

Teaching the Professional Dimension of Translation in Academic Translation Programmes



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ABSTRACT: Reform policies in higher education have brought about changes in attitudes regarding the education of translators. One of the latest challenges concerns the concept of professionalization of translation and the need for a type of training that would provide students with the specific skills required for the translator's profession. Indeed, most translation programmes today aim at educating highly qualified translators on a competence-based training. More particularly, the emphasis is on metacognitive competence acquisition and the reflexive capacity development taking into account students' motivation and expectations, their general background knowledge as well as individual learning styles. The present paper proposes a didactic approach on a professionally-oriented basis that would help students enter most effectively the translation industry by realizing at the same time the importance of acquiring a strong theoretical background on translation. Among the main issues to be addressed are the contribution of translation theory to the practice of translation, the role of the translator as cultural mediator, his social responsibilities as well as the translator's psychological traits and their effect on translation quality. Finally, it proposes a variety of learning activities that are closely related to the act of translating together with a number of student assessment methods bearing a strong professional orientation.

KEYWORDS: professionally-oriented didactic model, the status of translation theory, the translator's social responsibilities, the psychological aspect of translation, student assessment methods

1. INTRODUCTION

Institutional translator training is a phenomenon which started in the mid twentieth century while until then translators were either self-taught or with some form of apprenticeship alongside experienced professionals. Kelly (2005) mentions that the oldest institutions which provided general translator training are the Moscow Linguistic University (ex-Maurice Thorez Institute, 1930), the Ruprecht-Karls Universität Heidelberg (1933), the Université de Genève (1941) and the Universität Wien (1943). The growing need for professional translators and interpreters in bilingual contexts and the development of economy led to the establishment of offered courses in translation in an increasing number of countries. The majority of these programmes functioned in the framework of the already established Departments of Language and Literature or on an interdepartmental basis (Caminade & Pym, 1998, p. 283).

Regarding their structure, Kelly (2010, p. 87) stresses the lack of a systematic design procedure, with the early programmes offering a number of autonomous courses without being interconnected to each other, depending on the available teaching staff or the local professional market of translation. These programmes take different forms; some of them offer training at undergraduate level while others at postgraduate level; some are fully integrated into the university system while others are offered by institutions which provide professional diplomas in specific areas of translation without belonging to the university system. In addition, the content of these programmes differs; academic translations programmes include a higher proportion of theoretical elements while non-academic programmes tend not to include or to include a minimum of theoretical components. Similarly, some provide general training to translation while others offer expert training in specific types of translation such as literary translation, technical translation, legal translation or audiovisual translation.

2. TOWARD A PROFESSIONALLY-ORIENTED TEACHING APPROACH

Training future translators for the translation industry implies introducing into academic translation programmes the professional dimension of translation. Within this framework, a practically-oriented teaching model designed to integrate the concept of professionalization is proposed so that students receive a holistic approach toward the translator's profession. The model centres around the following matters: the status of translation theory and its connectedness to the practice of translation, metacognitive skills development, the issue of social responsibility in the translator's profession, the role of the translator as cultural "transformer" as

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well as his psychological features and their effect on the translation product. In addition, the model offers proposals regarding practical learning activities that could be implemented in academic translation programmes as well as professionally-oriented assessment methods of students' progress.

2.1 The status of theory

One of the main issues addressed in Translation Studies concerns the status of theory in translator training programmes and the question of whether translation theory should be taught as a separate course or it should be integrated into the practical courses. According to principal authors (Gambier 2012, Gouadec 2007), the introduction to translation theory should be basically practice-oriented and deal with the most important parameters of the professional aspect of translation.

To achieve this, it is important to promote discussion of theoretical issues in class and to devote attention to the contradictory positions that arise in the debates. The discussion should focus not so much on the purely theoretical matters, as to their implications for the practice of translation. The most important link between theories and professional work should be provided during the discussion of the theoretical literature, by providing trainees with examples from professional translation experience. Apart from the general literature read by all students, each student could read some additional literature of his own choice. This material could be presented by the student orally in class, enabling the rest of the class to assess this piece of material and thus to develop their critical ability as one of the main skills required by professionals in the translation industry.

To combine theory and main aspects of translation practice, students could also form groups according to their interest and do project work together outside class hours so that they get acquainted to contemporary translation theory in the context of real translation tasks. The overall purpose of the assigned projects is to give participants an opportunity to practise theories with which they have been acquainted during the course. As far as the translation teacher's role is concerned, he could place both the literature and his experience at the students' disposal, but he could also critically assess the value of the contributions in the context of an assigned project work.

Teachers of translation theory should bear in mind that the connection among general theoretical considerations about translation can be brought to life within the context of two language systems. According to Gentile, one way of achieving this connection might be to design a series of structured experiences which would allow students to discover principles that are then reinforced with further practice. He goes on with suggesting the division of theory courses into, on the one hand, a part which introduces the thinking in the field of translation in a broad fashion and, on the other hand, a part which aims at bridging the gap between thinking of translation and the , purely practical approach (1995, p. 61).

2.2 Raising the issue of responsibility

A basic concept that is closely related to the professional dimension of translation and should be further analysed is the term of "responsibility" that would help students to show deeper view of their needs as professionals. Developing translation students' awareness of their responsibilities as trainees constitutes an important task that will definitely encourage them to be fully aware of their responsibilities as future professionals. They can benefit from their position as trainees in order to be able to cater for their own needs as professionals and in this sense the teachers' expertise can prove very constructive in guiding them toward the philosophy of autonomous learning. Another concept that is related to the issue of responsibility is the so-called "service attitude concept" toward the supplier-customer in the translation industry (Sainz, 1995), as one of the main components involved in translation as a professional activity. According to experts in quality, 80% of an enterprise's success lies in its attitude and only 20% in its skills which means that students have to cultivate their service attitude toward their future customers.

The question that is usually raised is how the quality-of-service provision could be taught in translator training programmes. Sainz stresses the translation teacher's invaluable role who, apart from his core task which is to teach translation, he can also teach his students how to think critically and, mostly, how to respect their clients. Indeed, liaising with the clients is a key feature of the trainee translators' future profession given that they are the ones who can provide essential information on the purpose of the translation commission by helping translators to resolve various matters related to the assigned work. Thus, one of the main objectives in academic translation programmes should be to provide students with explicit guidelines and advice on how best to handle their interpersonal relationship with clients.

2.3 Translators as mediators of culture

It is very important to incorporate real-world criteria within a curriculum for translator training so that students realise that translation is an act that takes place within a specific socio-cultural context. In order to handle appropriately a text, translators need to know all the special features of the text they are translating, as well as its function and status both in the source and the target culture. Therefore, the related sociocultural parameters should never be underestimated; on the contrary, they should make up an integral part of the translation assignments in a translator training programme. Among the basic questions students should be encouraged to ask are: who wrote the text? for whom? with what intentions? what adjustments need to be done in order to produce a text that is acceptable to the target culture?

More specifically, trainees have to become conscious of all the ideological, political and cultural implications of the translation phenomenon and decide how to handle them without violating the sociocultural norms dominated in the target culture. Pym stresses

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that in order for cultural mediation to be worthwhile, translators must move from a focus on linguistic replacement to one on “cooperation between cultures” and “mutual benefit” (2002, p.), while, in the words of Taft: “The role of the mediator is performed by interpreting the expressions, intentions, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group to the other, that is, by establishing and balancing the communication between them. In order to serve as a link in this sense, the mediator must be able to participate to some extent in both cultures” (1981, p. 53).

Intercultural intervention is a form of translatorial intervention which takes account of the impact of cultural distance when translating although matters such as who is responsible for cultural mediating, how it is done and at what level of the cultural iceberg are still under consideration. Despite the fact that it is almost impossible to teach students every aspect of a given cultural community, there should be made a systematizing approach to help them to develop the awareness of their own culture and that of the foreign culture as opposed to their own.

Within this framework, the objectives of reinforcing the concept of cultural selfawareness training to translation programmes are described by Dollerup as follows:

- To develop students’ awareness of culture-specific differences in behaviour and their effect to intercultural situations
- To enable students reflect upon their own culture-bound conditions of perception and upon the other culture’s conditions of perception
- To help students reflect upon the clients’ conditions of perception (Interpretation, evaluation) (1995, p. 78).

2.4 The psychological aspect of translation

The psychological aspect of translation concerns both the training environment of the translator and the pressure of the translator’s profession. The translator’s profession entails a lot of pressure nowadays which is also felt by translation students, who expect to receive solid training in order to face the challenges of the profession in the real world. In this context, the task of the translation teacher consists not only in helping students to deal with the stress felt during the learning process but, mostly, in realizing the psychological factors involved in the act of translating.

According to Jääskeläinen, translation psychology research should cover not only what is happening in the translator’s mind during the translation process but it should also embrace the emotional, behavioral and social factors involved with the translator’s personality (2012, p. 19). Another psychological parameter in most translation-related phenomena concerns the translators’ personality features and their impact on task performance and quality. The interrelatedness between personality features and translation quality could increase students’ understanding of the psychological parametres involved in the translation process and it may also help them to assess their weaknesses and strong points as translators.

The psychological immersion of the translation phenomenon may also investigate other features such as the way in which translated texts are interpreted by their recipients. One of the most important aspects in the translator’s work is related to the process of understanding the source text as a reader and addressing the target readership in a way that meets the needs of the translation commissioner.

Another main dilemma that is raised regards the professional ethics of translation and the translators’ choices especially when professional ethics contrasts with personal ethics given that translators are human beings with their own attitudes, beliefs and opinions. Robinson stresses that the definition of translator ethics is highly controversial. To his words: “For many translators it is unthinkable to do anything that might harm the interests of a person or group that is paying for the translation, the translation ‘commissioner’ or ‘initiator’ “(1997, p. 121).

2.5 Learning activities

Since translation has become both a purposeful and a more complex activity, the tasks and procedures in a translation class have changed; they aim at developing among others students’ reading skills, their problem spotting and solving skills, their creative and critical ability. Gambier proposes three main methodological approaches aiming at closely relating translation theory to the professional aspect of translation which are the following (2012, p. 34).

Integration of process-centered activities that entail a metacognitive nature such as:

1a. Activities which aim at helping students challenge their beliefs and misconceptions about translation as well as their self-concept of translators.

1b. Activities which motivate students by developing their creativity.

1c. Activities which help them develop their reading skills and understand the importance of the concept of meaning in order to realise that translators are not ordinary readers searching for information out of pleasure.

1d. Activities which help students to localise and solve translation problems. Trainees need to be aware of appropriate strategies so that they can decide for the proper solution to translation problems and difficulties. 1e. Activities which help students to develop their ability to look for relevant sources and evaluate the variety of information that is available on the internet.

A second methodological approach is the situational approach that stresses the importance of analyzing step by step the translation commission by providing answers to questions such as “who is the commissioner”, “why is the translation needed”,

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“who is the targeted recipient”, “which is the influence of deadlines”, “what are the quality criteria requirements”. Collective projects approach the translation process in a holistic manner by analysing and presenting rationally the steps involved in the entire translation process. The assignment of collective projects would enable students to work together towards an end product implying collaboration among them and interaction with the commissioner.

A third approach is the text-based approach with the focus on text typology where different kinds of texts must be analyzed so that students understand how a text works within a given cultural and communicative context. The selection process of the texts to be translated entails certain difficulties and a number of factors determine the text choice to be made such as the expected learning outcomes and the subcompetences to be mastered. This approach focuses on reading comprehension activities which are sometimes overlooked in the learning process and on error analysis exercises in order to explain to students when they misinterpret text-types or make incorrect assumptions.

2.6 Assessment methods

In comparison to the traditional assessment process that is based, according to Gile, on “translation assignments which are corrected in class, with teachers criticizing or approving the students’ choices and presenting their own solution” (1994, p. 117), a process-oriented system is proposed where “teachers put to the students whenever possible rather than criticize them” and “trainees are considered as students of translation methods rather than as producers of finished products” (1994, p. 108).

The student assessment model proposed in the present article is based on the following three main principles: a. the principle of systematic feedback, b. the system of student-centered corrections and c. the principle of a humanistic approach to students’ errors.

As far as the principle of systematic feedback is concerned, Dollerup describes his feedback which consists of three components: 1. “corrections in the translations which students have handed in”, 2. “oral discussions in the class covering adequate as well as inadequate renditions”, and 3. “feedback form assessing strengths and weaknesses with each student” (1994, p. 125).

The student-centered approach described by Sainz considers that students “learn best when they are involved in developing learning objectives for themselves which are congruent with their current and idealized self-concept” (1994, p. 135). According to the student-centered approach, students have the right to know the evaluation system as well as who is judging their work and also by “a non-aggressive way of giving students feedback on their errors” since “the traditional method of re-writing the correct version on the student’s sheet is ...very disruptive, frustrating and stressful for students” (Sainz, 1994, p. 134).

Séguinot adopts a humanistic approach to translation errors by not describing them as violations of translational of language norms but “as surface manifestation of phenomena which are the object of study” (1989, p.74). She observes that there are errors which can be explained by the fact that a translator does not understand the source language or cannot handle well the target language while others are normal in the process of learning to translate.

Furthermore, Séguinot adopts a professional approach to error-correction that should emulate the real-life circumstances of translation industry, the basic points of which are summarised as follows:

- The trainee-trainer relationship should not be the traditional student-teacher relationship but should be similar to that of a professional translator and a trainee translator.
- The corrections should look like real life corrections so that the trainee should be aware of the work that a reviser has to do before the work is ready for print.
- Corrections should not follow the same pattern in all translations but they may vary from translation to translation aiming to make every translation perfect in itself.
- Correction strategies of teachers should be compared to those of editorial revisers (1989: 74).

3. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The continually increasing number of academic translation programmes worldwide has come to have a long debate regarding the challenges translation teachers face in training future translators and about possible ways of meeting successfully these challenges. One of the latest challenges in teaching translation concerns the need of training professional translators that would possess a wide range of competences in order to be able to meet the increasing demands of the translator’s profession. Within this framework, Hurtado Albir suggests programmes that should aim at producing highly competent translators by transforming students with certain language skills into professionals able to accomplish many different tasks such as to translate, localise, revise etc (2007).

As for the teaching approach to be adopted, although there is no unique model today of translation competence acquisition, training should be more profession-oriented; translation activities could be designed in terms of practical goals so that learners are aware of the translation process step by step and the translation strategies with a special role given to metacognitive and metalanguage acquisition during their training. As Gouadec stresses: “the lack of a consistent, systematic, scientific methodology/pedagogy is being compensated little by little by a more empiricallybased pedagogy with more explicit objectives and learning outcomes”. He further describes the following steps to be taken in translation teaching through which this can be achieved:

- Providing information on existing jobs and careers
- Integrating professional objectives at all stages of training

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- Simulation of different work situations by applying the same strategies and procedures as in a professional context
- Emulation of professional practice by carrying out translation service provision tasks under exactly the same conditions as in a standard professional context
- Immersion in real-life working environments, particularly through work placements (2007, pp. 327-360).

However, professionally-oriented training does not simply mean teaching students to become operatives by excluding any critical thinking acquisition and theoretical analyses. Quite the contrary, translation programmes should be supported by a strong theoretical foundation that would shed light to a number of practical issues such as the translation process, the professional environments of translation, the critical paths and the operations that make up the professional practice for which students are trained. To this context, the ultimate goal of translator training should be to help students realise that theory is directly related both to what they are taught in class and to their future experience of professional realities.

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