

# The Phases of the Translation Process: Are They Always Three?

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## Abstract

In general, there is agreement among translation scholars (e.g. Mossop, 2000; Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005) that the translation process is divided into three clear-cut phases, which Mossop (2000) terms as pre-drafting, drafting and post-drafting. In the first phase, the translator gets acquainted with the source text; in the second phase, a full version of the translation is created; and the third phase commences after the translator has produced a first full draft of the translation.

This contribution discusses the findings of a recently completed doctoral study (Borg, 2016) which investigated in-depth the coming into being of a whole literary translation. The detailed case study provided a rich description of the evolution of the translation from first draft to publication and analysed thoroughly the different phases the translation went through. It was found that the translation process was composed of five phases and that every phase has a specific pace and particular functions. Thus, it was suggested that Phases 3-5 are phases in their own right and not sub-phases of the post-drafting phase. The findings indicated that the number of phases in the translation process and their length might vary among translators and that this might be linked to their process profile. The results therefore challenge the subdivision of the translation process into three fixed phases.

**Keywords:** phases of the translation process, literary translation, translation process research, process profiles

## Introduction

This paper examines the phases a French-Maltese literary translation went through and how the translator approached the task. The phases of the translation process are a main topic in translation process research (TPR) and translation scholars (e.g. Mossop, 2000; Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005) generally concur that the process is divided into three clear-cut phases. However, different authors employ different terminology for the same three phases, albeit defining the three phases very similarly. For example, Jakobsen (2002) applies i) *orientation*, ii) *drafting* and iii) *revision*, while Mossop (2000) employs i) *pre-drafting*, ii) *drafting* and iii) *post-drafting*. The current study utilises Mossop's terminology and delineates the three

phases as follows: in the first phase, the translator familiarises himself/herself with the source text (ST); a full version of the translation is produced in the second phase; and the third phase begins “after sentence-by-sentence drafting is complete” (Mossop, 2000 p.40).

Translation Studies (TS) distinguishes between revising one’s own work and revising other translators’ work, termed by Mossop “self-revision” (2001/2010) and “other-revision” (2007) respectively. In self-revision translators correct their own work, while in other-revision, the translation is revised by a third party. In this study, the translation process is considered as ceasing when the role of third parties begins, hence at the end of the post-drafting phase (Figure 1).

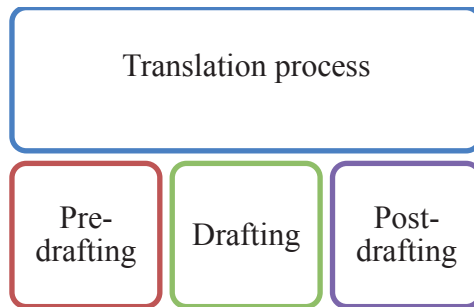


Figure 1. The translation process

### Functions of the different phases

Phase 1 serves as a familiarisation phase where translators read and interpret the ST before composing the target text (TT). Comprehension is a main feature of this phase (Jakobsen, 2002) as is planning (Englund Dimitrova, 2005). Yet, previous studies (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Carl, Dragsted and Jakobsen, 2011) have shown that the length and activities performed during this phase differ considerably among translators and this variation seems unrelated to translation experience (Englund Dimitrova, 2005). Some translators jot down words/phrases and/or carry out research, some read the whole ST, others browse it quickly, whereas certain translators start translating immediately, skipping this phase altogether.

In Phase 2, the translation is drafted but this is not the only action taken. Translators read the ST (again) and engage with it, resort to external resources such as dictionaries and the Internet, evaluate the emerging text and self-revise it. Most studies have found the second phase to be the longest (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005; Dragsted and Carl, 2013) but individual differences and exceptions were reported here too in terms of duration, approach and activities performed.

In the third phase, translators review and/or hone the translation. Self-revision, however, is not restricted to this phase but often takes place both in the drafting and the post-drafting phases. Moreover, “the post-drafting phase can include non-checking work such as term research” (Mossop, 2001/2010, p.168) and some decisions could be postponed until this phase. Still, “the main activity is monitoring of existing text” (Jakobsen, 2002, p.193). Some translators choose to subdivide this phase in various subphases (Englund Dimitrova, 2005), which begins when the translator finishes a first draft of the translation and ends when s/he considers the translation complete (Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005).

It will be interesting to find out what the translation process of this study’s participant is composed of, and whether it is also divided into three phases.

## Methodology

This case-study forms part of a larger research project (Borg, 2016) which investigated in-depth the coming-into-being of a Maltese literary translation: *Is-Sur Ibrahim u l-Fjuri fil-Koran* (henceforth *Is-Sur Ibrahim*) rendered from French by Toni Aquilina (Schmitt, 2014). It collected data through draft translations, the ST and the final TT, think-aloud, observation, and interviews. The data elicited were triangulated and analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The present study focuses on the phases of the translation process and analyses pertinent data extracted from Drafts 1-4 (D1-4), the initial interview, think-aloud and observations (for details on the methodology see Borg, 2016). Since D1 of *Is-Sur Ibrahim* was completed in 2008, prior to the start of the research project, data about Phases 1 and 2 were obtained through an initial interview, in which the translator described all the phases of his translation process; the results are presented in section 4.1. The researcher then observed the translator as he self-revised D1 and D2 while thinking aloud, corresponding to Phases 3 and 4<sup>1</sup> respectively; these data were recorded in Translation Process Protocols (TPPs). Data about Phase 5 were gathered through a telephone call and analysis of D4. These results are found in section 4.2.

## Analysis

### ***Overview of the phases gleaned from the interview: the translation process as conceived by the translator***

The translator immediately asserted that he has his own translation method: “I always follow my method” (ISSI/TA047). He perceives his translation process in terms of phases, each one of which is analysed below:

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1 Phase 3 yielded D2 and Phase 4 D3.

### *Phase 1*

For Aquilina, the first step in translating a literary work consists of reading and understanding the text. He first reads the whole text, as many times as required to get a full grip of the work. A thorough understanding of the text to be translated and a complete grasp of the meaning of words in context are considered crucial. During this phase, he also carries out research which includes background reading about the author, reading other works by the same author and searching words in dictionaries. Only once he is confident of having achieved a good grasp of the text, will he move to the next phase.

### *Phase 2*

The next step consists of drafting the translation. First, he divides the text into what he calls units of work. This involves segmenting the ST in chunks comprising between five and eight pages, based on the amount of time available for translation. A unit of work is tackled in one go. During this phase he works regularly on the literary translation at hand until D1 is completed, in order to maintain the impetus gained as well as to capitalise on the research done in the previous phase, while this is still fresh in his mind.

No recourse to dictionaries is made during drafting, in order to produce the draft swiftly, in an uninterrupted flow. During the production of the draft, he does not necessarily look at the research undertaken because he gets carried away. It could be argued that in the phase preceding drafting he internalises the research done, stocking up on his internal resources so that the draft TT is produced in a natural burst. Once a paragraph is translated, he rereads it and checks whether it can be improved. However, he clarified that changes done at this phase are minor. D1 is not intended to be perfect. In D1 he is not concerned with details such as spelling; optimisation of the TT is reserved for later.

### *Phase 3*

Aquilina asserts that he likes to leave an interval between this phase and the previous one as it allows him to approach the draft with fresh eyes. Here, the translation is typed and fine-tuned and he sets himself no targets and time limits. In fact, he explained that this phase normally takes longer than the preceding one. Fine-tuning the TT involves carrying out minor and not so minor changes. At this stage, the focus is on improving the text. Use of dictionaries and other external resources resurfaces here. Interestingly, he envisages this phase not as the revision stage, but as the stage where he improves the writing.

### *Phase 4*

Now, he focuses on the TT, enhancing and polishing it, making it sound as natural as possible, ensuring that it works on its own. All this is done with the potential reader

in mind and thereby for acceptability reasons. Reference to the ST is made at this stage too, in order to quickly eliminate any remaining doubts.

### *Phases 5*

Phase 5 is only discussed fleetingly; it is nonetheless referred to as a phase. At this point the translator takes on the role of a proofreader and endeavours to spot as many mistakes as possible before the TT is passed on to the actual proofreader.

### *Translating *Is-Sur Ibrahim* (Phases 1-2)*

D1 of *Is-Sur Ibrahim* was created while on holiday in France. He had already read the book in Malta and reread it during this vacation. He estimates having worked on Phases 1 and 2 for circa ten days. As part of the groundwork, he read four or five other books by Schmitt to acquaint himself with the author's writing style. He affirms having adopted his normal translation process for the production of D1.

### ***Phases 3-5 as observed by the researcher***

#### *Phase 3*

Phase 3 transpired to be the longest phase of the process, extending over eighteen sessions each lasting between two and six hours. This phase involved a painstaking comparative self-revision: departing from the ST, the translator read a ST chunk, compared it with the corresponding TT segment and revised it when he reckoned it necessary. Once satisfied with the TT chunk, he moved to the next ST segment and its TT counterpart until the end of the document was reached. This resulted in a great deal of self-revisions, in extensive rewriting. Typically, once a whole paragraph is revised, it is reread and, at times, further amendments are made. As a result, Phase 3 is cyclical and recursive: a comparative self-revision at the sentence level is followed by a unilingual self-revision at the paragraph level. Once this cycle is completed the translator moves to the next ST-TT segment and a new sequence begins. This phase was characterised by other recurrent process patterns which the translator seemed to perform as part of a routine developed through experience, such as i) starting the session by reading part of the TT revised during the previous session and ii) concluding it by a unilingual rereading of the text revised during the same session.

These iterative process routines give a non-linear slant to Phase 3: the translator does not approach this phase in an entirely linear fashion but operates in "recursive loops" (Dam-Jensen & Heine, 2013, p.93). Nevertheless, most of the time the translator processes the TT linearly, tackling one sentence after the other, sequentially.

In Phase 3 the translator brings into play a combination of internal and external resources. He constantly resorts to the internal resources acquired through

education, practice, life experiences and so forth. Moreover, extensive use of external resources was observed. Use of book dictionaries was by far the most dominant. This seems to be a particular feature of Phase 3, where reference to dictionaries was frequent and consistent. Every single little doubt is checked. Consequently, this phase is slow and lengthy.

Think-aloud revealed a whole range of reasons motivating translatorial decisions. There seems to be two constant preoccupations in Aquilina's decision-making: i) loyalty to the ST/ST author and ii) TL/TT considerations/requirements. The translator appears to be continuously pulled between these two forces and he is all the time striving to strike a balance between the two. Personal preferences are a third significant factor in this translator's decision-making, particularly his penchant for Semitic words.

#### *Phase 4*

There was a three-week gap between the end of Phase 3 and the start of Phase 4. This phase was completed in two sessions, each lasting approximately 4.5 hours. The ST still played a role and loyalty to the ST/ST author remained a concern at this stage. Yet, consultation of ST was not as frequent as in Phase 3. On the other hand, TL considerations were frequent and a main concern in Phase 4: as the translation process progresses, the translator's focus slowly shifts from the ST to the TT, becoming increasingly TT-oriented.

Attention to detail also intensifies as the translation process advances, with the translator focusing more and more on microscopic details such as punctuation, spelling, and spaces between words. When compared to the previous phase, the self-revisions carried out in Phase 4 are less complex involving mainly orthography, informativity, and lexical changes. Notably, only fifteen verbalisations relate to the translator's preferences, ideology or poetics while in the previous phase these were overriding concerns. In this phase, self-revisions are less frequent with the result that Phase 4 was completed in a much shorter timespan than Phase 3.

Likewise, it was observed that although the translator did generate verbal ATs, these were much less frequent when compared to the previous phase where there was a continuous generation of verbal ATs. Recourse to dictionaries decreased too. As regards linearity, it was found that the self-revision process in Phase 4 is more linear than in Phase 3.

In the current phase, the translator read the TT aloud. He seemed to be listening to the text, hearing how it reads out, how it sounds. At this stage, importance is thus given to the acoustic texture of the Maltese text, attributing attention to the rhythm of the words, the cadence of sentences, the tempo of the text. Upon encountering a mistake or an inadequate segment, the reading aloud is interrupted and thinking aloud commences. The switch from reading aloud to thinking aloud and vice-versa was generally seamless.

### *Phase 5*

D3, revised in Phase 4, was completed on 09.09.13 and on 16.09.13 the translator was scheduled to meet the proofreader to give him the translation for proofreading. The day before his appointment with the proofreader was due, Aquilina called to inform the researcher that earlier on during the day he printed a copy of the TT, read it again, did some amendments on the printout which were later inputted on the computer and that a copy of D4 will be provided. The researcher inquired whether the ST was consulted during this phase and he answered in the negative. He explained that the changes undertaken mainly pertain to punctuation and word order, and were “mostly dictated by the harmony experienced during the reading aloud of the text” (personal communication 15.09.13). The indications are that this phase was short: it was completed in one session lasting a few hours, the time required to read through a text of 8891 words and carry out the changes.

Analysis of D4 reveals that most of the self-revisions in D4 are minor. Since the translator concentrated on the TT allegedly without consulting the ST, they were performed because of TT and TL considerations. Moreover, this phase also points to the perfectionist nature of the translator: he strives to give the proofreader a draft with the least amount of mistakes possible, thus he self-proofreads the TT before handing it to third parties.

## **Discussion**

### ***A five-phased translation process***

Analysis of the various data sources showed that the translation *Is-Sur Ibrahim* was created in five distinct phases and went through four drafts. Section 1 discussed how scholars traditionally divide the translation process in three phases. In cases where several phases succeed the drafting phase, these are grouped as subphases under one phase, the post-drafting phase (e.g. Englund Dimitrova, 2005; Shih, 2013). Now, in Aquilina’s process Phases 3-5 seem to be three distinct phases. Consequently, his translation process emerges as consisting of five phases, not three. From the analysis, it is evident that each phase has specific purposes, its own pace, and builds on the previous one.

### ***Phases: their function and pace***

#### ***Phase 1: Preparing the groundwork - the comprehension phase***

In Phase 1 the preparatory work for the translation is done: the translator acquaints himself with the ST, engages deeply with it and lays the foundations for the translation. This phase precedes the drafting of the TT although the translator stated that he jots down some notes after looking up words in dictionaries. The

research carried out on and around the ST and the multiple readings of the entire text highlight the importance attributed to understanding the ST, which is the main purpose of this phase of Aquilina's process. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that: i) this phase comes before the systematic writing of the translation (e.g. Mossop, 2000), ii) certain translators resort to aids and write notes during this phase (e.g. Englund Dimitrova, 2005), iii) it serves as an orientation/planning phase (e.g. Carl, Dragsted and Jakobsen, 2011) and iv) it "is dominated by comprehension" (Jakobsen, 2002 p.192). The several readings of the entire ST accompanied by research indicate that this phase is not short in Aquilina's case. However, it should be pointed out that not all translators read the whole ST before starting to translate (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005; Alves et al., 2009) and this counts both for non-literary and literary (e.g. Rabassa, 2005) translators. The importance given to understanding the ST in Phase 1 demonstrates that the translator wants to approach Phase 2 with the certainty of having mastered the meaning of the ST.

### *Phase 2: Producing a draft translation*

In Phase 2 Aquilina produces a handwritten first draft rapidly with the aim of capturing the spirit of the ST gleaned from Phase 1 and transferring it to the TT. In his process, Phase 2 is not the longest which contrasts with previous TPR findings showing that most professional participants dedicate the largest part of the task time to drafting (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005; Shih, 2013). However, in the same studies these authors all report at least one experienced translator not spending most of their time drafting. Moreover, Ros Schwartz (Schwartz & de Lange, 2006), who translates contemporary Francophone prose, also works very rapidly on her first draft and sets daily targets. Therefore, there are translators who, like Aquilina, actually produce the first draft quite fast. It is, however, likely that since in previous studies these translators were in a minority, they were lost in the crowd despite authors highlighting significant individual differences in approaching the task (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Antunović & Pavlović 2011).

In D1, Aquilina sketches the outline of his translation. It seems that through practice he has developed a number of process strategies to facilitate the drafting process and to work more efficiently and effectively (see Borg, 2016). Further, attention to detail does not pertain to D1; in Phase 2 he does not let himself get bogged down with details and microlevel decisions. In this phase, only slight corrections are done since fine-tuning is reserved for the next phases. As Peter Bush (2006) puts it "[t]he first draft is the first stab at the rewriting" (p.30).

### *Phase 3: Redrafting - fine-tuning the draft translation*

There is a clear change of pace and approach in Phase 3 reflecting the functions of this phase in this translator's process. The TPPs have revealed that Phase 3 involves a thorough comparison of the ST with the TT and a conscientious self-revision of D1.



The comparative revision is generally followed by two unilingual revisions, one at the paragraph level and another one at the end of the self-revision session. Phase 3 thus encompasses several levels of monitoring; it is also characterised by heavy use of dictionaries and constant generation of verbal ATs. As a result, the translator proceeds very slowly and meticulously. This is the lengthiest phase in Aquilina's process and comprises substantial rewriting. Reworking parts of the draft TT is not unusual in literary translation. For instance, D.H. Lawrence rewrote whole sections of his first draft translation of Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (Arnold, 1968).

Phase 3 is significant in Aquilina's process, both in terms of length and role. This goes against previous studies' results which found that D1 is generally the most time-consuming. Yet, researchers report important individual variation, for instance, "[i]n one task, one of the professionals spent more time end revising the draft than actually drafting it" (Jakobsen, 2002, p.194).

This is the phase where Aquilina's TT really takes shape, where most translation solutions survive till the final product. The analysis indicates that the main aims of this phase are to refine the TT by increasing its accuracy in relation to the ST but also its fluency. However, TT/TL considerations are also given importance. Personal preferences are another main focus in Phase 3. The translator spends a great deal of time dealing with such factors which contributes to making Phase 3 slow and lengthy.

#### *Phase 4: Polishing the style of the TL*

Phase 4 is much shorter than the preceding one which correlates with the tasks and functions attributed to it. While in D2 he was more concerned with macro aspects, in D3 he switches gears focusing more on the microlevel of the text, paying attention to details such as spelling and punctuation, which are less complex and hence less time-consuming. Focus is also shifted to the TT and TL. In Englund Dimitrova's (2005) study, certain participants too had different aims for their different subphases of the post-drafting phase.

In this phase, both the generation of verbal ATs and the consultation of dictionaries diminish whereas linearity increases. As self-revisions, ATs, recourse to external resources and non-linearity are all associated with problematic segments (e.g. Angelone, 2010), this provides evidence that problematic segments decrease as the TT unfolds. Shorter phases and less numerous self-revisions also indicate that the translator's satisfaction with the TT is increasing.

#### *Phase 5: Self-proofreading*

Phase 5 was short but with precise aims nonetheless: to increase the readability of the translation and to eliminate as many mistakes as possible from it. Here the translator assumes the role of a proofreader: he proofreads his own text before sending it for actual proofreading. Phase 5 appears to be completely TT-oriented as the translator declared not having referred to the ST during this phase and having focused on rendering the TT more readable, more harmonious.

*A compartmentalised and incremental process resulting from strategic behaviour*

In view of the above, Aquilina's translation process could be described as compartmentalised and incremental, each phase having specific purposes and building on the former one. Assigning different tasks to each of the phases seems to help him be more self-disciplined, methodical and focused on the task at hand. This division of tasks points towards strategic behaviour on the translator's part: through experience he has learnt how best to approach the TT and distribute tasks throughout the production process.

### **Questioning the phases of the translation process**

Scrutinising the findings of the current study and of previous ones raises questions about whether the translation process is always composed of three phases. Previous research has shown that the translation process is characterised by significant individual variation (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002; Englund Dimitrova, 2005; Dragsted & Carl, 2013; Hansen, 2013). For instance, certain translators read the entire ST before commencing drafting, others familiarise themselves quickly with the text or the first part of it while others skip this phase altogether and start drafting immediately (e.g. Carl, Dragsted and Jakobsen, 2011). Inevitably, all translators have a drafting phase, although individual variation occurs here too (e.g. Englund Dimitrova, 2005). Researchers report that translators generally perform a post-drafting phase (e.g. Jakobsen, 2002), though not all translators implement changes to the TT during this phase (e.g. Carl, Dragsted and Jakobsen, 2011) and the length of the post-drafting may vary considerably among translators (e.g. Shih, 2013). Moreover, some translators check their draft more than once. For example, Englund Dimitrova, (2005) reported that two of her participants had five subphases in the post-drafting phases and several of Shih's (2013) participants had four subphases. Yet, although translators seem to allocate different functions to the different subphases they are all subsumed under post-drafting.

As things stand, whether a translator performs a pre-drafting phase or not, it is assumed that there is a pre-drafting phase in his/her process and, if a translator meticulously checks the draft several times, these are all counted as one phase. In view of this and of the significant individual variation found in how translators handle texts, should we start questioning whether the translation process is always divided into three phases? Jakobsen's (2002) assertion that "[w]hether or not the initial orientation phase is treated as a separate phase or as part of drafting (Phase 2) is a matter of definition" (p.192) strengthens the point as it allows for alternative definitions of the phases and hence for alternative divisions of the process depending on how translators spread the tasks over the phases and on the approach they adopt. It is being posited that Aquilina translated *Is-Sur Ibrahim* in five phases and each phase had its own particular function; consequently each phase could be considered

a phase in its own right. Interestingly, Göpferich (2010) seemed to think along similar lines as she did not speak of subphases of the post-drafting phase but asserted that “[t]here may be one or several post-phases depending on the number of revisions (*post-phase 1, post-phase 2, etc.* in the TPPs)” (p.10). If the translation process has a “pre-phase”, a “main phase” and possibly “several post-phases” (Göpferich, 2010), then it follows that the phases are not necessarily limited to three. Johnsen’s (2014) study also provides empirical evidence of an additional phase, therefore signalling that the phases of the translation process are not always three.

Generalisation is of course not possible from the present case study yet, in view of its results, previous studies’ results, and assertions by various scholars that the translation process is characterised by variability (e.g. Séguinot, 1997; Breedveld, 2002), the question being raised seems legitimate. Englund Dimitrova (2005) asserts that “[t]he relative allocation of time for the phases is a consequence of how the main cognitive process components of the task are distributed and applied throughout the task” (p.22). To this, one could add that another consequence is the number of phases in a translator’s process. If cognitive process components<sup>2</sup> are distributed by a translator over two phases, then it could be argued that his/her translation process consists of two phases; if on the other hand, they are distributed say over five, as in the participant’s case, then his translation process consists of five phases.

This variety in the handling of the task has been linked to individual process profiles, i.e. how translators approach a task and distribute the activities performed over the different phases of the translation process (Antunović and Pavlović, 2011). Dragsted and Carl (2013) found that a translator’s behaviour does not change much from one translation to another “and that one may thus postulate that translators are characterised by individual translator profiles” (p.149). In line with this, Aquilina confirms that his translation process remains constant across his practice; other translators too seem to have their own steady way of working (e.g. Schwartz & de Lange, 2006). It may thus be suggested that the number of phases and their length in a translator’s process are related to his/her process profile. In this scenario, Aquilina’s process would consist of five phases and he would be considered an oil painter, or a second draft writer, according to writing researchers (e.g. Chandler, 1993) as he dedicates good time to Phase 1, produces a quick first draft and then engages in major self-revision in the subsequent phases. Mossop (2001/2010) affirms that “[r]egarding self-revision, some people ‘steamroll’ through the text, not stopping to make corrections as they go. [...] They do almost all their self-revision after drafting is complete” (p.19). This is very similar to how Aquilina approaches the task which goes to show that his translational behaviour is not completely idiosyncratic but is in many ways similar to other translators’ (and writers’) approach. Since the vast majority of process studies carried out so far focused on identifying patterns common to all

2 Hayes et al. 1987 suggested that the monolingual writing process is composed of planning, text generation and revision and TS scholars have applied this to translation (e.g. Englund Dimitrova, 2005).

translators, translators who approach the task in a different way were overlooked because of the need to generalise from research studies, although significant individual variation in how the task is approached was consistently highlighted by the same studies. As “translation [...] necessarily involve[s] variation” (Séguinot 1997, p.104), studying in-depth the translatorial behaviour of individual translators and taking into consideration individual differences seems a natural next step for TS.

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### Bio-note

**Dr Claudine Borg** holds a PhD in Translation Studies from Aston University, Birmingham. She lectures French at the University of Malta Junior College and Translation Studies at the University of Malta. Borg has presented her work at various international conferences, co-authored *Théorie et pratique de la traduction littéraire français-maltais/It-Teorija u l-Prattika tat-Traduzzjoni Letterarja Franciż-Malti* and authored various articles. She is also a practising translator. Her main research interests are translation process research, literary translation, research methodology and translator studies.

