Emotional Intelligence and Professional Translation

Conference or Workshop Item

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The value of Emotional Intelligence for the translation and interpreting professions

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Presentation Outline

I. Translation and Emotional Intelligence: what and why?

II. EI in practice (examples)

III. Findings from a study of translators’ self-perceived emotional intelligence

IV. Implications for professional development
What is Emotional Intelligence?

• A set of competencies demonstrating the ability to recognize, understand and manage behaviours, moods, and impulses.

• The ability to perceive emotions accurately, to use emotions to enhance thinking, to understand and label emotions, and regulate emotions in the self and others.
What is Emotional Intelligence?

• Involves:

- emotional empathy;
- attention to one’s emotions;
- accurate recognition of others’ moods/emotions;
- responding with appropriate emotions and behaviours;
- possession of good social/communication skills.
Translation and EI: Why?

Four key reasons:

• public interest
• integral part of translation competence models
• issue for professional translators
• limited research in TS, but growing area
This column will change your life: Are some emotions untranslatable?

Not being able to find the right word for our feelings could be bad news for our emotional lives

Oliver Burkeman
Follow @oliverburkeman Follow @GuardianUS
The Guardian, Saturday 3 October 2009

The Danish word "hygge" (pronounced, very approximately, "hooga") means something like "cosiness", but with undertones of "camaraderie" and "wellbeing". Denmark's tourist industry likes to suggest that it's untranslatable and unexportable: the only way to feel it is to hop on a plane to Copenhagen.
This column will change your life: unspeakable emotions

'Our daily lives might be full of experiences we never talk about, simply because we lack the words'

Oliver Burkeman
Follow @oliverburkeman  Follow @GuardianUS
The Guardian, Saturday 8 June 2013
Jump to comments (14)

'The problem is unnamed feelings is a reminder of how baffled psychologists remain about what an emotion actually is.' Illustration: Ben Jones for the Guardian
Translation and EI: Why?

• included in translator competence models
    • sensitive to the needs of translators and clients, interpersonal skills and how to build and maintain good communication skills
  – EMT framework of reference 2009 (European Commission DG for Translation)
    • Interpersonal dimension, inc. managing stress, adapting to new situations, ability to self-evaluate, and knowing how to interact with different communities.
Translation and EI: Why?

• included in job adverts
  – Senior Translators at United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): EI, positive attitude
  – Language specialists at MI6: strong EI
  – Translator at Isle of Anglesey County Council: dealing with distressing and highly charged emotive topics
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT (WRITER/EDITOR)
Location: New York, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Application Deadline: 13-Jun-13

Competencies: [...]

• Strong team player with belief in UNDP’s mission
• Ability to work under pressure
• Creative and confident pitching communication ideas
• Excellent attention to detail
• Excellent communicator, writer and editor
• Emotional intelligence
Translation and EI: Why?

• Issue for practicing translators
  – Discussed in writings, at conferences, in the classroom...

Have you ever read a book that made you feel deeply uncomfortable on some level? Where you didn’t want to ‘buy into it’?

Or one that made you feel elated, maybe changed your life in some way?
En fait, j’aurais tout aussi bien pu ne pas écrire. Après tout, ce n’est pas une obligation. Depuis la guerre, je suis resté un homme discret ; grâce à Dieu, je n’ai jamais eu besoin, comme certains de mes anciens collègues, d’écrire mes Mémoires à fin de justification, car je n’ai rien à justifier, ni dans un but lucratif, car je gagne assez bien ma vie comme ça. Je ne regrette rien ; j’ai fait mon travail, voilà tout ; quant à mes histoires de famille, que je racontées peut-être aussi, elles ne concernent que moi, et pour le reste, vers la fin, j’ai sans doute forcé la limite, mais là je n’étais plus tout à fait moi-même, je vacillais, le monde entier basculait, je ne fus pas le seul à perdre la tête, reconnaissiez-le. Malgré mes travers, et ils ont été nombreux, je suis resté de ceux qui pensent que les seules choses indispensables à la vie humaine sont l’air, le manger, le boire et l’excrétion, et la recherche de la vérité. Le reste est facultatif.
Dear Mr Silverman,

Re: Complaint for a Litter Abatement Order

I have received a copy of your email in which you make a complaint against Wycombe & Beaconsfield Magistrates’ Court.

Firstly, may I thank you for providing this feedback to my staff.

I am sorry that you were not kept informed of the process for a Litter Abatement Order.

I will be raising your complaint at meetings I will be attending and will be analysing our systems with a view to ensuring that these complaints are dealt with more efficiently.

Thank you for alerting me to your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Sue Walton
Deputy Justices’ Clerk

Anytown Practice

Mrs A.N. Individual
12 Somewhere Avenue
Someplace
AB1 2CD

Dear Mrs Individual,


Congratulations!

We are proud of you, of your accomplishments, and of the contributions that your years of service represent. To acknowledge your personal milestone, we are honored to present you with this service award selection.

Please accept your award as our sincere appreciation for your continued loyalty and dedication to Mortenson’s purpose and mission.

Many thanks - you are a valued member of our team!

Tom Gunkele
Chief Executive Officer

DIY Recipe
Simple Pear Soap

Ingredients
2 lbs. Cocoa Butter MP Soap Base, cubed
3 Tablespoons Coconut Oil
Matte Brown Mica Pigment Powder
Perfect Autumn Pear Fragrance Oil

Directions
Melt cubed pieces and coconut oil in a microwave safe bowl using short intervals, and stirring in between. Once melted stir in the mica powder, add in until it’s the color you prefer. Next add in the Pear Oil to how strong you want the scent. Put your mixture in a mold, and allow for it to cool and harden.
EI in practice

• Bassnett (2006): translators engage with texts first as readers, and then as rewriters

• Kaplan (2013): translators have a desire to “get into the skin of a book”
  ➢ translators undertake closer readings of STs than other readers & engage on a deeper level

• Shields and Clarke (2011): translators are compelled to “transmit emotional elements even when these are questionable”
“... a sense of physical invasion by the original text... Rebellion must be chocked down for the disturbing work to proceed” (Anderson 2005, 177)

“This summer, punctuation has been penetration into my palms, a sliding back of skin, the separation of its subcutaneous layers” (Maier 2006, 144).

“There may be a literature of how coroners deal with [an] autopsy, but I found nowhere to turn except to a fellow translator who could understand how a text could reach so far into me” (Jones, ATA Conf 2009)
EI in practice

• Myth of neutrality and objectivity?
• Showing emotion = showing weakness = taboo?

➢ There is a lack of discussion in our training about how we are to deal with how texts/situations make us react

➢ Self-evaluating and managing one's own behaviours, moods, impulses is important
EI in practice

What works well

- Making introductions
- Positive body language
- Talking in short bursts
- Asking for clarification if necessary
- Allowing each other to speak
- A calm approach
- Caseworker and interpreter working together
- Drawing conclusions and finishing well

Explaining fully
Being welcoming
Being clear
Listening
Empathy

What doesn’t work

- Going straight into an interview
- Negative body language
- Creating confusion
- Pretending to understand
- Interrupting/cutting off
- Emotional response
- Arguing in front of client
- Ending interview without drawing it to a conclusion

Not being clear
Appearing not to care
Being long-winded
Ignoring
Over-involvement
Ignoring each other,
Some statistics....

- EI affects 58% of performance in all types of jobs
- 90% of high performers are also high in EI
- Only 20% of low performers are high in EI
- Important correlation between EI and earning potential

Bradberry, T. & J. Greaves (2009)
Study

• Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Petrides 2009), part of UCL academic research programme.
• 155 professional translators, from professional associations

**Research question:** to what extent are differences in emotional intelligence linked to various aspects of professional translators’ profiles and working lives?
Study

Some statements from the EI test (agree on a scale)

• Understanding the needs and desires of others is not a problem for me
• I’m able to “read” most people's feelings like an open book
• I’m usually able to influence the way other people feel
• I normally find it difficult to calm angry people down
• I’m normally able to “get into someone’s shoes” and experience their emotions
• I often find it difficult to see things from another person’s viewpoint
• I find it difficult not to feel sad when someone tells me about something bad that happened to them
• Generally, I must be under pressure to really work hard
• I like putting effort even into things that are not really important
• I tend to change my mind frequently
• I would describe myself as a good negotiator
• Sometimes, it feels like I’m producing a lot of good work effortlessly
Study: Some Results

EI is positively correlated with:

- Job satisfaction
- Professional translating experience (i.e. years spent translating)
- Literary translation experience
- Age
- Education levels
Study

Job satisfaction:
- emotion skills = work engagement, entrepreneurial behaviour, creativity, decision-making, academic achievement & leadership skills
- emotion skills ≠ job stress and burnout
  - impact on recruitment & training

Age & experience:
- older and more experienced = habituation = easier to recognise and control emotional states (client expectations and target reader requirements)
  - Impact on job engagement & general well-being
Literary translation:

- Higher EI = better performance in creative literary activity & in academic subjects that require consideration of affect-related issues

- translating literary fiction = emotional engagement, emotion sharing and channelling, increased personal insight, openness to challenging work, positive frame of mind...

- Impact on design of translator training courses
Some implications for professional development

• Practice literary translation
• Reflect on emotional triggers
• Partake in group discussions, role plays, vignettes, journal writing, self-observations
• Be self-aware and proactive: ask for extra time, refuse a job, speak about it with a mentor, assess the emotional potential of the text...
Final Thoughts

Rose (2013): “I’ve made the work mine [...] I’m there all the time, but you won’t notice me.”

Cole (2013): “Each stage of the process involves discomfort and pleasures of a kind.”

Feltrin-Morris (2012): “The translator [is] a skilful agent who pulls the emotional chords of the readers”

- Impartial, neutral, objective translators?
Thank you for your attention.
Related references

