Benjamins Translation Library

171

CHAPTER 11

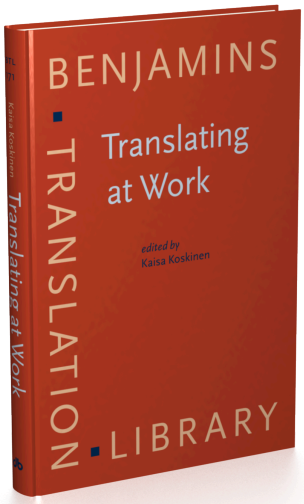
Beliefs and practices in paraprofessional translators' work

Towards a conceptual framework

Sylwia Ciuk
Martyna Śliwa
Kaisa Koskinen

https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.171.11ciu

Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.



Pages 213–234 of
Translating at Work: Paraprofessional translation in organizations
Edited by Kaisa Koskinen
[Benjamins Translation Library, 171] 2026. vi, 361 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights

John Benjamins Publishing Company

CHAPTER 11

Beliefs and practices in paraprofessional translators' work

Towards a conceptual framework

Sylwia Ciuk, Martyna Śliwa & Kaisa Koskinen

This chapter makes an empirically grounded contribution to the evolving understanding of paraprofessional translation work. First, drawing on forty-four semi-structured interviews with a broad range of employees and managers working in five organizations in different sectors, we identify six distinctive approaches to paraprofessional translation: each underpinned by a different set of beliefs and practices. We then illustrate how they are influenced not only by management policies but also by three major factors: (a) the characteristics of the paraprofessional translator, namely their identity, organizational role, seniority and language skills, (b) organizational context, and (c) the translation type — small-t and big-T translation — a novel analytical distinction which we propose for the paraprofessional context.

Keywords: paraprofessional translators, small-t and big-T translation, translation practices, translation beliefs, interviews, subsidiaries of multinationals

Introduction

Recently, various modes of translation work beyond professional contexts — most notably in non-professional, volunteer settings — have generated increased interest in translation studies (i.a. Antonini et al., 2017; Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva, 2012). However, there exists a third type of translation work, which has been referred to as *para*professional translation (Koskela, Koskinen and Pilke, 2017; Pym, 2011; Tyulenev, 2014). This is translation undertaken in work settings by non-language professionals (i.a. managers, administrators, engineers, IT specialists) as part of their professional work. The underpinning element of employment, the embeddedness of translation in other organizational activities, and the blending of translation norms with other professional codes make paraprofessional translation distinctive from both professional translation and translating in

https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.171.11ciu
Available under the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.© 2026 John Benjamins Publishing Company

volunteer or activist settings. This conceptual granulation allows us to investigate and theorize translation with increased contextual precision.

This underexplored 'middle ground' between professional and non-professional interlingual translation has so far been largely considered in theoretical papers, or based on single case studies. We contribute to this emerging body of literature by drawing on an exploratory, interview-based study conducted in five organizations operating across four sectors. We have adopted an open-ended exploratory approach focused on both written and spoken paraprofessional translation. We ask: (1) How do paraprofessional translators approach translation work in subsidiaries of multinational enterprises? and (2) What factors influence these approaches? We address these questions from the perspective of *narrated practices*, recounted by those engaged in paraprofessional translation, in interview data.

Our chapter makes several contributions to the literature. First, based on our analysis of paraprofessional translators' beliefs and practices associated with paraprofessional translation, we identify six distinctive ways of approaching this type of translation. Second, we contextualize these varied approaches and show how they are influenced not only by management policies but also by three major factors: (a) the characteristics of a paraprofessional translator, namely their identity, role, seniority and language skills, (b) organizational context and (c) the translation type — small-t and big-T translation — a novel analytical distinction which we propose for the paraprofessional context.

Below, through a focused overview of the relevant literature in both translation studies and language-sensitive international business, we discuss different conceptualizations of paraprofessional translation. We then explain our methodology and present the findings. We conclude by outlining our theoretical contribution and future research directions.

Paraprofessional translation as a middle ground between professional and non-professional translation

Translation studies has traditionally given primacy to professional translation and professional translators and interpreters as its object of study (Dam and Koskinen, 2016). Recently, however, scholars have begun to explore non-professional contexts and activities such as activist translation, fan-subtitling and crowdsourcing (i.a. Antonini et al., 2017). This has led to a recognition that it is also beneficial to differentiate these voluntary-based activities from translation tasks performed in a professional capacity and within employment but not by professional translators or interpreters. This middle ground has been labelled paraprofessional translation. Anthony Pym (2011) describes paraprofessional translators/ interpreters as:

> … people who engage in translation activities without having specialized training or for whom translation is not the main source of income… Many such translators have expert skills in fields associated with particular translation projects.
> (p. 87)

This definition is not explicitly linked to workplaces, but the expert skills often relate to a professional role. Sergey Tyulenev's definition, by contrast, is more restrictive and therefore more useful for our purposes. He refers to "paratranslators" whom he defines as "people whose jobs are not directly translation- or interpreting-related who do translate or interpret" (Tyulenev 2014, p. 75). Tyulenev mentions journalists as a prime example, and recent research into "journalation" (the convergence of translator and journalist roles) and international news production has generated valuable insights into this context (i.a. Davier and Conway, 2019). Another group mentioned by Tyulenev (2014, p. 76) are "those who work in multilingual environments" and who "interpret/translate because otherwise they cannot fulfil their main professional duties". This last description captures the everyday reality at many contemporary workplaces.

Empirical studies have revealed many creative strategies of approaching such translation. Data from bilingual meetings (Koskela et al., 2017), for example, indicate that people can be communicatively resourceful when they are not expected to translate everything verbatim. Similarly, Muñoz Gómez (2020), focusing on paraprofessional translation in an IT company, discusses a range of implicit translation practices; the flexible use of textual strategies such as gisting, summarizing and rephrasing; and using translation to manage social relations. While these studies provide valuable insights into translation strategies, they do not explicitly focus on how these translation practices are intertwined with translation beliefs, and with the context of translation.

Paraprofessional translation, and in particular the politics of translation (Wilmot and Tietze, 2023), has also started to generate interest in IB and MOS where the kinds of actors we choose to label paraprofessional translators are often referred to as boundary-spanners (i.a. Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), intermediaries (i.a. Zølner, 2019) or knowledge brokers (i.a. Tietze, Tansley and Helienek, 2017). Evidence shows that translations are undertaken by both entry level (Blazejewski, 2006) and more senior staff (Ciuk, James and Śliwa, 2019), including general managers (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015; Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2012). Paraprofessional translations span many organizational functions which go beyond communication (Michalski and Śliwa, 2021; Sanden, 2020; Zølner, 2019), marketing (Ristolainen, Outila, and Piekkari, 2023) and customer-facing roles (Piekkari et al., 2013), and are also undertaken by human resource professionals

(Zølner, 2019), engineers (Sanden and Lønsmann, 2018), technicians and production staff (Langinier and Ehrhart, 2020).

Studies in IB tend to address the translation of key documents, such as a company value statements (Blazejewski, 2006; Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk et al., 2019; Zølner, 2019) and strategy documentation (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015). They highlight local actors' agency when editing and adjusting the target text culturally and politically. While these studies have generated important insights, they very rarely discuss paraprofessional translators' approaches to the seemingly more mundane everyday translation. We see this as a significant oversight as paraprofessional translation is part of bottom-up responses to linguistic diversity (Sanden and Lønsmann, 2018) which are fundamental to organization's functioning (Piekkari et al., 2013).

Methodology

The empirical material comes from a larger interview-based research project focused on corporate language policies and interlingual communication in subsidiaries of multinational organizations. In this paper, we draw on forty-four semi-structured interviews in five Polish subsidiaries operating in four different sectors (see Table 1). The chosen research design allows us to explore a wide range of translation practices and to consider them in different contexts. Conducting multiple interviews in each organization helps paint a richer picture of the prevailing approaches to paraprofessional translation. Sampling organizations from different sectors offers the additional benefit of approaching each organization as a distinctive "linguistic ecology" (Spolsky 2007, p. 2), although, because of space considerations, we only point to key contextual factors that emerged in our analysis.

We selected a combination of companies from the same and different sectors to explore the role of context in participants' language practices. We also used theoretical and maximum variation sampling when recruiting participants.

We selected participants from a cross-section of organizational functions (e.g. HR, finance, IT, client-facing roles, marketing, analytics), hierarchical levels (from general manager to entry positions), management responsibility (extensive to none) and length of service (from over ten years to a few months) and foreign language proficiency (from basic to high). Our sample was also balanced in relation to gender. Most of our participants were under forty; many, specifically in the media and hospitality industries, were in their twenties and thirties, which reflected the companies' staff profiles. Interviews lasted between forty minutes and over two hours, with the majority lasting over an hour. Interviews were carried out in Polish and were fully transcribed.

Table 1. Sample composition

	Headquarters	Sector	Completed interviews
1	USA	Media	15
2	USA	Media	6
3	France	Market research	8
4	USA	Healthcare	8
5	USA	Hospitality	7
Total			**44**

Interviews addressed participants' language profile, foreign language use at work and organizational language practices and policies. We also asked participants about any translation work they undertake as part of their role and their views on it. In addition, we probed for their understanding and perceptions of their company's translation policy. We use the term "translation" as an umbrella term to cover both oral and written modes, as well as multimodal or intermodal practices as in paraprofessional contexts they are interwoven to such an extent "that the distinction between these two aspects becomes blurred" (Piekkari et al. 2013, p. 772).

The first stage of analysis was accomplished in Polish using the Nvivo (12) software. Data were open coded and grouped thematically into clusters of codes summarizing references to formal language policies, statements about who can, should and does translation work and evaluative statements about translation. Subsequently, one of the authors translated the quotes into English to enable reflexive whole team discussions. The translation was reviewed by the first author of the paper who has formal translation qualifications. At this stage, the three authors turned to a more interpretative mode of analysis. We began to differentiate between various emergent forms of translation work leading to six proposed approaches to paraprofessional translation. The final step of analysis entailed recontextualizing the data in order to make sense of the differences in approaches to paraprofessional translation. This step revealed that the beliefs and practices varied depending on: (a) the organizational context, (b) professional identities, role and seniority of paraprofessional translators and their foreign language skills and finally (c) the type of paraprofessional translation which, for analytical purposes, we differentiate as small-t and big-T translation. While we provide a more detailed overview of the distinction between these two translation types in the discussion section, we offer a short working definition here to set the scene for our findings. Small-t translation emerged as different forms of small ad-hoc, highly pragmatic translation and interpretation activities that are not usually assessed for

their linguistic quality and often entail high degrees of editing autonomy which can result in important deviations from the source text. Big-T translation, by contrast, entails more formal translatorial tasks of larger texts, spoken or written, the accomplishment of which is associated with more limited translatorial freedom and where the concern is with the linguistic quality of the translation that is likely to be scrutinized.

Approaches to paraprofessional translation, and the concomitant beliefs, and practices

The majority of participants admitted to performing some form of translation work as part of their work, although, with some exceptions, it was not carried out on a regular basis. Below, we highlight six approaches to paraprofessional translation (comprising beliefs and practices) which emerged from our data and their influencing factors. We start by reviewing approaches to small-t translation before focusing on big-T translation (for a summary, see Table 2).

Table 2. Small-t and big-T translation

	Small-t translation	**Big-T translation**
Paraprofessional translation as	(1) care work (2) knowedge-brokering and management (3) information sourcing (4) play	(5) enactment of one's subject expertise (6) a distinctive linguistic task

Small-t translation

Paraprofessional translation as care work

Paraprofessional translation was rarely questioned and was rather believed to be a necessity when it was part of work aimed at helping and looking after customers. We identified this approach to paraprofessional translation among staff in customer facing roles, such as the reception desk, in the hospitality sector where strong industry and profession customer care norms applied to beliefs regarding paraprofessional translation and interpretation. As an experienced receptionist, acting as a supervisor, explains:

> 'We can't abandon[1] a guest who simply doesn't understand anything. There are guests from China who can't understand that the card activates the lift… Then there is Google Translate because, really, no one speaks Chinese. I show them [things on the phone] and ask if they understand… The guests also come to us with their telephone to show something in Google Translate. (Julia, Hospitality)

The "immediacy of the customer pressure", as noted also by Piekkari et al. (2013, p.779) in their study of translation behavior in a Nordic bank, the framing as 'guests' rather than 'customers', as well as the time-sensitive nature of the encounter appear to play an important role. Refusing to engage in paraprofessional interpretation and translation would be in conflict with the professional identities of hospitality industry workers and would violate professional norms and obligations in this sector. Here, mediation between languages, often by drawing on any linguistic resources available, individual and team, is considered integral to one's work, necessary to perform one's duties and thus part of one's professional competence.

When performed as care work, paraprofessional translation and, especially, interpretation, take the form of pragmatic, ad hoc mediation, accomplished by both individuals and teams. It mainly takes the form of paraprofessional interpretation but it also extends to translation of client messages and reviews. In our sample only staff with more advanced language skills were delegated to handle (written) translation. Paraprofessional translation as care work is concerned with the achievement of the communicative purpose, be it with the help of gisting, Google Translate or embodied and multimodal means, such as drawing, gestures, the usage of technology and team effort. The norms of customer care enable team members to call on each other, even when colleagues are off work. The availability to engage in unpaid 'care work' outside one's normal working hours might be part of the professional identities of staff in the hospitality industry: it demonstrates care towards both customers and colleagues. The conceptualization of translation as care work is reminiscent of a previous study of volunteer church interpreting conceptualized as service (Hokkanen, 2012) and is linked to the ethics of linguistic hospitality (Pokorn and Koskinen, 2020).

Paraprofessional translation as knowledge brokering and management

A common way of approaching written and sometimes also oral paraprofessional translation, in all of our settings was knowledge brokering. It was typically performed by staff in managerial roles who were the recipients of corporate docu-

1. The original phrase used was 'zostawić' which typically translates into leave.

ments, training materials or announcements sent by the headquarters or another division of the multinational. As part of their role, managers engaged in selective translation and gisting to convey, usually, to lower level staff, or their immediate team, the key points of the received texts. This type of mediation is seen as a pragmatic solution which can address information and knowledge needs as they arise, and its enactment is linked to assuming responsibility for staff and colleagues rather than customers.

The need for mediation arises because a lot of resources tend to be provided in the corporate language, regardless of the fact that staff in some departments (e.g. the salesforce, accounting or in low skills jobs) are not necessarily sufficiently fluent in the corporate language to engage with such resources. As a long-serving manager overseeing a large housekeeping department from the hospitality sector explains:

> With a [staff training] film, we obviously tell [our cleaning staff] what it's about, right? Perhaps not exactly interpreting each dialogue word for word, but more or less, what it was about, what the intention was. (Grażyna, Hospitality)

Here, again, the concern is not with the comprehensiveness or the form of translation, but its potential to serve as a means of knowledge and information sharing and, importantly, also highlighting its core message, as seen by the paraprofessional translator. This type of mediation is viewed as a pragmatic solution which can address information and knowledge needs as they arise. As indicated earlier, translation as knowledge brokering is not confined to managers:

> There are[2] also [Ukrainian] girls[3] = **who are bilingual**, who have been here for a long time, and they can understand Polish and they interpret [what I am saying] for the newcomers [into Ukrainian]. (Grażyna, Hospitality)

Similar findings have been reported by other studies (Koskela et al., 2017; Langinier and Ehrhardt, 2020; Tietze et al., 2017) suggesting that a wide range of staff might engage in paraprofessional translation as knowledge brokering. Translation as knowledge brokering is typically viewed as part of one's job — and tied to the professional identities of senior employees in multinational companies as those who are capable of and entrusted with knowledge brokering. Here, again, the concern is not with the comprehensiveness or the form of translation, but its potential to serve as a means of knowledge and information sharing.

---

2. The original phrase used is 'Mam' meaning 'I have'.

3. This is a direct translation. The word is used to denote cleaners who are mature women.

At times, paraprofessional translation as knowledge brokering becomes a platform for managing staff, setting priorities and giving direction. Managers and staff in senior leadership roles (such as managing directors in Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2012; Ciuk and James, 2015) who receive important correspondence, especially from the company headquarters, can engage in selective, highly agentic paraprofessional translation where the concern is predominantly with the performative role of the source and target texts. Even when staff are deemed to possess the required language skills to be able to comprehend the source text in its original form, paraprofessional translation offers an opportunity for transforming messages. Staff in senior leadership roles translate these texts selectively and strategically, typically adding further layers of interpretative work, providing additional instructions and key take away points that they wish to highlight. Acting as local intermediaries (Zølner, 2019) or boundary-spanners (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), they tend to leave out what they see as redundant parts of the communication and adjust the text to the target audience. One IT director with very high English language proficiency explains:

> I know that it'll be easier for me to convey the message in Polish [and] … to adapt the content, the language to the recipient… For key communication, involving all employees, I try to have[4] it in Polish. It'll simply be easier for these people to do what I ask them to do, i.e. to change something, do something independently.
>
> (Antek, Healthcare)

This approach to paraprofessional translation was also discussed by participants working in specialist roles from other sectors and in different organizational functions. The ability to take autonomous decisions regarding the content of the translated text was crucial to the professional identities of managers as agents and decision-makers. The entanglement of paraprofessional translation with management and leadership has been reported in earlier studies (e.g. Logemann and Piekkari, 2015; Ciuk et al., 2019). A vivid illustration of this phenomenon comes from Zølner (2019) with one of her participants making a distinction between literal translation and what they see as the 'real' translation of the 'spirit' of a core corporate text.

Engaging in paraprofessional translation as an intermediary enables managers to derive a sense of pride in their work and enact their professional identity. This pattern of association of paraprofessional translation as knowledge-brokering and/or management with professional identity was repeated in other professionals acting as language intermediaries in Zølner's (2019) study, such as Human Resource practitioners. This kind of agentic translation is atypical in com-

4. In original, the verb 'być' meaning 'be' was used.

mercial professional translation where translators do not often have their own agenda to drive, but has been widely studied in literary and activist translation.

Paraprofessional translation as information sourcing

In some contexts, for example the healthcare setting, we found a tendency among managers to prompt others to undertake their own translation; to 'force people to make an effort and read, find out… self-translate the incoming communication', as observed by a manager from the healthcare sector who himself for a long time was the beneficiary of company sponsored individual language training (Kacper). Translation was here seen by some as an inherent aspect of work in a multinational organization and thus something every employee should be able to undertake.

According to the implicit norm, everybody does and should undertake some translation for their own information sourcing purposes. This demonstrates belonging to the organization and ability to participate in HQ-subsidiary communication. These expectations are often expressed in companies that contribute to employees' language training (i.a. two media companies from our sample).

This approach, however, can pose challenges for staff who do not have adequate linguistic resources to undertake translation in particular in terms of synchronous interactions:

> It is not that we only employ people with advanced English language skills… Recently, two women from the HQ ran some workshops for us … It was clear that not everybody was able to cope. There was no option, like at a conference: here are the headphones or here is the consecutive interpretation (*tłumaczenie*).… I feel sorry for these people who don't understand. Nobody has ever dared to say that they don't understand. (Teresa, Media)

The act of hiding one's linguistic shortcomings in English indicates that being a person who is capable of sourcing information for oneself, without asking for help, through translation in work-related contexts, is part of the expected and desired identity of an employee of an MNC subsidiary. The lack of such skills is likely to be seen as undermining an employee's professional competence.

Paraprofessional translation as play

The final type of small-t paraprofessional translation that emerged from our study is linked to its perception as play. Small-scale paraprofessional translation activities are sometimes perceived as a welcome distraction from one's core tasks by

staff who have the required language skills to enjoy the task. As two young, newly hired entry level employees working in shared offices in the media sector explain:

> Sometimes we do [the translation] together to have a laugh. (Ilona, Media)

> …, there is healthy competition in that someone can come up with a nicer word, and there is a moment of de-stressing, 'taking off' some of the concentration [5] (*ściągnięcia z siebie tej koncentracji*) which is allocated to working.
>
> (Kamila, Media)

Translation is perceived here as a pleasant, often shared, activity that can give joy. Paraprofessional translation as play was most visible in the media sector, where employees are occasionally expected to engage in translation, but it is not core to their daily work. Unlike in the hospitality industry where corporate practices (e.g. a lack of recognition of the need to translate corporate training materials) resulted in high demands for translation imposed on some line managers, short, 'low-risk', 'low visibility' translation activities can be valued. The tasks mentioned in the quotes above are small enough to be seen as a pleasant pastime rather than a burdensome chore, especially in an organizational context where staff are young graduates, at times having recently come back from study programs abroad. They are new to the sector and the world of employment, work in close physical proximity to each other, and see paraprofessional translation as a low stakes activity that provides them with some intellectual stimulation while enhancing their identities as fun-loving, bright and collaborative knowledge workers. This resonates with earlier work by Piekkari et al. (2013) who have illustrated that paraprofessional translation can be a source of pleasure as it provides a variety of tasks. These perceptions change with the volume and complexity of the translation task, as we discuss in the next section focused on the big-T paraprofessional translation.

The big-T paraprofessional translation

Paraprofessional translation as enactment of one's subject expertise

In many instances translation is a more distinctive, bigger task, as linked to its volume/ length and complexity of the source text and the expected standards of quality. Our material suggests that both staff and managers prefer to avoid translation when it entails duplicating work. However, in some cases, such as when a transla-

5. This is a direct translation from an unusual word choice by the participant in Polish.

tion task is closely entangled with an employees' professional knowledge, such as HRM, marketing or law, and in particular when it is also associated with a given product or account an employee is responsible for, then paraprofessional translation tends to be approached as enactment of one's subject expertise. When presentations or reports for international clients are required in a foreign language, preparing texts in the local language in order for them to be translated later was seen by our participants as an unnecessary step. Nevertheless, when external local service providers deliver key documents in the local language and these documents need to be seen by international clients or expatriate managers, they tend to be translated by the person responsible for a given project, client or brand. Undertaking such paraprofessional translation is perceived as an extension of one's professional expertise, as its accomplishment requires specialized vocabulary, and industry and subject expertise. Here, a high degree of correspondence with the source text, as well as appropriateness in the target language, are crucial. A marketing specialist explains:

> .. an advertorial[6] is in Polish, because it is going to be published in a Polish newspaper, but it has to be approved by a Brand Manager who is anglophone. And then the Account Manager [responsible for that particular client] has to translate it… Translating a page long document such as an advert is quite bothersome (*uciążliwe*). (Zosia, Media)

Expectations to engage in paraprofessional translation are linked to responsibilities for one's client. These translated documents are intended for internal communication, albeit for important stakeholders, they are relatively short and translation is often time-sensitive. The underpinning belief about this approach to paraprofessional translation is that it is burdensome but, in a multinational company, it needs to be accomplished by a subject expert responsible for a client. This becomes challenging in contexts when 'staff turnover is quite high and one cannot always match the required competences with regards to English' (Zosia, media).

In Translation Studies, these considerations evoke a longstanding discussion, particularly in non-fiction publishing, as to whether to enlist a subject matter expert who may struggle with translation competence or a professional translator who may struggle with subject matter competence, or both in collaboration (Eskola and Kivinen 1990). As Buzelin's (2014) comparative case study of a marketing text book translation indicates, a paraprofessional subject matter expert may be willing and able to exercise much more agency than a professional translator.

6. English word used in the original.

Paraprofessional translation as a distinctive linguistic task

When the translated texts are of a substantial length, require a close correspondence with the source text, and when the translator's agency is limited to linguistic and stylistic choices, translation turns into a distinctive standalone linguistic task. In such cases, translation is viewed as a time-consuming activity which requires expert language skills but not necessarily subject expertise. Interestingly, language competence is typically considered sufficient to undertake paraprofessional translation. Translating, with the exception of simultaneous interpretation, tends not to be seen as a competence in itself. This tendency to associate the ability to perform paraprofessional translation with "requisite language skills" has been noted in earlier work (see i.a. Piekkari et al. 2013, 776) and is in stark contrast to a longstanding work on translation competences and expertise in translation studies (see i.a. Hurtado Albir ed. 2017). Our interviewees reported that translation as a distinctive standalone linguistic task is typically passed on to others. If it was seen as requiring specific industry knowledge and vocabulary, it tended to be delegated to employees who were seen as 'linguistically skilled' (often language graduates or those who had worked or studied abroad). If it was a complex task that relied on sophisticated language skills but not necessarily subject-expertise, it tended to be outsourced to professional translators. When the complexity was more limited, this type of translation often fell within the remit of entry level staff with perceived high foreign language competence. We will now discuss each of these practices.

In the organizations we researched there were often a few dedicated staff, who were seen as particularly suited to performing more complex paraprofessional translation as a linguistic activity. In contrast to small-t translation discussed in the earlier section, the focus here was on linguistic accuracy and industry specific/appropriate language:

> We have one senior person who is an English language graduate and, indeed, we always give her various things to translate, if we get stuck. (Wiola, Marketing)

In some organizations staff can be asked to volunteer, or be incentivized to perform translation:

> We have a girl [woman] who is an English language graduate, and she sometimes also translates presentations. We pay her extra for this. (Ola, Media)

In some contexts, especially for staff in relatively low-level positions, engagement in paraprofessional translation, in particular when it is a one-off project, can be seen as an opportunity to showcase their skills. One such example is provided by Fedir, a young receptionist working in the hospitality sector:

> We had to do a 'Hotel Accessibility'[7] project [in English]. A colleague... came to me for help... She said: You have a degree in English, you can do it. … I was surprised. It worked out really nicely. I really enjoyed it. I was proud of myself.
>
> (Fedir, Hospitality)

As the quote indicates, paraprofessional translation can also be a source of pride for staff, especially when working on a relatively high-profile document. Such engagement in paraprofessional translation as a 'special task' can contribute to establishing a person's identity as a linguistically skilled and thus a 'special' person who can perform tasks that others would struggle with.

In some contexts, most notably a leading market research organization, there was a strong norm of outsourcing translation, such as research project reports, and simultaneous interpretation of focus group discussions, to external trusted language professionals. Translation, and in particular simultaneous interpretation, was considered a valued competence but one which did not fall into the scope of duties of professional researchers who were instead expected to utilize their time exercising their subject expertise and core competences (such as designing, undertaking and managing research projects). The company was among the leading companies, and its clients had adequate resources to have translation costed as a separate activity in their market research projects. Experienced researchers were, by contrast, relatively hard to recruit. Their job-related skills therefore carried considerably more premium than translation which was framed as a separate competence. Among the companies in our data, the market research agency provides an extreme case where the boundaries between 'one's actual/ real' work and translation work are very clearly demarcated (see also Muñoz Gómez, 2020). Here, demonstrating 'core' research skills, and refusing to undertake work, such as translation, which is seen as less central for the organization and thus less valuable, is part of one's professional identity and a sign that one is a sought-after researcher. While researchers at times write reports in English, they tend to refuse to translate documents and to undertake interpretation. As one highly experienced research manager observes:

> Some clients suggest that the researcher could do the interview and simultaneous interpretation [*tłumaczyć*], but we absolutely never agree to do this. Even if the client wants to interpret [the interview] to their colleagues, we advise against it… The quality of translation by our simultaneous interpreters cannot be replicated.
>
> (Martyna, Market Research)

7. English phrase used in the source text.

Martyna's words signal the high regard the researchers had for the quality of professional simultaneous interpreting. Where written translation work is carried out by professional translators, it is a common practice among the case companies for staff to proofread translations, and they are not always happy with the results:

> We had policies to translate, and this was translated by an external firm… They translated it in the wrong way or not precisely (enough) in relation to the English policy… [*jakoś nie specyficznie do konkretnego odniesienia do polityki angielskiej*] … I was the person responsible for liaising with the translation firm and for verifying the correctness of the documents. (Dominika, Healthcare)

As the quote above indicates, in the healthcare context, where, presumably, policy documents are seen as important documents that cover industry-specific content and vocabulary, an employee is often assigned the responsibility for assessing the correctness of professional translation. Interestingly, this employee can be an entry-level staff member. This finding resonates with the practices reported by Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) who found in their study of a car manufacturing plant in a cross-border area of France that it was the technicians who often verified translated texts. Other studies, by contrast (i.a.. Ristolainen et al., 2023) provide examples of paraprofessional translations being verified by language professionals. This was, however, only accomplished in relation to strategic markets and key client facing documents.

Finally, in our dataset translation as a standalone linguistic activity was also commonly approached as an assistant's job, especially where whole texts which do not typically require familiarity with industry-specific vocabulary need rerendering in a foreign or the local language and, when there is no room for creative reinterpretation and filtering. This approach was most pronounced in the market research agency but was also visible in media and healthcare organizations. Our participants often admitted to having done more translation in entry level roles. At times, staff were recruited because of their English language competence, which subsequently created expectations regarding the tasks they were required to accomplish. Due to the association of translation work with low-level roles, many participants, especially those in the market research sector, were reluctant to undertake translation work. As Alicja, an experienced researcher, with long tenure in her company and the industry more broadly, explains:

> I have a feeling that translation is very much an assistant's job which sometimes, simply, I haven't got the time for. And maybe that's why I approach it more negatively. When there's too much on, one would like to pass on exactly such things like translations to an assistant, if they are not going to a translator.
>
> (Alicja, Market Research)

Although, here, the ability to carry out translation is considered a norm, the expectation to engage in it is placed upon lower-grade staff, as translation tasks are perceived to be 'basic'. Where paraprofessional translation is believed to be an assistant's task, non-engagement in it becomes part of a person's identity as a more 'senior' staff member.

Discussion and conclusions

We have focused on paraprofessional translation, an underexplored and undertheorized 'middle ground' between professional and non-professional translation. While the ubiquity of translation activities in organizational contexts has previously been acknowledged (Outila et al., 2021; Piekkari et al., 2013), studies of paraprofessional translation to date have largely come from single case studies (Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk et al., 2019; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015; Piekkari et al. 2013; Zølner, 2019). By contrast, we adopted a multi-site approach comprising different industry contexts, hierarchical levels and professions. At the outset of the chapter, we asked: (1) How do paraprofessional translators approach translation work in subsidiaries of multinational enterprises? and (2) What factors influence these approaches? Our study has allowed us to identify six distinctive approaches to paraprofessional translation, characterized by unique combinations of underlying beliefs, and translation practices, and to consider them in context. We have discussed paraprofessional translation as: (1) care work, (2) knowledge brokering and management, (3) information sourcing, (4) play, (5) enactment of one's subject expertise, and (6) a distinctive linguistic task.

We have demonstrated that translation practices are influenced by (a) the identity, role, seniority and language skills of paraprofessional translators, (b) organizational context (i.a. staff's language skills, language training provision, cost, time pressure, immediacy of customers, being part of a MNE) as well as (c) the translation type (see Figure 1).

Although some of the factors identified in our study as affecting approaches to paraprofessional translation have been considered by others within and outside of translation studies (Muñoz Gómez 2020; Piekkari et al. 2013), a systematic consideration of these factors and their link to different approaches to paraprofessional translation has been missing.

We propose a framework that distinguishes between two main forms of paraprofessional translation, which we refer to as small-t translation and big-T translation, and which we find across both the written and oral mediation mode. The framework helps explain patterns in beliefs and practices of paraprofessional translation. We find this conceptual differentiation — which also resonates with

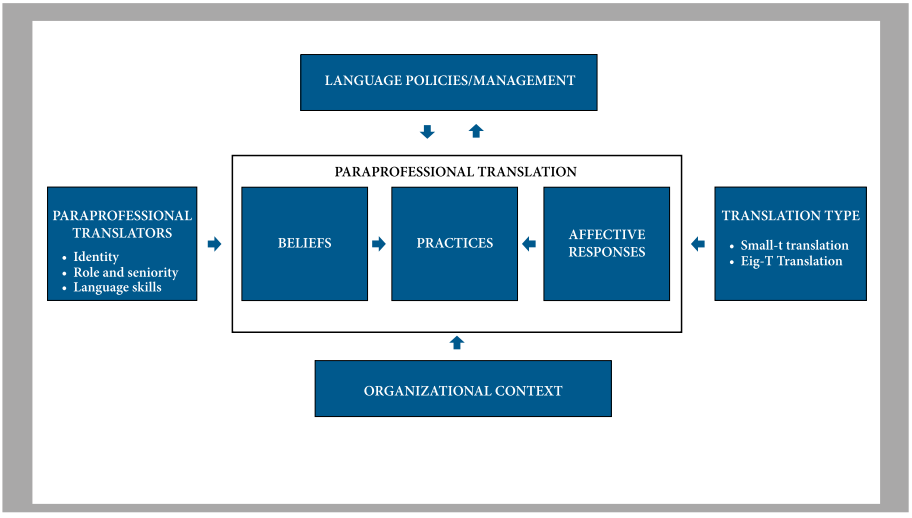


Figure 1. Factors influencing paraprofessional translation practices

the distinction between explicit translations versus implicit translating as conceptualized by Muñoz Gómez (2020) — helpful for analytical purposes, although we must also stress that the difference between 't' and 'T' translation is not always clear-cut.

We define small-t translation as a set of everyday, typically small ad hoc translation and interpretation activities, carried out as part of performing other professional tasks and using other core competencies, such as customer service or managing staff. Small-t translation usually involves gisting and a high degree of tanslatorial agency which can entail editing out parts of the source texts and adding new information. This type of paraprofessional translation is accomplished with a pragmatic orientation and a concern for the communicative function of translation. In highlighting this type of translation we aim to add to its visibility. Because it tends to be embedded within other activities, it may easily go unrecognized by the practitioners themselves as well as their managers (Muñoz Gómez, 2020), who may underestimate its role and, by extension, the value of the translatorial competences of key employees, for organizational functioning.

Big-T translation, by contrast, denotes translation as a standalone activity. It usually entails more textual work as the source texts tend to be longer. Here, the value of the translation is assessed in terms of its linguistic standard. Big-T paraprofessional translation blends with professional translation. Many participants seem to be aware of this, as they signal the importance of giving the task to somebody else, be it esteemed professionals (when they value translatorial competences) or a lower-level assistant (when they do not). In some cases, it may

also be that a paraprofessional translator who is repeatedly given these tasks and develops translatorial competence in time becomes more akin to a professional translator. The proposed conceptual differentiation has substantial explanatory potential in paraprofessional contexts and can thus help advance this emerging strand of work. It can also create bridges between translation studies and other disciplines, notably organization studies and international business and encourage cross-fertilization of ideas.

The participants' narratives in relation to the practices of 't' translation — which we classified as belonging to one of four types, translation as: care work, knowledge brokering and management, information sourcing and play — reflected their beliefs about their own role and place in the organization, and the values attached to their professional and organizational identities. For example, in the hospitality industry, the expectation that employees would engage in ad hoc translation was considered legitimate when translation tasks were seen as part of looking after hotel guests — a 'core' task of hotel workers and managers. However, they were also perceived as a burden when they were required to facilitate communication with colleagues who were unable to interact with others in the language of everyday communication in the organization.

Similarly, the narratives which we see as relating to 'T' translation — labelled as: enactment of one's subject expertise and a distinctive linguistic task — give insights into both the organizational policy regarding translation, and the beliefs and values in relation to it, as well as one's role and place in the organization, in different industry contexts. 'T' translation was considered crucial in industries which deliver a product whose quality is assessed on the basis of its linguistic content, as in the case of media and market research companies. Put differently: whilst 't' translation could be observed in all organizations in our study, there were some organizations where translation competences were a required 'core' competence — hence 'T' translation — necessary in the process of product/service delivery. At the same time, a 'T' translation perspective was also found in organizations where staff perceived engagement in 'T' translation as endangering their professional identity and, as such, were outsourced.

We conclude with suggestions for future research. Firstly, we encourage scholars to empirically study the connections and disconnections between translation practices, everyday beliefs about translation, organizational context and translation type. It would be useful to further consider these in relation to organizational language and translation policies. Our analytical categorization into big-T and small-t translation applied to all of the examined cases, but contexts vary in how much relevance each has. In hospitality industry, for example, small-t practices are predominant, but its uses are manifold, ranging from going to great lengths to keep customers happy to providing basic guidelines to workers with immi-

grant background. The market research company was the only one among these to focus predominantly on big-T Translation — or big-I Interpreting if you like — and at the same time the only one where interviewees insisted on employing professional simultaneous interpreters.

Secondly, we call for research into paraprofessional translation in different industry and organizational settings, using a combination of interviews, documentary analysis and observational methodologies, to further examine our conceptualization of small-t and big-T translation and explore in more detail further contextual influences on paraprofessional translation belief and practices. A full picture of a local translation policy will require observational fieldwork methods to also fully capture paraprofessional practices. Translation studies is currently expanding its disciplinary boundaries, spreading its analytical efforts into new areas on interlingual and other kinds of translation (see i.a. Marais 2019). We believe that it is also beneficial to work on new conceptualizations of the more traditional terrain. The distinction between big-T and small-t translation may well become useful in creating workable differentiations within an area that has also been called translatorial (i.a. Koskela et al. 2017) as it gives more visibility to the translation elements of everyday routine multilinguality.

Thirdly, we see substantial potential for future studies of the affective dimension of translation activity. While big-T and small-t contexts, and the interplay of these two modes can shed important light onto translation beliefs, more research is needed on internal contextual differences and affective stances, and their potential relationship. A related element worthy of future study is interpersonal relations and collaboration. Organizations are hierarchical by nature, and this affects the agency of paraprofessional translators, and hence their beliefs. We already know that this agency can sometimes be significantly higher than that of professional translators (e.g. Logmann and Piekkari, 2015; Ciuk and James, 2015; Ciuk et al., 2019), and comparative and collaborative studies might help us better understand agency and habitus in translation studies and bring new knowledge into the study of translation ecosystems (Westney et al., 2022) in IB and OS. Another interpersonal feature is collaboration. Collaborative translation has been studied in translation studies, and how it plays out in an organizational context, and the joys or agonies of it, merits further discussion.

References

Antonini, R., Torresi, I., Rossato, L. & Cirillo, L., (Eds.) (2017). *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation*. John Benjamins.

Barner-Rasmussen, W., and Aarnio, C. (2011). Shifting the faultlines of language: A quantitative functional-level exploration of language use in MNC subsidiaries. *Journal of World Business* 46(3), 288–295.

Barner-Rasmussen, W., Ehrnrooth, M., Koveshnikov, A. & Mäkelä, K. (2014). Cultural and language skills as resources for boundary spanning within the MNC. *Journal of International Business Studies* 45(7), 886–905.

Blazejewski, S. (2006). Transferring value-infused organizational practices in multinational companies: A conflict perspective. In M. Gebbert & M. Mayers (Eds.) *Global, Local and National Practices in Multinational Companies* (pp. 63–10). Palgrave.

Buzelin, H. (2014). Translating the American textbook. *Translation Studies* 7(3), 315–334.

Ciuk, S., & James, P. (2015). Interlingual translation and the transfer of value-infused practices: an in-depth qualitative exploration. *Management Learning* 46(5), 565–581.

Ciuk, S., James, P. & Śliwa, M. (2019). Micropolitical dynamics of interlingual translation processes in an MNC subsidiary. *British Journal of Management* 30(4), 926–942.

Dam, H., & Koskinen, K. (2016). The translation profession: centres and peripheries. *JoSTrans* 25, 2–14. https://jostrans.org/issue25/art_intro.php.

Davier, L., & Conway, K. (Eds.) (2019). *Journalism and Translation in the Era of Convergence*. John Benjamins.

Eskola, A., & Kivinen, D. (1990). Cooperation and the logic of action: experiences of cooperation between scientist and translator. *Meta* 35(2), 370–377.

Hokkanen, S. (2012). Simultaneous Church Interpreting as Service. *The Translator* 18(2), 291–309.

Hurtado Albir, A. (Ed.) (2017). *Researching Translation Competence by PACTE Group*. John Benjamins.

Koskela, M., Koskinen, K. & Pilke, N. (2017). Bilingual formal meeting as a context of translatoriality. *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies* 29(3), 464–485.

Langinier, H., & Ehrhart, S. (2020). When local meets global: How introducing English destabilizes translanguaging practices in a cross-border organization. *Management International/International Management/Gestiòn Internacional* 24(2), 79–92.

Logemann, M. & Piekkari, R. (2015). Localize or local lies? The power of language and translation in the multinational corporation. *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 11(1), 30–53.

Marais, K. (2019). *A (Bio)semiotic Theory of Translation: The Emergence of Social-Cultural Reality*. Routledge.

Michalski, M. & Śliwa, M. (2021). 'If you use the right Arabic…': Responses to special language standardization within the BBC Arabic Service's linguascape. *Journal of World Business* 56(5), 101–198.

Muñoz Gómez, E. (2020). Non-professional translation in an Irish business setting: Considerations for global theory and national policy. *Translation Studies* 13(2),1–19.

Outila, V., Piekkari, R., Mihailova, I. & Angouri, J. (2021). 'Trust but verify': How middle managers in a multinational use proverbs to translate an imported management concept. *Organization Studies* 42(10), 1581–1601.

Peltokorpi, V. & Vaara, E. (2012). Language policies and practices in wholly-owned foreign subsidiaries: A recontextualization perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies* 43(9), 808–833.

Pérez-González, L. & Susam-Saraeva, Ş. a (Eds.) (2012). Non-Professional Translating and Interpreting: Participatory and Engaged Perspectives. Special issue of *The Translator*. 18(2).

Piekkari, R., Welch, D., Welch, L., Peltonen, J.-P. & Vesa, T. (2013). Translation behaviour: An exploratory study within a service multinational. *International Business Review* 22(5), 771–783.

Pokorn, N. K. & Koskinen. (2020). The ethics of linguistic hospitality and untranslatability in Derrida and Ricœur. In K. Koskinen & N. K. Pokorn (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Ethics* (pp. 87–98). Routledge.

Pym, A. (2011). Translation research terms: A tentative glossary for moments of perplexity and dispute. In A. Pym (Ed.) *Translation Research Projects 3* (pp. 75–110.) Intercultural Studies Group.

Ristolainen, J., Outila, V. & Piekkari, R. (2023). Reversal of language hierarchy and the politics of translation in a multinational corporation. *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 19(1): 6–26.

Sanden, G. (2020). Limits of language: Stylistic, linguistic and modal convergence in blue-collar communication. *Globe: A Journal of Language, Culture and Communication* 9: 73–101.

Sanden, G., & Lønsmann, D. (2018). Discretionary power on the front line: A bottom-up perspective on corporate language management. *European Journal of International Management* 12(1–2): 111–137.

Spolsky, B. (2007). Towards a theory of language policy. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* 22(1). https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol22/iss1/1

Tietze, S., Tansley, C. & Helienek, E. (2017). The translator as agent in management knowledge transfer. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 17(1): 151–169.

Tyulenev, S. (2014). *Translation and Society. An Introduction.* Routledge.

Westney, D. E., Piekkari, R., Koskinen, K. & Tietze, S. (2022). Crossing borders and boundaries: Translation ecosystems in international business. *International Business Review* 31(5): 102030.

Wilmot, N., & Tietze, S. (2023). Englishization and the politics of translation. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*. 19(1): 46–69.

Zølner, M. (2019). Local intermediaries and their organizational identification in a French subsidiary. *European Journal of International Management* 13(1): 88–110.

Appendix. Interview guide

1. Can you tell us a bit about your educational and employment background?
2. Can you tell us a bit about history with the current company?
3. Can you tell me something about your immediate team? Who do you co-operate most closely with?
4. To what extent is foreign language proficiency important at your company?
5. Does your company have an official corporate language? If so, what are the official rules regarding the corporate language?
6. To what extent are the rules formalized?
7. To what extent are they implemented?
8. In which contexts are foreign languages used in your company?
9. Are employees encouraged to improve their foreign language proficiency? If so, how is this done?
10. Can you tell me a bit about your experience with foreign language learning?
11. Some suggest that foreign language proficiency is composed of a set of different skills. How would you describe your English language proficiency?
    a. What are your strengths?
    b. How about weaknesses?
12. How does, in your view, your foreign language proficiency impact your work?
13. How would you describe the foreign language proficiency in your team?
14. Are there any particular situations that require the usage of a foreign language that you find more challenging? If so, can you give me an example of such a situation?
15. How do you cope with similar situations?
16. Has your approach to using a foreign language at work changed over time? If so, what did this change look like?
17. To what extent do differences in foreign language proficiency in your team impact the work and cooperation in your team?
18. What strategies of coping with challenges of foreign language use have you observed?
19. To what extent is foreign language proficiency managed on the team level? *[How does this look like? Can you give some examples to illustrate this?]*
20. Can you tell me about the recruitment process in your company? To what extent is language part of your considerations?
21. To what extent is language a topic that can be raised in performance reviews?
22. To what extent is the career progress at your company linked to foreign language proficiency? Can you recall a situation when somebody's promotion or lack thereof was linked to their foreign language proficiency? What happened?
23. Do you happen to do some translation work as part of your work? Can you give examples?
24. How about your other team members? What kind of translation work are they involved in?
25. How do you feel about these tasks?
26. What approach to translation have you observed in others? [How could you explain this approach]
27. Does your organization use professional translators? If so, in which situations?
28. How is this translation reviewed?
29. Could your organization engage in other activities/ adapt their procedures/ process to better manage the company's language capacity?
30. Is there something else that we should know but have not asked about in order for us to understand the impact of foreign language on the functioning of subsidiaries of MNEs?