Distributed Agency in Networks of Translation: An Exploration, from Journalism to Treaties

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ABSTRACT

Today's translation processes and production environments involve multiple actors and instruments that form increasingly complex networks. This paper examines such networks and the distribution of influence therein through two example cases: (1) translation of journalistic texts by a freelance translator through a language service provider (LSP); (2) government translators' work on treaties. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that in order to understand the nature of a translator's work and its outcomes, the scope of the analysis should extend far beyond the immediate participants of the translation assignment. Results showed that networks in the two cases extend as far as state level, and that various mediators and inscriptions that remain invisible to the end-users of the translation products play a significant role. The distribution of agency should be acknowledged whenever studying phenomena related to translation, and also when dealing with translation products. Understanding the multitude of influential background factors may provide a more nuanced understanding of the outcome and shed light on the positionality of translators.

KEYWORDS**:** Actor-Network Theory, distributed agency, journalistic translation, legal translation, positionality

1. Introduction

Translation is far from a solitary endeavour; it is a networked activity involving a number of actors. This article examines the extensive networks that form the translation production environment, and the translator's role and position. The topic is approached from the perspective of translator's agency, also applying Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In Translation Studies (TS), agency started to gain interest along with the sociological turn, as the scope of attention expanded from texts to people (this branch of research has also been called

"translator studies"; see Chesterman 2009:20). The concept of agency has been deemed useful in making theoretical approaches more "agent aware" and translators and interpreters more visible as social actors (Inghilleri 2005:142). It allows studies to portray translators as active agents instead of invisible background operators, i.e., as norm-makers instead of norm-followers (cf. Inghilleri 2005:126). These are important topics to raise in today's operating environment, in which translators feel that their professional status – and, ultimately, their livelihood – is weakened by such factors as poor visibility and misconceptions concerning the requirements of the profession (see e.g. Dam and Zethsen 2008, 2016; Ruokonen and Mäkisalo 2018; Ruokonen and Svahn 2022).

Translation as an activity should never be regarded in isolation. It is shaped by its environment, which consists of people, tools and artefacts. These environmental elements not only form the background to a translation professional's work but constitute its essential components (Korhonen 2024:21–27). Today's translation processes are increasingly shaped by multiple actors, instruments and entities in increasingly complex production networks. The translation product typically results from the work of numerous people, such as translator(s), project manager(s), revisor(s) and technology experts, as well as the client (Risku and Rogl 2022:33–34). Digital systems and applications also play an increasing role in today's translation processes, influencing a variety of factors. In terms of translators' agency or status, these can be either supportive or restrictive. Technology can be seen as an aid that enables the translator to produce better quality and work more efficiently, but also as a means to diminish the translator's role and thereby cut costs (see e.g. Marshman 2014:392–399).

In addition to the immediate production environment, further factors also frame and influence both the process and outcome of translation, including abstract ones, such as specific or implied rules and agreements, generally adopted conventions and personal norms and values, as well as the constraints set by time and money. These factors are not mere underlying passive structures, as they have a clear influence on the translator's working conditions and, ultimately, translation quality (see e.g. Abdallah 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore the large number of influential factors and demonstrate that in order to understand the nature of a translator's work and its outcomes, a wide variety of factors that extend far beyond the direct parties of the translation assignment must be considered.

The networks across which agency is distributed in translation processes are situated and dynamic. They vary greatly between different fields and branches of translation – e.g. between literary and non-literary translators, in-house and freelance translators – and even between assignments. This paper explores the extent of such networks, as well as their varying nature, by presenting two different networks underlying translation processes. Case 1 describes a journalistic translation process in which the translation is implemented by a freelance translator for a newspaper via a language service provider (LSP) company. Case 2 describes translation processes involved in the drafting of treaties.

The networked nature of the translation profession and business has been addressed from various perspectives in earlier studies, starting from the seminal work of Justa Holz-Mänttäri describing translatorial action as a goal-oriented professional activity carried out within a complex structure comprising various parties and roles (Holz-Mänttäri 1984:84–109). Kristiina Abdallah was among the first to apply Actor-Network Theory and the Agent-Principal Theory to non-literary translation (see e.g. Abdallah 2010; 2012). Hanna Risku and her team have addressed the topic in various studies, using the concept of distributed cognition (see e.g. Risku et al. 2019; 2020; 2022), which was also applied by Korhonen (2024) in her dissertation focusing on the collaboration of translators and translation revisors. This paper links network theories to practice through concrete examples based on the translator's perspective. The examples presented herein can serve as a model for analysing actor networks in other case studies.

Section 2 introduces the conceptual framework that serves as a lens through which the cases are analysed, i.e., distributed agency and Actor-Network Theory. Section 3 outlines the methods and materials used in the case studies. Section 4 presents the two example cases, and the networks involved. Finally, section 5 contains a summary of the key findings and suggestions for further discussion.

2. Conceptual Framework: Agency, Distributed Agency, and Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Agency is a recurrent concept in many scientific fields, particularly in the social sciences. Despite slight differences in definition and usage in different disciplines and approaches, agency is typically defined in terms of three components: intent/will, ability/capacity, and

action/choice. For example, in the context of translation studies, Koskinen and Kinnunen (2010:6) define it as the "willingness and ability to act". The three core components are, in turn, underpinned by a variety of integral background factors, such as motivation, self-regulation, accountability, confidence and trust. These factors are intertwined with each other in many ways, forming a multifaceted conceptual entity (see e.g. Barbalet 1996; Kinnunen and Koskinen 2010; Eteläpelto et al. 2014; Enfield, 2017; Santalahti 2025).

The present section contains an overview of agency through the lens of translation studies, followed by an account of the distribution of agency across networks with reference to Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

2.1 Translators' Agency

A translator can exert influence, i.e., exercise agency, in many ways and at many levels. In this paper, this is described in terms of textual, paratextual and extratextual agency (on the terms and their application, see Koskinen 2000:99 and Paloposki 2009:191).

The most common form of translator's agency is textual agency, which encompasses the cognitive process of translating and the translator's choices that influence the target text. In a very broad generalisation, any research dealing with translated texts and the translators' solutions therein touches upon translators' agency. When defining the translation strategies, the translator considers what kind of agency they are entitled to exercise with regard to the assignment: how much they can manipulate the text, what kind of expression they should prefer, do they need to make remarks, etc. (Jänis 2010:115–116). The translator chooses the strategies relying on their professional expertise and motivated by their sense of obligation to adhere to certain norms, which may be dictated by the commissioner/client and assignment or based on the translator's general knowledge of the art and business of translation.

Paratextual agency refers to the translator's interaction with the readers and/or commissioner of the translation. This interaction can be unidirectional or bidirectional. It is manifested through comments and notes addressed to the commissioner and/or directly to the readers of the text. The most visible demonstration of a translator's paratextual agency is adding translator's notes or comments to the translated text for readers to see. This practice is mainly present in literary translation, whereas translators of non-literary texts typically submit their

comments to the commissioner separately by e-mail or other such communication channels, explaining, justifying or negotiating their strategies and solutions. In the analysis presented herein, the concept of paratextual agency is expanded to also comprise situations in which a translator consults the commissioner or a subject matter expert on terminology or other such issues. This level of agency provides a platform for the translator to exert an influence not only on the text at hand but sometimes also on translation policies or even norms of translation.

Extratextual agency pertains to the translator's relations with their employer or client, as well as the industry and society at large. This level of agency is closely linked to professional agency and includes such matters as the translator's working conditions, contractual rights and obligations, pay and schedules. Furthermore, translators can also exert societal influence by contributing to the choice of texts to be translated. At this level, translation commissioners, publishers, editors and revisors, as well as policy makers, also exercise translation-related agency (see e.g. Milton and Bandia 2009:1).

In the present study, the focus is on textual and paratextual agency, while the importance of extratextual agency is also acknowledged.

2.2 Distributed Agency

Agency is often studied from an individual agent's point of view and conceived as "a heroic individual exerting power over others" (Bernstein 2017:42). However, in the analysis presented herein, agency is seen as an interdependent social activity, considering the extensive network of actors and elements contributing to the outcome. This is what Enfield and Kockelman (2017), among others, call "distributed agency", and it is closely related to the concept of distributed cognition (see e.g. Risku and Rogl 2021:486–487).

Sociology, in particular, typically addresses agency vis-à-vis societal structures. Agency is approached as an interplay of structures and individuals in which, according to a widely accepted consensus, the outcome is a balance: structures constrain agency whereas, at the same time, agency maintains the structures (see e.g. Hitling and Long 2009:137–138; Koskinen and Kinnunen 2010:7). However, interdependence is also intrinsic to the very nature of agency (Bernstein 2017:44). Agency is not only a question of competition for power

between agents and structures, but also of cooperation between agents, and between agents and structures:

> We never really act alone. Our agency is enhanced when we cooperate with others, and when we accept their help. We benefit when we take credit for people's achievements, or when we free ride on their ideas and their strengths. And not only is our agency shared through action in these ways, but we often have agency without having to engage in action at all. Even when at rest, we are bound up in networks of cause and effect, intention and accountability. The distribution of agency, for better or worse, is everywhere. (Enfield and Kockelman 2017:xi)

In the present article, distributed agency refers to a situation in which several agents contribute to a common outcome or goal. In the most straightforward case, this refers to joint activity based on joint intent and/or a verbal or non-verbal agreement between all those involved (see Schweikart 2017). Such joint activity can take different forms: Collective agency means that several individuals pool their knowledge, skills and resources and act in concert to achieve a commonly agreed goal. Another alternative is agency by proxy, whereby an individual chooses to pursue their goals by engaging others who have the resources, knowledge and means to act on their behalf to obtain the outcomes they desire (Bandura 2018:131).

However, distributed agency can also be seen as a network system in which only the adjacent actors are contractually bound to each other or even actively aware of each other's existence. Such networks can include individual human actors, institutional actors that consist of several individuals but form one decision-making body and present themselves to the external observer as one collective entity, and also non-human entities, such as technology and statutes. Values and norms are also parts of these networks, as an individual's agentic choices are typically made in reference to values (Kockelman 2017:20).

2.3 Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as Applied to Translation

ANT is based on the notion that all entities in the world are constituted and reconstituted in different, varying webs of relations (Latour 1988; cited in Farias et al. 2020:xx). It provides a framework for studying the relations between various elements in a certain operating context by portraying them as a network. The networks consist of three kinds of nodes: *actors* that are connecting other actors to themselves, as well as *mediators* and *inscriptions* that serve as

channels or tools through which the actors exert influence in the connecting process. It has been widely debated whether actors as referred to in ANT can be human only or if non-human elements can be considered to be actors as well (see e.g. Farias et al. 2020:xxi). The approach applied herein emphasises the significance of intent and accountability as defining characteristics of agency, and therefore the term *actor* refers to humans and institutions only. Mediators, on the other hand, can be people, technical systems, rules and norms, monetary resources or other such elements that have a specific role in the formation and functioning of the network. Inscriptions are artefacts, typically texts, that outline the rules and norms applicable to the given relation in the network (see e.g. Latour 2005; Sayes 2014; Michael 2017; Louhivuori 2019; Huhtasalo 2022).

Mediators and inscriptions are of particular interest in the analysis featured in the present study. Even though such elements as technical systems, agreements, guidelines and norms are not intentional, accountable actors, they nevertheless have a great influence on the outcome of the translation process (cf. Abdallah 2012:24–25). Today's translation processes are almost entirely digital, and technology frames, defines and even takes over translators' agency in many ways. While the ever-increasing role of translation memory and machine translation technologies is widely discussed in TS research and attention has also been paid to project management systems (see e.g. Risku et al. 2019; 2022), the influence of other technical systems, such as publishing platforms and even calendar applications, is often overlooked. Nevertheless, the publishing platform, for example, can set considerable constraints that affect the translator's textual solutions (for a practical example of this, see Haapaniemi 2023).

Inscriptions involved in the networks of translation include various public and private agreements, guidelines and statutes. Business agreements, such as those between LSPs and their clients, are typically confidential, and even though they may affect the translation process in many ways, their contents are only revealed even to the translator insofar that is necessary to ensure compliance with the agreement; the target text readers – as well as researchers – remain unaware of these influential background factors. For example, when magazines and newspapers purchase rights to publish articles originally produced for another publication in another language, the copyright clauses of the purchase agreement can quite strictly stipulate that no omissions or additions are allowed. This restricts the editors' and translators' textual agency and may lead to the translated articles seeming partly irrelevant and

alien to the target-culture readers – who may attribute this inadequacy to the editor and/or translator.

Statutes, on the other hand, are public, and in the realm of public governance, agency is fundamentally shared between statutes and the people who use the statutes as grounds for their action. While there are concrete human actors behind the statute texts, these actors are anonymous and the texts are deemed to be produced by a faceless institution, which serves as a node in the network (Bernstein 2017:41–43).

The analysis presented in section 4 employs the notion of an actor network and makes use of central ANT concepts. The focus is on the very existence and wide extent of the network instead of an in-depth analysis of the power dynamics between actors.

3. Methodology

Section 4 below presents two example cases: Case 1 describes a journalistic translation process in which the translation is carried out by a freelance translator for a newspaper via an LSP company. Case 2 describes translation processes involved in the drafting of treaties. Both case descriptions are based on multiple datasets obtained by interviews or ethnographic methods.

Case 1 is based on a first-person approach that can be described as small autoethnography (see Uotinen 2021). Business translation processes can seldom be analysed in detail due to strict confidentiality requirements. However, in this case I was the translator and the analysis relies mainly on my personal experience and knowledge. Furthermore, thanks to the public nature of the translated texts, the LSP representative and newspaper editor gave their consent to this study. To widen the perspective, brief e-mail interviews were conducted with the LSP's project manager (PM; this refers to the role of the person in the process, not their job title) and the newspaper editor in charge of publishing the articles in question (Helsingin Sanomat Editor, HSE). Questions for these interviews were provided by a fellow researcher, reflecting the perspective of a reader of the newspaper. The interview material comprises 7 questions (4 to the newspaper and 3 to the LSP) pertaining to the processes, agreements and the other parties' views about the translator's role. The responses were imported to the qualitative research tool ATLAS.ti and coded for statements indicating different parties' agency.

Case 2 derives from data gathered in two semi-structured expert interviews with Finnish–Russian treaty translators (RT1 and RT2). The interviews mainly focused on the treaty drafting process. The interviews were conducted via Teams, and each lasted approximately one hour. The transcribed interview material comprises a total of approximately 15,000 words. The transcripts were imported to ATLAS.ti and coded with tags indicating different parties' agency or the underlying elements[1]. The tag "distributed agency" was used for utterances indicating the simultaneous involvement of more than one actor, and this emerged as the most frequent tag in the dataset. All interviews for both cases were conducted in Finnish, and the quoted responses have been translated by the author for the purpose of the present article.

For both cases, all actors, mediators and inscriptions that have an influence on the final outcome were identified. In Tables 1 and 2 in Section 4 below, these are jointly referred to as "nodes" and further categorised according to their type as human or institutional actors, technical mediators or inscriptions. For further clarification, the tables also provide a brief comment about each node's influence in the process.

4. Networks of Distributed Agency: Two Case Studies

This section provides an analysis of the most essential nodes of the networks of distributed agency in the two cases. The networks in their full complexity are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

4.1 Case 1: Meduza – Helsingin Sanomat

Meduza is an international publication produced by journalists of Russian origin operating in Latvia. It features content about events in Russia and around the world in Russian and English. The publication has been declared an "undesired operator" by the Russian

[1] A complete list of all tags used (also for the purposes of other studies):

- agency – textual, paratextual, extratextual
- background factors – expertise, confidence, motivation, accountability
- structures – time, money, law, politics, convention
- distributed agency
- [tags indicating each actor]

This paper only focuses on segments tagged with "distributed agency".

government (meduza.io). Following the Russo-Ukrainian war, the leading Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (HS) started to publish selected Meduza articles translated into Finnish from Russian. The translations were commissioned from an LSP that collaborates with several freelance translators. The workflow proceeded as follows: the HS editor chose a Meduza article to be published in HS, copied the text into an MS Word file and sent to the LSP for translation. The LSP's project manager imported the file to the translation workflow system and assigned a freelance translator to the case. The translator translated the text and returned it to the project manager who then forwarded it to HS. The HS editor edited the translated text to make it appealing to Finnish readers and then published it in the HS online publication and often also in the printed newspaper (HSE; PM).

The human and institutional actors directly involved in the translation process are Meduza as a publication and its journalists authoring the articles, HS as a publication and its editors, the LSP as a company and its project managers, and, finally, the translators. It is worth noting that this process lacks one actor typically present in all professional translation processes: the translation revisor. This is because the HS editor assumed overall responsibility for editing the translated articles, including language revision.

The description above also identifies one indirect yet significant institutional actor: the state/government of Russia, which, by declaring Meduza an "undesired operator", had an impact on the process at many levels. First of all, due to the undesired status of the publication, most sources interviewed for the articles remained anonymous, which made the texts linguistically more complex ("says our source who has close ties to the Kremlin" instead of "says Name Surname"), thus complicating the translator's work at the textual level. In addition, this declaration also restricted the translator's possibilities of practicing paratextual agency by consulting native Russian contacts in difficult parts of the texts – it had to be considered that not all wanted to be connected to the undesired operator in any way.

The process involved various technical systems and tools that both supported and restricted the actors' agency. When choosing the translator(s) to whom the assignment was offered, the PM used the company's translator database linked to its project management system. In addition to proficiency in the language pair in question, the selection criteria included the translator's ability to use translation memory software, as well as their specialisation in more

creative texts. Once a suitable translator was identified, this was marked in the system so that the following Meduza-HS translations were first offered to this translator directly without needing to go through the selection process again (PM). This way, the project management system serves as a channel through which the PM exercises their agency – it is a mediator with a rather substantial role.

The translator's textual agency, in turn, is exercised through the mediation of the translation memory tool. Apart from being a decisive factor in translator selection, the translation memory tool frames the practical translation process by limiting the translator's ability to apply edits during translation. In this example case, this supported the process model agreed upon with the client: the Meduza articles were to be translated as such and provided to the HS editor, who was to edit them according to the newspaper's guidelines and policies. Furthermore, the translation memory software facilitates the translator's work by automatically reproducing hyperlinks (with the help of tags) to match those in the source text. This, however, turned out to be a negative feature in this case: Meduza's online publication system includes both external links and internal links to pop-up windows that provide additional information about certain topics. While this is a very useful, agency-supporting feature for the translator, the links proved to be incompatible with HS's online publication system, and HS requested that instead of having embedded links, the web addresses were to be written out in brackets after the word to which the link was to be embedded. This brought an additional step to the workflow for the PM, and it also exacerbated the translator's work, as the long and nondescript link texts diminished the readability of the text in the translation phase.

The translation process was governed by a number of inscriptions, both official agreements and generally accepted guidelines. The agreements comprised the framework agreement between the translator and the LSP, the service purchase agreement between the LSP and HS, and the article purchase agreement between HS and Meduza. All of these are confidential business agreements whose impact on the process can only be addressed at a general level. The framework agreement between the translator and the LSP defines the pricing and general terms and conditions of translation work, thereby removing the need for assignment-specific negotiations, streamlining the process and saving time and effort for both parties. The agreement between the LSP and HS further outlined terms relating to the translator's agency,

such as the fact that the texts are to be translated as such and edited by HS without consulting the translator. The agreement between HS and Meduza was prepared by the Chief Editor of HS, and even the editor in charge of publishing the Meduza articles was not fully aware of its contents (HSE). Nevertheless, it was known that this agreement allowed the texts to be edited before publication in Finnish, which was useful information for the translator. Although no major editing was expected, this allowed the translator to exercise textual-level agency in the form of slight adjustments, such as minor omissions or explicatory additions to the text. As pointed out in Section 2.1 above, translator's notes and comments are a typical way of expressing paratextual agency. In these assignments, an unusually large number of supplementary comments were submitted by the translator to the HS editor, explaining the textual choices and providing additional information, such as some useful points found in Meduza's pop-up windows, yet leaving it to the editor's discretion whether or not to include these in the final articles. According to the interview response, this was viewed favourably by the client (HSE).

Further inscriptions affecting the translation process include various journalistic guidelines. The original articles are written according to Meduza's guidelines and ethical codes (meduza.io) and also to a certain extent following Russian journalistic traditions, which differ slightly from those adhered to in Finland. HS, on the other hand, applies its own internal guidelines and policies, as well as the Finnish Journalistic Guidelines (jsn.fi) to the final versions of the articles. These inscriptions emphasise the agency of HSE: as the translator cannot be aware of HS's internal guidelines, it is natural for the editor to assume responsibility for editing the translated article to its final format. Consequently, the editor also assumes accountability for the final result, while the translator is accountable to the LSP and HS only. Reflecting this notion of accountability, the translator's name was not always mentioned in conjunction with the published articles (HSE).

Table 1. Actor network in a journalistic translation process

Node	**Type**	**Action**
Translator	human	translating Meduza articles commenting on translation solutions
Translator's colleagues	human	assisting Translator with translation solutions
LSP	institution	negotiating agreement with Translator negotiating agreement with HS

LSP's PM	human	choosing translator acting as mediator between Translator and HS
LSP's PM system	technical mediator	choice of translator (parameters) workflow management
LSP's internal guidelines	inscription	choice of translator (setting parameters)
TM software	technical mediator	providing Translator with translation solutions limiting edits reproducing links and formatting
Agreement between Translator and LSP	inscription	enabling and framing translation work by the particular translator, including rates
Agreement between LSP and HS	inscription	enabling and framing the translation process affecting rates payable to Translator
HS's publication platform	technical mediator	enabling HS readers to read the articles online affecting use of embedded links
HS's internal guidelines	inscription	[mainly secret] governing the choice of articles, format, contents and language of translated articles
Finnish Journalistic Guidelines	inscription	governing the preparation of articles
Agreement between HS and Meduza	inscription	[mainly secret] affecting translation strategies (right to edit)
HS	institution	outlining general guidelines on articles to publish negotiating agreements with Meduza and LSP
HS's editor	human	choosing articles to publish editing translated articles
HS readers	human (collective)	reading articles, paying for subscription
Meduza	institution	outlining general guidelines on articles to produce negotiating agreement with HS
Meduza's internal guidelines	inscription	defining the chosen stance (e.g., against war, against Russian oppression of free press)
Meduza's publication platform	mediator technology	enabling Meduza readers to read the articles online enabling provision of additional info as embedded links
Meduza journalists	human	choosing topics producing the original article texts
Meduza readers	human (collective)	reading articles, paying for subscription
Russian journalistic guidelines	inscription	governing the style of articles and use of language

State of Russia	institution	declaring Meduza “an undesirable organization”

4.2 Case 2: Finnish–Russian Treaties

Treaties may be concluded in more than one language, in which case the text is equally authoritative in each language (VCLT 1969:Article 33). This is typically the case when the concluding states have different languages. Such multilingual drafting processes, naturally, involve multilingual communication professionals, whereas monolingual treaties do not require translation. The present study deals with a translator-mediated process.

In Finland, treaty conclusion typically includes two separate kinds of translation. First, multilingual communication takes place during the treaty preparation phase. Second, as Finland is a bilingual country, all treaty texts must be translated into Swedish before presenting the Government proposal on ratifying the treaty to the Parliament (Treaty Guide 2021:105; Treaty Guide 2021, App. 16:2). Due to space constraints, the following analysis focuses only on the first part, translation between Finnish and Russian taking place during treaty preparation. The following sections discuss the process as described by the interviewees (R1 and R2); for further research dealing with the drafting and translation of treaties (see e.g., Prieto Ramos 2014; Masiola and Tomei 2015; and Santalahti and Mikhailov 2019).

The analysis addresses the following process: The need to conclude a new treaty or amend an existing one is recognised. The case is presented to the respective ministry, which contacts the other party to initiate negotiations and establishes a negotiating committee. The parties’ committees prepare the treaty by means of exchange of letters and/or negotiations. All correspondence is translated; face-to-face negotiations are interpreted and text is drafted and translated in the course of the negotiations. It is agreed which party produces the first actual treaty text draft, and the other party translates this draft into its language. The draft is then circulated for comments, and once the final form is agreed on, the text is revised to ensure correctness and identicality between the language versions. After this, the text is translated into Swedish in Finland and presented to the Parliament for ratification (RT1, RT2; Treaty Guide 2021, App. 1).

The network of actors involved in treaty preparation is highly situational, depending on the topic and method of conclusion. By default, all treaty processes involve at least two

institutional actors: the parties to the treaty, which can be states or international organisations. Treaties are typically prepared by decision-making bodies representing these institutions, such as ministries. These bodies, in turn, are represented by individuals, usually in the form of negotiating committees. In addition, specialists of different fields may participate in the process. Exercising extratextual agency, the Russian translators employed by Finnish ministries have negotiated the right to be present already at the negotiating committee's preparatory meetings in order to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the topic at hand. In the negotiations between the parties to the treaty, translators actively exercise paratextual agency by discussing terms and expressions with the negotiators. It is noteworthy that in treaty negotiations between Finland and Russia, the Finnish translators have quite often interpreted and translated for both parties in the absence of an interpreter representing the Russian delegation (RT1, RT2). Thus, the Finnish translators' agency extends even to the Russian versions of the treaty text.

Translators employed by the Finnish Prime Minister's Office or ministries have ample opportunities to exercise paratextual agency also with regard to information mining, as they have direct access to the negotiating committee members and also favourable conditions for contacting specialists of various fields to discuss terminology and similar important issues. It is also worth noting that the translated treaty texts are usually revised by lawyers or subject-matter specialists, not multilingual communication specialists. Translators review each other's work as allowed by the deadlines, but in general, the other actors in the network place a great deal of trust in the translators' professional competence (RT1, RT2).

The Finnish translators/interpreters working on treaties are typically employed by the ministry in question or the Prime Minister's Office, but external subcontractors can also be assigned. If translation work needs to be outsourced, the government translator assumes the role of a project manager, coordinating the translation process and revising the translations (RT1). This constitutes agency by proxy, whereby the government translator maintains accountability for the translations while the final accountability for the treaty text rests with the negotiators. This boundary of agency and accountability may not always be clear to all parties:

> Then, once we had the translated texts all ready, they were sent to experts for preparation, and I remember that at that point there was a lot of complaining about it being "just translation" and not finished treaty text. So, in this, in my opinion, the

> experts did not understand that it would have been their task to prepare the text and that we translators, of course, only produce translation within that schedule. (RT1)

The role of technical mediators in the treaty process is not as significant as it is in typical LSP-mediated translation assignments. Translation memory software is used, which can support the translator greatly if long segments of text are repeated from previous treaties (RT1, RT2). The translation memory functions as an integrated database containing previous treaty texts and allowing the easy reuse of previously translated segments. However, translation memories cannot usually be accessed in the negotiation situations, so at that point the textual agency is only shared between those present (RT1).

With regard to using previous translations, the translators' agency is restricted not by the technology as such but rather by an underlying norm: it is a rule that if certain parts of a treaty's contents remain unchanged from a previous treaty, the corresponding text will remain unchanged as well. Hence, even new treaties can contain seemingly archaic language (RT1). It can be said that, through this convention, the voice of earlier treaty translators is also woven into the actor network. Further norms that frame and restrict the treaty translator's agency are related to the generally accepted conventions of treaty preparation. Particularly restrictive is the rule that all language versions of the treaty text must be completely identical, even to the point of using linguistic forms in a way that contradicts the target language's norms of fluent language use (RT1).

The conclusion of treaties is mandated and regulated by a number of inscriptions, i.e. international, supranational and national statutes, including the globally adopted Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. In Finland, guidelines concerning treaty conclusion are outlined in the Treaty Guide (2021). These inscriptions set out the legal framework for the treaty process and thus also govern the work of the translators, but they do not offer textual-level support. The Finnish Treaty Guide includes a glossary (Treaty Guide 2021, App. 16), but it only features Finnish and English terminology and thus it is of little use for the Russian translators (RT1).

Table 2. Actor network in treaty preparation and translation

Node	**Type**	**Action**
Finland (state)	institution	official party to the treaty
Russia (state)	institution	official party to the treaty
field-specific experts	human	identifying the need; initiating process
workgroups / committees	human (individual/ collective)	treaty preparation consulting translator regarding terminology
Ministry/Finland	institution	confirming need giving permission to start preparation
Ministry/Russia	institution	confirming need giving permission to start preparation
Fin/Rus translator(s)	human	translating preparatory works interpreting in negotiations translating treaty text
stakeholder specialists	human/institution	commenting on the treaty draft
Russian embassy representatives (lawyers)	human	revising the treaty text language assuring identity of language versions
Fin/Swe translator	human	translating the treaty into Swedish for Finnish Government's proposal and publication
Finnish Parliament	institution	bringing the treaty into effect
Russian Duma	institution	bringing the treaty into effect
earlier versions of treaty text writers and translators of these	mediator / human	copied to revised treaties if content remains unchanged
translation memory	technical mediator	providing translator with translation solutions
industry-specific experts	human	consulting translator regarding special terminology
Government Rules of Procedure	inscription	outlining which Ministry concludes treaties – including translation
Finnish Treaty Guide	inscription	outlining the procedures of preparing and bringing into force of treaties in Finland
Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties	inscription	outlining the procedures of preparing and bringing into force of treaties globally
Russian state recommendations for treaty preparation	inscription	outlining the procedures of preparing and bringing into force of treaties in Russia

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The present study approaches distributed agency mainly from the perspective of cooperation, through factors contributing to a single outcome. The aim has been to make the wide distribution of agency visible and illustrate how factors that may, at first glance, seem like insignificant background elements may in fact have a direct and tangible impact on the way a translator can perform their work.

The network of actors and other elements influencing the final outcome of translation processes is situated and dynamic, varying greatly between different contexts. This has been featured in this paper through two different translation processes: journalistic translation by a freelancer via an LSP, and treaty translation by state-employed translators. In the journalistic translation process, the actor network remained relatively stable, even though each assignment was unique. The case of treaty translation, on the other hand, particularly highlights the situatedness of agency distribution in translation processes: the actor network varies significantly between individual treaty preparation processes. It is, however, noteworthy that in both cases presented herein, the network extends up to the state level. In treaty conclusion, states are key actors as parties to the treaty, but actions taken in state governance exert a major influence even in the journalistic translation process.

Norms and values – whether manifested through personal ethics, professional practices or written inscriptions – are significant mediators in all actor networks, also in those described in this paper. They can either constrain or reinforce the translator's agency. In the journalistic translation process, the translator's agency was restricted by certain inscriptions, such as the agreements between the publications involved and the LSP. However, motivated by such personal values as the professional-ethical ambition to serve the client and target-text readers in the best possible way, the translator chose to actively exercise paratextual agency by providing explanations and additional information for the client. The treaty translators, in turn, face constraints on their agency in the form of globally accepted treaty-related conventions, such as the principle of fidelity to the single instrument (see Šarcevic 1997:112, 215), which means that the language versions of a treaty are to preserve the unity of meaning, legal effect and intent. This is sometimes pursued at the expense of linguistic fluency. Another agency-restricting convention is preserving the text unchanged when no modifications are made to the contents.

It has been argued that in modern processes of translation, agency is shifting away from translators towards digital systems in particular (see e.g. Marshman 2014; Risku et al. 2019). In the two cases described above, digital systems played very different roles. In the treaty translators' work, the only digital element serving as a node in the actor network was translation memory software, which the interviewed translators found to be agency-supporting but not instrumental. The journalistic translation process, in turn, involved a number of digital systems, such as translation memory, project management and publication systems, which both enabled and constrained the translator's agency.

This paper employs a descriptive approach, and power dynamics have intentionally been left outside the scope of analysis. While it is understandable that agency is not distributed evenly and different agents have different degrees of agency, it is difficult to define such degrees of agency in exact terms, as agency is not a measurable entity (Kockelman 2017:17). However, approaching the matter through the background factor of accountability, it can be noted that in neither of the processes described herein does the final accountability rest with the translator. In the journalistic process, the party responsible for the final product – the text that the readers access – is the end client, the newspaper, represented by the editor. The following statement by the PM in response to the question about resolving possible differences of opinion between the translator and the client emphasises the client's dominant position in the actor network:

> If the HS editor's view differs from that of the translator, we won't even necessarily know about it; <u>they own the translation</u> we provide for them and as the client, they have every right to edit it. (PM; underlining added by the author)

Correspondingly, in treaty preparation, the party responsible for the outcome is ultimately the state as an institution, represented by the negotiators. This study contains two relatively small-scale case studies. The findings are case-specific and not to be generalised, but a similar approach could be applied to other cases, possibly also on a larger scale. One of the goals of this study was to point out that while it is hardly feasible for every translation researcher to make a detailed account of the actor networks underlying their research topic, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge their existence. Similarly, it is part of a professional translator's cognitive process to at least subconsciously take notice of all the influential elements linked to the process. This kind of research could also contribute to the

strengthening of translation awareness (see Kuusi et al. 2024) by making the clients and end-users of translation products more aware of the scope of a translator's agency – including its boundaries.

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