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Translation didactics: A proposal for teaching consecutive interpreting

ABSTRACT. The current article presents an example of a consecutive interpreting activity, which draws on the concept of autonomy in language learning. With regard to the “applied” component of translation studies, as formulated by Holmes (1988), the authors intend to demonstrate the need for enhancing foreign language competence in translator education, accentuating its role in the conceptualization of the discipline. Considering the context of this type of education, which is offered frequently to undergraduate students, the authors posit the need to concomitantly develop the command of a foreign language. They propose to compensate teaching practices derived from translation studies with the use of foreign language methodology for developing translating and interpreting skills.

KEYWORDS: teaching translation, translation studies, consecutive interpreting, foreign language teaching vs. translation, autonomy and collaborative learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation and interpreting are human activities which date back to the very beginnings of humankind. Yet a rigorous academic conceptualization of translation (also pertaining to oral interpretation)¹ is only a mid-twen-

¹ General translation theory encompasses any rendition, including interpreting, audiovisual translation, etc. (see Gile 2009). In Europe, translation theory incorporates interpreting,

tieth-century achievement. Earlier, it received only marginal attention from philosophers and other intellectuals, which did not result in any systematic reflection or conceptualization. Translation competence was perceived as an integral part of the knowledge of an additional language system. In a sense, it was visualized as a by-product of knowing a language.

At the birth of translation studies, which is perceived basically as a European phenomenon, the act of text rendition was considered a multifaceted process and an intellectually challenging activity. Although translation studies took on a purely linguistic paradigm in the initial stage, which “ruled the 1960s or 1970s” (Pym 2012: 60) with the visualization of rendition as looking for formal equivalence, James Holmes, the forefather of the discipline in the English-speaking world, worked out its conceptual map reaching further than the purely linguistic dimension, which was considered valid at the time (Munday 2016: 16ff). Modern reflection oscillates around the cultural or critical turn (including the ideological dimension) in translation studies and presents the final product of translation activities as a result of multi-layered translation processes, which influence both the ultimate content and form of the translated text.

In Holmes’s project, the “applied” aspect of translation studies, as contrasted against “pure” or theoretical ones, “concerns applications to the practice of translation” including, among other things, translator training. This categorization of the “applied” dimension is adopted by Van Doorslaer (2007: 223), although his taxonomy differentiates between the process of translation and translation studies. The association of the word “applied” with the didactic dimension of language studies reflects the initial conceptualization of the discipline of applied linguistics as the one which was directly related to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers 2001; Grabe 2012). Nonetheless, in contrast to foreign language teacher education, which is currently drawing on the achievements of applied linguistics – understood as the methodology of foreign language teaching, or more recently as glottodidactics² –, translator training, with a few notable examples³, is still on its way to

while in the USA, the term “Translation and Interpreting Studies” seems to be used. It is evident, for instance, in the names of professional organizations: American Translation and Interpreting Studies Association and European Society for Translation Studies respectively. In the present article, any mentioning of translation will be evocative of interpreting.

² The authors realize that this term is still paving its way and that there are other terms, e.g., the methodology of teaching foreign languages, language pedagogy or the study of foreign language learning and teaching.

³ See, for example, the University of Granada which has been specializing since 1979 in teaching translation, “when translation was still not considered a prestigious activity” (<http://grados.ugr.es/traduccion/?lang=en>). Their curriculum is thorough and offers tuition in linguistic skills in three languages, intercultural skills training and translation methodologies.

being fully established at universities. Despite the fact that translation courses are offered by many academic centers, practical training subjects are very much dispersed and segmented and teaching translation is very often based on teacher instincts.

This article aims to delineate some fundamental issues pertaining to translation teaching and offers a practical activity in developing consecutive interpreting skills among potential professionals. To fill in the gap between translation reflection and pedagogical practices, the authors inscribe their proposal firmly into didactic aspects, drawing both on translator competence, as derived from actual practices and teaching theories corresponding to foreign language learning and teaching. The latter element accounts for the reality of translator training, which entails awareness raising, referring to translation and, correspondingly, the development of linguistic proficiency, which also encompasses specialized languages. Our initial tenet is that the existing conceptual maps of translation teaching seem to neglect this important element, taking for granted that translation trainees have at their disposal well-developed linguistic competence.

2. TEACHING TRANSLATION

It is one thing to be a competent, well-informed and aware translator, it is yet another to possess capacities which make one a skilled and successful person in the public service, that is, “the behavioural components of translation quality” (Arumí Ribas 2010). In teaching translation, the former area may be correlated to making students acquainted with theoretical reflection underpinning translation, resulting from the application of different conceptualizations to the very process of rendition or the ruminations about the final product of such a process (e.g. Kubaszczyk 2017), including its functional existence in a given culture. The latter may refer to the technicalities pertaining to the translation processes in the form of strategies, methods or procedures, although there is no consistency in the use and application of the terms (cf. Molina & Albir 2002; Piotrowska 2007). In addition, it is our conviction that practical training of translators should consist in the development of (linguistic) skills and sensitivity to the intercultural differences between the perceptions of the act of rendition, i.e., transferring texts from one linguistic system to another is not the same activity for two different cultures.

Certainly, translation pedagogy is very often inferred directly from the general theoretical reflection on translation. Some authors make an equation between translation studies and their teaching. In other words, they seem to derive the pedagogy of translation in an implicit way from theoretical con-

siderations, without a direct reference to didactic issues. This claim may be exemplified by the publication of Hatim (2001). Its title *Teaching and re-searching translation* suggests that the volume includes pedagogical considerations, yet they are rather vague, since there is little or no explicit mention of practical teaching in this book. Consequently, the reader looking for pedagogical practicalities will be disappointed at its pedagogical implicitness as the book deals more with the history of translation, the different schools of thought informing it, the research methods, and reflection on practitioner research. Therefore, even though training has been delineated as an integral part of the conceptual map for translation studies, we are still lacking a comprehensive approach to “methodological problems in teaching”, as is indicated by some researchers (Soang 2016: 247). However, even Soang misleadingly equates translation methods, strategies and techniques when he refers to them as “the traditional methods of teaching translation” (ibid. 248) and justifies this claim evoking the publications of Bassnett (2002) and Newmark (1988). While both books certainly are used in teaching translation studies, they pertain more to the study of the processes of translation rather than to their direct pedagogical applications. For example, the word “teaching” occurs in them sporadically and predominantly in reference to foreign language teaching rather than teaching translation per se.

Nonetheless, it does not mean that there are no publications bringing translation didactics into focus. However, they are very rare or dedicated to selected aspects of developing translator or interpreter competence and performance. A detailed bibliographic review of professional literature is beyond the scope of this article. Illustratively, it needs to be mentioned that one of the most well-received and comprehensive textbooks written in English for teaching translation is *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training* by Gile (2009), in which the author, contrary to the reader expectations designated by the title, does not present direct educational guidelines or implications, but instead articulates theoretical components and models for translator training. By and large, it needs to be concluded that teaching translation is little inspired by (language) pedagogy itself, contrary to, for example, foreign language teaching. Instead, the practice of teaching translation is informed to the greatest extent by the competences the prospective candidates for the translation profession are expected to display to guarantee successful translation products.

At this point, we should question how far and in what ways translator education should be inspired by the translation process or evaluation of the translation product, though there can be no doubt that it should. However, the properties required in the target text cannot be equated with the teaching methods leading to their appropriate applications since there seems to be no

direct interface between the process of teaching and the expected effects. The adverse supposition seems to be a basic disadvantage of neoliberal education (cf. Lankiewicz 2018). Correspondingly, the need for proper application of pragmatic issues in a foreign language does not result in a method of language teaching called, as it were, the pragmatic approach. Instead, the awareness of pragmatic aspects necessitates the conceptual modification of foreign language pedagogy in such a way that their teaching is accounted for, as it is, for example, in the communicative approach. Similarly or parallelly, the post-structural approach to literary reflection does not easily transfer to methods of teaching literature, although it may have an influence on the commonly accepted activities dedicated to literary interpretations.

Translator or interpreter education is largely derived from general translation theory and practical reflection as well as by competences a prospective candidate to the profession should possess rather than by some kind of a pedagogical framework pertaining to developing translating skills. This is, in the opinion of the present authors, the weak point of such education. It should be informed by the methodology of foreign language teaching to a more considerable extent due to the fact that foreign language competence plays an important role in successful rendition of source texts or translation activities, in general.

3. LANGUAGE TEACHING AND / OR TRANSLATION TEACHING

Since language is the main tissue in teaching translation, translators or interpreters are expected to possess a good command of, at least, two language systems. Nonetheless, this results in a basic dilemma, with which many translation educators are faced: Should translation instruction concentrate on developing language skills or translation procedural technicalities? Historically, the knowledge of a target language (TL) was perceived as sufficient for activating rendition processes. Alternatively, translation was considered one of the basic language learning processes and thus “translation was relegated to an element of language learning” (Munday 2016: 13). This nesting of the two competences may well account for a longstanding equation between the domain of knowing the language and having translation abilities. Nowadays, we know that translation competence requires high language proficiency, but proficiency itself may not guarantee a successful rendition of a text from one language to another. A part of reflection in translation is derived from advances in the perception of language and knowledge, beyond their positivist paradigms, cultivated by the conviction that via language people are able to express meaning transparently, while

knowledge, in turn, is “a more or less reflection of objective reality” (Benson 2001: 20). This linear transfer of messages through the linguistic means (structures, patterns and words) constitutes the basic tenet of the linguistically-oriented Equivalence Theory in translation. The functional approach to translation, promoted among others by Bassnett (2002), puts to the fore the contextual aspects in transferring a source text (ST) to a target text (TT), and thus distances the possibility of producing the same content (message) with the same effect via a mere adherence to linguistic equivalence. This process-oriented approach to translation places emphasis, among others, on “the influence of a text, author or genre, on the absorption of the norms of the translated text into the TL system and on the principles of selection operating within that system” (Bassnett 2002: 18).

The organization of translator education is indicative of the need to develop both (linguistic and translating) competences at the same time. Potential candidates to the translation profession develop their translation skills, while at the same time they improve their linguistic abilities. Since translation courses are offered to undergraduate students (which is a common practice in Poland and Spain), their initial foreign language competence may be insufficient to carry out translating or interpreting activities. Hence, the above-mentioned dilemma constitutes a frequent reality for translation teachers, and translation classes frequently turn into traditional language classes, with the reservation that the majority of such classroom activities also incorporate translation exercises. Apparently, in this way we are going back to the roots of language teaching dominated by the Grammar-Translation Method in foreign language teaching (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 5ff), although such a claim is a gross simplification due to the fact that the teaching of formal aspects of language has gone far beyond the syntactic constitution of sentences. It needs to be underscored, however, that the development of linguistic, or more precisely, communicative competence, remains an essential part of the reality of translator education. Needless to say, language awareness of the mother tongue of the students is also in focus and the development of such an awareness is very often incorporated into the curriculum of a translation course. However, as mentioned earlier, the conceptual map of translator training formulated by Holmes, cited by Toury (1991; 1995), and assumed as “a point of departure” for other translation theoreticians such as Pym (1998), Hatim and Munday (2004), Snell-Hornby (2006), van Doorslaer (2007), seems to be incomplete as Munday (2016: 20) maintains. The “applied” area of translation studies does not incorporate developing language competence, or at least fostering language awareness, because linguistic proficiency in TL is taken for granted. Yet, common sense and the teaching practice of the authors of the present paper dictate that the

quality of translation is, to a large extent, a derivative of both the command of a foreign language and the awareness level of the native language. Thereby, conceptualization of translator education cannot go unnoticed in this respect.

4. INCORPORATING LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY INTO TRANSLATOR EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL

The assumed line of thinking necessitates the application of language teaching methodology for translator education. Publications in this area seem to recognize a close correspondence between language teaching methodology and translation teaching (e.g. Newmark 1988: 139ff; Soang 2016; Sekhiri 2016). The issue in question may be related to translation policy, an area envisioned by Holmes (1988: 77), which apart from “defining the place and role of translators, translating and translations in a society at large” should consider “what part translating should play in teaching and learning foreign languages” (Holmes 1988). The authors of the present paper invert the components and ask to what degree language teaching should be incorporated into translator education and translating activities. As Meylaerts (2011: 164) points out, little attention was given to developing the “applied” branch (understood as translation teaching) and translation policy. Interestingly, *The Oxford handbook of translation studies*, published online, offers only two chapters dedicated to pedagogical issues: training translators and interpreters respectively (Malmkjær & Windle 2011). Certain implications for the close correspondence between language teaching and translation quality may be derived from translational stylistics, and, as Boase Beier (2011: 155) posits, “stylistically-aware reading can be learned and will result in better translations”. On these grounds, in the next sub-section, we propose an activity which fosters the development of linguistic and translation skills at the same time, with attention paid to the importance of learner autonomy and collaborative learning.

4.1. Description of classroom activities

The proposal described below has been developed collaboratively by the authors of the present article and has been used, at least, by two of the authors during translation classes, mostly to teach consecutive interpreting to students at Polish universities in the Departments of Applied Linguistics. These academic units educate prospective translators and interpreters and

offer combined German-English major courses. Nonetheless, the profile of the graduate incorporates occupational opportunities outside the narrow translation profession. They can be employed in different institutions, in which the working knowledge of both languages is required for communication purposes. In fact, the career tracing system of these universities delivers data that very few applied linguistics graduates find employment in the translation profession, but they claim to use translation competences in their careers, or to offer occasional translating and interpreting services.

In our proposal, conceived of as a part of learner contribution to the syllabus organization for consecutive interpreting (alternatively, for specialized consecutive interpreting, etc.), nominated or volunteering students are asked to select a short recently-published newspaper article, or an Internet article (pertaining to any domain of human activity, of around 2500 characters with blanks), to read it at home, become familiar with new vocabulary and prepare a tentative translation of difficult words or phrases, and write an abstract (in English, the language of the article) consisting of about 250 words. At least two days before the class, they are supposed to place the original article (or a link to it) on the common email box for the remaining members of their translation group so that they can download the material and be familiar with it before the class. A copy of the material should be redirected to the teacher, as well.

When the whole group convenes for the translation class, those students who select and prepare the materials are asked to be ready to read their abstracts aloud in the classroom. Students are informed that their effort will be evaluated according to (1) pronunciation correctness, (2) proper parsing of information into componential parts (the act of splitting it up into cognitively manageable units) to make the text intelligible, as well as for (3) the formal layout of the abstract, (4) its orthographic, grammatical and stylistic organization, jointly with (5) its content (that is, how the abstract is representative of the original material). Obviously, all of the evaluation components mentioned above result, in a summative way, in a single grade for their homework activity.

The other students in the group are requested to be familiar with the original article and the abstract to be able to evaluate their informative compatibility, in other words, how accurately it reports the body of the article. They should also prepare to translate it consecutively sentence-by-sentence or clause-by-clause into their mother tongue (Polish), while the student who prepared the material is reading it. The students are nominated to translate by the teacher and they do not see the text of the abstract during the very act of translation. They can only hear it, which is intended to emulate the process of real consecutive interpretation, yet with an opportunity to be familiar

with the ST. The performance of the interpreter is also subject to evaluation based on the criteria of (1) fluency and an overall effect, (2) terminological precision, (3) stylistic and grammatical correctness, (4) content similarity with the ST, and (5) functional equivalence. Similarly to the presenter, the interpreter will get one grade – derivative of the componential evaluation. The choice of the person to do interpreting is random so as to take advantage of the surprise effect and counteract any student machinations to outsmart the system. It is worth mentioning that the evaluation process is perceived as a collaborative interpreting experience between the teacher, the student and the audience, during which reflection regarding translation and interpreting is to be triggered. Both the teacher and the students can comment on the equivalents provided in the translation, which enhances their linguistic and translation awareness.

During the first, organizational class of the course, the teacher familiarizes the students with the syllabus and works out a common scheme for students' contributions. Since interpreting classes are carried out in small tutorial groups, it is expected that one, maximum two students will present their abstracts during a single class of 90 minutes duration. This is to guarantee that there is room for other activities offered by the teacher and aimed at developing consecutive interpreting skills or enhancing related faculties employed in the process of consecutive interpreting, e.g. note-taking techniques for classic consecutive interpreting when the speaker stops every one to five minutes (cf. Pöchhacker 2011), or memory stretching techniques (Gillies 2004: 114ff). Since additional classroom activities are not the focus of the article, further comments will be restricted only to the proposal pertaining to the students' contribution.

However, before the teacher puts the plan in action, the whole class is meticulously instructed regarding the required style sheet (font type, its size and layout) for the abstract, including their general function, for example, in the academic context. Additionally, students are warned that the selected article should present a linguistic challenge, that is, contain at least ten new words or expressions, which should also be included in the abstract. This instruction is exemplified by the teacher's presentation of the abstract specimen. Lastly, the teacher launches a dry-run session, in which students are shown precisely how to go about the article, abstract and its interpreting. The whole class works on the article selected by the teacher, compiles tentative abstracts individually or in groups. Selected abstracts are evaluated by the whole class and compared with the exemplary specimen (preferably prepared by the teacher). The best abstract is presented by the student to the rest of the students (first reading, followed by evaluation according to the presentation criteria listed above) and ultimately, (during the second read-

ing) consecutive sentence-by-sentence interpreting takes place, which again is evaluated according to the relevant criteria. The function of the dry-run is only an instructive and informative one, and, therefore, no grading follows it.

Below the authors articulate the methodological rationale behind the proposal informed both by translation theory and interpreting practice as well as foreign language teaching methodology. Inclusion of the latter element in translation teaching practices is considered the added value of the article.

4.2. Rationale derived from translation theory, interpreting practice and language teaching methodology

Starting from the language pedagogy component in translation teaching, reference is made to the idea of autonomy in foreign language teaching, proponents of which posit it as a conditioning concept for language education (Benson & Voller 1997: 11). On a more practical level, students are supposed to take responsibility for, or control over, their own learning (Benson 2001) with regard to different aspects of the learning process. With reference to autonomy, our teaching proposal is intended to exert a motivational effect on students, who make their own decision regarding the source material selected, the progression of their work (students establish the timetable for their presentation with the teacher and their peers). In accordance with autonomy tenets, their own learning takes priority over formal teaching. It is left at their discretion how intensely they want to work with the material offered by other students. The fact that their preparation of the lesson depends on their collaborative skills (what others choose with regard to the linguistic difficulty and intellectual challenge of the source text will have an influence on the interpretation process) highlights the issue of learning as basically a collaborative phenomenon.

In the field of translation and interpreting, autonomy, understood as interdependence (Benson 2001: 13), may be derived from practitioners' reality. Translators need to consult texts with other professionals, while interpreters need to be initially well-instructed regarding the company profile, products, etc., to be familiarized with professional terminology and the new settings within which a given translation act/process is going to be contextualized. Certain kinds of consecutive or simultaneous interpreting (e.g. during conferences) are also based on prior familiarization of the interpreter with the texts to be presented, yet the speaker will always make changes in the original text. Most evidently, the success of the consecutive mode of translation is very much dependent on the collaboration between the speaker and the interpreter. In this respect, the autonomy-oriented component, borrowed from

foreign language teaching, reflects the reality of interpreters' practices and, represents the fact that translating and interpreting are never-ending language learning opportunities.

The evaluation, of both the abstract presentation and its rendition, entails autonomy-related evaluation procedures, which all highlight the subjective element incorporated into any form of translating or interpreting. A similar opinion is claimed by Newmark (1988: Preface); namely, "the body of knowledge and of assumptions that exists about translation is tentative, often controversial and fluctuating". Although this statement may seem obsolete, if one takes into account the bulk of reflection that came after Newmark, autonomy-related reflection informs us that neither the language nor knowledge communicated via linguistic means can accurately portray the on-going changing reality.

Since translating or interpreting entails the living tissues of language (van Lier 2004), and, thus makes translation and its teaching more complicated, rendition necessitates the use of the linguistic system which is partly alien to interpreters, and always in progress, teaching translating and interpreting requires a constant upgrading of communicative competence in a foreign language, which is concomitant with developing related translation procedural technicalities. Our proposal, in this respect, has a double objective since it unites students' linguistic development pertaining to various aspects such as phonetics, lexis, or discourse and integrates all four basic language skills (reading, writing listening and speaking), while assuming a different end, which is a development of consecutive interpreting. Drawing on the training guidelines for teaching this type of oral translation, our proposal incorporates the issue of public presentations or the need for constant expanding of general knowledge (Gillies 2004: 105ff).

Professional literature regarding translation teaching accentuates the need for assuming a more learner-centered paradigm in teaching translating and interpreting. It is to be "education that develops the necessary competences to perform well in the job market; and training that guarantees autonomous, multi-purpose and continuous or lifelong learning which can be adapted to a constantly changing world" (Albir 2007: 164). This is necessitated by both the general reflection regarding the constructive nature of human knowledge (Candy 1991) and translator competence (Kiraly 2000). These assumptions change the role of the teacher in the process of teaching/learning translation. The teacher cannot assume the position of possessing all answers for translation problems but rather should adopt the role of the facilitator.

All in all, the proposal for developing consecutive interpreting skills presented above implicitly evokes reflection regarding the process of cognizing

the world and constructing its mental image via linguistic means which, by nature, are also subject to interpretative processes. Conceptualization of the “applied” translation studies cannot take the linguistic component for granted because the translation skills are very much dependent on language proficiency (including specialized languages and their cognitive function, see Oxbrow & Lankiewicz 2017), in the same way that they depend on general or professional knowledge (see Lankiewicz & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej 2015). Due attention to the linguistic element is also required by the context of translator education. One should not forget that undergraduate students are simply learning two separate skills simultaneously, that is, they are expanding their command of foreign languages and are being instructed in the field of translation studies.

5. CONCLUSION

The integration / synergy of language, knowledge and translation skills is crucial for translation teaching, and the dilemma regarding which aspect should be given priority seems inextricable. The last component cannot be fully activated without the former ones. If one takes language competence for granted, then translation courses should be offered as graduate or post-graduate courses; however, language awareness should be developed alongside translation training. Additionally, presupposing that nowadays, in the era of facilitated communication, general translation is rarely a required skill, an amount of expertise is crucial for the completion of specialized translation courses. As a way out of the conundrum, one can easily proceed with translator education at lower levels of foreign language command if all constitutive elements of translator competence are properly accounted for in the educational process. This reiterates the autonomy development dilemma of whether it is the ultimate product of the long process of learning, very individual and independent of instruction, or, perhaps, whether it can be activated earlier in the educational process to result in a different quality.

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