corrections is described as something unpleasant, yet tolerable. During the interviews, some participants also shifted the focus to the revised text (rather than revision in general). They stressed that on-screen revision has a stronger effect than revision on paper, notably because changes are more visible: they generally appear in red and some edits imply a greater degree of change on screen than on paper, such as switching around two words (i.e., on screen, a word is crossed out and another added, while on paper an arrow suffices to highlight the change). Example (2) comes from a department head at the Swiss Confederation who has considerable experience. She used strong language to describe the experience of receiving a revised text.

(2) It's never nice to receive a text with track changes. […] Nobody likes it. I mean, red-coloured text is always an attack.[6]

Compared to Example (1), this is a broader point of view, since the participant speaks about revision in general and not about her own feelings, and the opinion is more pronounced: being revised is no longer just unpleasant, it is considered an attack. In this quote, revision is described as an intrinsically violent act. It is worth noting that the participant refers to a situation where the revised text is sent without oral explanation; in her opinion, the situation is different when the text can be discussed.

The interviews conducted highlight that being revised can induce several emotions, including anger, aggrievement, or discouragement, which are illustrated below. In the interviews, anger was mentioned in a general manner at times and more specifically at others when talking about stylistic corrections, which can cause particular irritation. Aggrievement stems from the fact that changes made in a text feel like a negative assessment of one's work, which can result in a little "wounded pride," in the words of one participant (*(des gens qui) se sentent touchés […] dans leur amour-propre*). The dataset provides hints that the aggrievement

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5. Original French: "*Parfois c'est peut-être aussi un peu quelque chose lié à l'ego. Il y a des passages, on trouve qu'on a fait pas mal et puis on se rend compte que le réviseur, il a trouvé que ça n'était pas une idée bonne du tout, ben ce n'est pas… c'est un peu désagréable.*" All interview excerpts in English are my own translation.

6. Original French: "*Ça n'est jamais agréable de recevoir un texte en mode correction. […] Personne n'aime ça. Je veux dire, le texte rouge, c'est toujours une agression.*"

resulting from revision may make it harder to accept corrections and suggestions. A translator working in the international organisation said that their disapproval of a revised text could be explained as much by the inadequacy of the changes as by aggrievement. A head of department at the Swiss Confederation said that some colleagues barely admit to their mistakes and described their behaviour as "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*).

As for discouragement, it is illustrated by Example (3), which is drawn from an interview with a translator with eight years of translation experience working in a department where revisions are extensive.

(3) Generally speaking, […] you feel quite discouraged when you see … when you think you've really done a good job, because when you hand in a job [for revision], you're meant to have done it well, and, in the end, you see that 'oh right, ok, he's changed everything'.[7]

A colleague of this participant also said that he feels some discouragement when faced with extensive revisions and added that this feeling can influence future translations. In his opinion, knowing that a text is going to be heavily reworked takes away the desire to do one's best. Discouragement seems to be particularly present during the first years of practice, according to the interviews conducted. This could be explained by two reasons. First, the intensity of the discouragement could be due to a greater number of changes in the draft translations of beginners, which might be of poorer quality than texts produced by more experienced translators. Second, discouragement may arise because the emotions provoked by the revision process are new. In this respect, several accounts show that the annoyance felt when being revised is exacerbated in the first years of practice. Among them are the two translators referred to above. These participants, who are still young but have some translation experience (8 and 6 years), explained how it feels to be revised during the first years of professional practice. The first said: "In the beginning, the first couple of years, when you see all the red marks, you just feel like crying."[8] The second said that young people find it hard to put the importance of revision into perspective and take it very much to heart. He added that translators have to get used to receiving criticism if they want to stay in the profession. This echoes Mossop's (2020, 202) comment that "new translators must get over [the inability to accept correction] if they are to succeed."

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7. Original French: "*De manière générale, […] on ressent quand même pas mal de découragement quand on voit… quand on croyait qu'on avait vraiment bien fait un travail, parce que quand on rend un travail [pour révision], c'est qu'on est censé l'avoir bien fait, et que, finalement, on voit que 'ah ouais, d'accord, il a tout changé'*."

8. Original French: "*Au début, les deux premières années, quand on voit tout rouge, on a juste envie de pleurer*."

The study provides indications that the process of getting used to being revised is common, but not systematic. On the one hand, none of the participants working in the team of translators said that they could not stand being revised, nor did they mention a colleague who could not handle it. On the other, examples of translators who do not tolerate being revised were raised during the meetings (two freelancers and one employee of another department), and one freelancer who took part in the study could be described as being very sensitive to revision. This translator, who is periodically revised but not on a daily basis, said several times during the interview that she does not like being revised. She also mentioned revision experiences that she found very hurtful, adding that she had to force herself to look at revised texts, because it was so unpleasant for her.

On an interpersonal level, revision can provoke conflict, which can be triggered by the feelings of aggrievement or anger mentioned above. In three of the four cases and six of the seven subsequent contexts, the participants referred to conflicts. Interviewees mentioned conflicts, even in contexts where revision was positively perceived overall, as in the second case in the Swiss Confederation. In this department, the head recounted a conflict he had had with a temporary translator, and two team members reported having conflicts in a former position.

Even if conflicts were widespread among the contexts studied, they mainly seem to be occasional or related to a specific person (although they seem to be habitual in one of the four cases examined in depth). One explanation may be the good work atmosphere in the majority of the contexts analysed, a point often raised by the participants during the interviews. In Section 4.3 I will describe one way of alleviating feelings of aggrievement and diminishing the risk of conflict: providing explanations for the changes made.

4.3 The critical influence of post-revision communication

This section describes how explanations provided for the changes made can impact the perception of being revised, as expressed in the interviews. Based on the findings, post-revision communication may take different forms (e.g., comments, discussions, emails) and fulfil different functions (e.g., providing information or justification, asking a question, giving praise, emphasising an issue, or assessing the quality of the translation). In this section, I analyse one type of communication: the explanation of changes made, in comments or orally, because it is the most common in the dataset and it is linked to how being revised is perceived.

The analysis of the data shows that providing explanations for the changes made can have two effects: it can help the translator improve and it can be a mark of respect. To state the obvious, an explanation aims at making the rationale behind a change clear. As such, it takes revision out of the realm of arbitrariness. In

this respect, it is worth noting that revision not only aims at ensuring the quality of the text but also has a didactic dimension, helping revisees improve their skills (Prioux and Rochard 2007; Horguelin and Pharand 2009; Mossop 2020). Nevertheless, understanding what was wrong in the draft translation is a precondition for learning. According to the interviews, this is only partly possible by examining the changes made, mostly depends on the kinds of problems that were solved, and sometimes an explanation is necessary. As a consequence, providing explanations helps translators develop their skills. As one of the participants said, "if you simply make revisions without explaining what you've done," the translator will simply take note of it then "forget it straight away because it won't sink in."[9]

Explanations not only help translators develop their skills, but also fulfil a communicative function and can have a social effect. During the interviews, one of the participants pointed out that he tries to provide an explanation for changes that are not obvious, to show the translator that he takes his task seriously and avoid giving the impression that he is simply telling the translator what to do. In his view, explaining the changes he implemented in the draft translation is a mark of respect to the translator.

Due to the two effects described, explaining the changes implemented in the draft translation can greatly influence how the revised text is perceived by the translator. Depending on the situation, explanations can either minimise or increase the feeling of annoyance. These two situations are analysed below.

The first situation, which was the one most frequently reported in the interviews, arises when the tone is appropriate. Two participants in the study even argued that the effect produced by a revised translation does not depend on the number or nature of the changes made, but on how the situation is presented. The first participant works at the Swiss Confederation. Example (4) is taken from a section of the interview where she commented on how she perceives being revised.

(4) I think it often depends on how it's presented. As it happens, I have a colleague who tends to intervene quite a lot and then she says: "I'm sorry, it's horrible when you just look at the document like that" […] She says: "I'm sorry, it's terrible!" But in actual fact, the way she presents it is never degrading, you never feel like you're a complete moron or that you're terrible at what you do.[10]

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9. Original French: "*Si vous faites simplement des révisions sans expliquer ce que vous avez fait […] le traducteur va l'oublier aussi sec parce que ce n'est pas quelque chose qui aura été imprimé.*"

10. Original French: "*Je pense que ça dépend souvent de la forme dans laquelle c'est présenté. Parce que, justement, j'ai une collègue qui a tendance à intervenir pas mal et puis elle dit : 'Je suis désolée, c'est horrible quand on regarde juste la feuille comme ça.' […] Elle dit : 'Je suis désolée, c'est horrible !' Mais en fait, comme elle présente la chose, ce n'est jamais dégradant, en fait, on n'a jamais l'impression d'être un abruti fini ou d'être nul dans ce qu'on fait.*"

The second participant works for the international organisation in the third case. He referred to a colleague who changes texts dramatically but takes a lot of time to explain her work. Combined with the fact that this reviser is "incredibly kind" (*elle est d'une gentillesse extrême*), he felt that "you can't take it badly" (*on ne peut pas mal le prendre*). He also added that he learns a lot from these discussions.

The second situation (i.e., the reinforcement of bad feelings) is less prevalent in the dataset and happens when explanations are clumsy or even rude. During the interviews, participants referred to instances where explanations increased their feeling of irritation. For example, they complained about the use of exclamation marks and irony in comments (irony is also reported as being deplored by translators in Solum [2017, 14]). Overall, the findings suggest that explaining changes can reduce or even eliminate the perceived violence of revision when it is done well, but may reinforce negative feelings when it is presented inappropriately.

5. Discussion

This section considers the findings regarding the two aspects of the translator–reviser relationship — feelings and communication.

The feeling of annoyance triggered by revision described in Section 4 seems especially strong, as if being revised were a violent act *per se*, or 'an attack' in the words of the participant quoted in Example (2). The factors that make revision such a challenging experience are difficult to identify. An initial explanation could be that being revised means having one's work assessed by another professional; that is, by someone whose opinion cannot be ignored for lack of competence, as might be the case with a client or someone who does not know much about translation (Gile 2005, 53). Another explanation may lie in the translator's investment in their work and their attachment to their translation, which can be considered to be their "baby" (Prioux and Rochard 2007, 38). In addition, the present study suggests that negative feelings seem particularly acute at the start of a career, before becoming less pronounced. As such, it reveals a process of normalisation of the perception of being revised during the first years of working life, which prevails in the majority of cases analysed in the study. However, the findings also point to another pattern: that of translators who remain sensitive about revision throughout their careers.

As for communication, the study highlights that communication within a team of translators may take many forms and can be extensive, at least according to the professionals interviewed in this study. Even when revision takes place between freelancers, there still seems to be some kind of communication, as evi-

dent in the few contexts studied (two agencies and two freelancers). The fact that translators and revisers working on their own have the opportunity to and often do communicate is in line with previous studies (Scocchera 2015a; Schnierer 2019). While communication can be promoted for its own sake, as in the literature written by practitioners (Oueillet Simard 1984; Graham 1989; Rochard 2004, 2009; Ko 2011), the results of the present study seem to indicate that communication itself is not enough: the communication has to be respectful. Poor communication can even make things worse. The determining factor is therefore not the presence versus the absence of communication, but the quality of the communication.

Finally, the study confirms the potential of revision to create conflict, which is also attested in the literature (Künzli 2006a, 2006b, 2007b; Hansen 2008; Horguelin and Pharand 2009; Solum 2017). Moreover, it suggests possible paths to avoid conflict (e.g., by providing explanations for the changes made and by communicating politely). It reiterates the necessity of showing the human qualities described in one handbook, namely diplomacy, tact, empathy, patience, and calm (Horguelin and Pharand 2009). Particular attention must be paid to politeness in written communication, where a direct tone can be interpreted as more impolite than desired (Korhonen and Hirvonen 2021, 269–270).

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the translator–reviser relationship drawing on an interview study that I conducted in different areas of specialised translation in Switzerland. Firstly, the results show that in the four cases that were investigated in detail, revision gives rise to numerous exchanges. Secondly, the article brings the perception of being revised into focus. It appears that revision results in a feeling of annoyance for translators (alongside a sense of security, which was not analysed here), especially in the first years of practice. Possible feelings produced by revision are aggrievement, anger, and discouragement. The communication that takes place after revision can have a great impact on how revision is perceived, especially the explanations given to justify the changes. When appropriate (the majority of situations reported in the interviews), the explanations reduce or even remove the feeling of irritation experienced by the translator, but when they are clumsy or disrespectful, they may reinforce such feelings.

The limitations of this study and avenues for further research are closely linked, and relate to the situatedness and indirectness of the study. As with all qualitative research, this study is situated in a specific context and is limited in scope. All settings are located in Switzerland, even if many of the participants are

not Swiss and come from neighbouring countries that share the same languages (i.e., France, Germany, Austria, Italy). It would be interesting to determine to what extent the results outlined above are context-dependent or apply to other cultural and geographical contexts. The second limitation results from the method chosen (i.e., interviews), which is indirect and socially constructed. I chose to trust the participants and consider what was said during the interviews as true for them (except when there were clear contradictions or implausibilities), following Rubin and Rubin (2012). This might have limited my interpretation, and other interpretative approaches are possible. The indirect nature of interview data is potentially particularly problematic regarding practices, but less so for perceptions, which cannot be observed directly. On the contrary, perceptions must be analysed indirectly, whether in discourse (e.g., in written documents or interviews) or in practice (Abric 2011b, 277–279). A way of complementing this research and deepening our understanding of the revision phenomenon would be to directly study the communication between translators and revisers by analysing comments in texts or doing fieldwork in translation teams to observe their interactions. A further avenue of research would be to conduct a quantitative study to measure the frequency and intensity of the feelings produced by revision or to identify factors that help promote positive perceptions of revision and the absence (and emergence) of conflicts.

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