

Self-Revision without Self-Recrimination with Joachim Lépine

“I never lose. I either win or I learn.” - Nelson Mandela

When we make an error, there's a feeling of shame that often accompanies it. We have thoughts that many times lead to self-recrimination. In this presentation, Joe Lepine invited us to examine our concept of error, how to minimize it, and how to respond to it more constructively with a view to improving our own outlook and practices.

Overcoming Self-Recrimination

During the presentation, Joe asked the attendees if they identified as perfectionists, and, not surprisingly, many said they did. One member commented, “Errors hurt my perfectionist soul.” We are human, and we certainly don't like making mistakes. In the long run, an unrealistic stance towards error can lead to constant feelings of frustration, self-doubt, and even self-loathing that affect the quality of our work.

Think about how you interpret your own mistakes, and then think about how you react when others make mistakes. Usually, we are far more understanding of others, so apply that same mentality to your own work. Upholding excellence does not imply perfection.

Dealing with criticism is difficult. Emotions resulting from criticism are inevitable. We are allowed to mope and be upset over mistakes. But we also have an opportunity to learn and grow, to examine and improve. Being kind to ourselves when we make mistakes can help us deal with criticism constructively and cultivate a professional mindset towards errors, making our work more effective and enjoyable.

Common sources of errors

Even the most competent and experienced translators make mistakes. Understanding how and why they happen teaches us how to better deal with these situations. Many of them are predictable due to the very nature of translation.

Limited cognitive processing capacity automatizes less demanding tasks to focus on ones that require careful attention. On average, our brains can only retain seven elements at a time before short-term memory begins to fade. Working with sentences or segments that are too long to remember can introduce or blind us to possible errors.

Mental and visual fatigue occurs after excessive visual stimulation and information overload. Scrolling reading environments allow the brain to navigate and absorb information faster, but less thoroughly. Research suggests that reading in box environments results in better retention and comprehension of complex information.

Lack of critical distance can add or conceal errors. Translation is an exhaustive, even personal process between translator and text and all its layers. It's easy to become invested and attached to our work. It wouldn't be surprising if we caught the same mistakes we made in some else's work more easily than in our own.

Emotional regulation is important to maintain quality. Constant stress creates a negative state of tension that harms our mental and physical health; it can aggravate existing challenges and decrease productivity. Working in a relaxed state cultivates good attention to detail. We are more mindful and observant, leading to better outcomes.

Minimizing mistakes

Our brains are excellent at thinking and creating, but they are not a great tool to depend on for storing and accessing information. Airline pilots stand out for having incredibly small error rates. Their secret? Extensive checklists. Improvising and skipping steps is not allowed. Set procedures must be followed, and communication with control towers is maintained. There's a formula to rely on. Having a checklist paves the way for high quality standards.

Getting to know our work style aids in building a better self-revision process. Joe calls these our inner animals. Cheetahs are brave quick drafters who have an intense post-drafting phase; they should focus on flow and accuracy when revising. Koalas take their time to create beautiful sentences on their first draft; they should keep an eye on accuracy. Lastly, Careful Crabs are those who pay close attention to detail and accuracy; they should make a note to focus on flow. Joe's number one advice is to not overly rely on revision, as it can take too much time and introduce new errors if we are not careful.

Wrap-up

Errors will continue to happen. Question and challenge your views towards them. We can build a conscious self-revision process to compensate for weaknesses and have a professional mindset towards error. Be a pilot, get to know your inner animal, and always be kind to yourself. After all, we are human.