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Syntheses of the Importance of Teaching Translation

Abstract

The acquisition of translation practice knowledge is part of the overall curriculum of foreign language students being a very important part of their skills' portfolio which will accompany them in the labor market. Translation practice skills are an effective and useful teaching instrument also in the EFL environment which is experiencing a welcome return after it was neglected for more modern approaches. For the FL students to have a sustainable development in their translation practice skills, a thorough study on the approaches of translation teaching is of paramount importance. This article will bring an overview of the actual context of the translation teaching process in Albania demonstrating: the background of the teaching process of translation, the importance of the translation skills for the students, teaching resources and approaches, research into translation teaching. Finally this article comes to the conclusion that the evolution of the translation teaching is affected by theories of translation and that future translators should have as a basis the theories of teaching translation in their studies. Furthermore, a system of continuous training should be established for the existing lecturers of translation workshops in order for them to be in close contact with the developments associating translation studies, modern technology and teaching theories.

Key words: translation practice, skills portfolio, teaching translation, undergraduates.

1-Introduction: A few words on Translation Teaching

Teaching translation importance is not sufficiently recognized for the values it is associated with, due to the very nature of translation as a science. It is one of the few disciplines that crucially reflects all new research taking place in areas such as linguistics, literature etc. Translation constitutes an inherent section in EFL classes and it may be utilized as instrument to evaluate foreign language skills. It also helps students to improve their comprehension capabilities, explore thoroughly their mother tongue and improve their knowledge on its respective patterns, and not only their linguistic ones, but it opens their mind to two cultures comparatively.

Translation teachers are working hard all over the world to embrace into one single concept both theory and practice of translation rather than leaving alone the practical translation skills. Consequences of poor training of translators can not only breed funny situations but also catastrophic conflicts and mis happenings in all areas of life such as medicine, legal matters etc.

Teaching translation plays an important part in the preparation of the translators and researchers of translatology but in spite of that didactics of translation has not received the required attention in the overall Translation studies sphere. Indeed, more and more we hear scholars complaining that translators don't research enough the theoretical basis of their work considering it as a merely practical job. It goes without saying that there are gaps in the didactics of translation which according to Baker 'have experienced a tremendous growth in the past few decades (2001:5)'.

2-A profile for the translation teaching staff

Regarding translation, Hermans stated:

'Translating is not an innate skill, it has to be learned and negotiated, both cognitively and normatively. Translating always takes place in the context of certain historical conceptions of what constitutes translation. (2002a:14)'

Teachers of translation (lecturers), should be both instructors and practitioners choosing extensively interesting materials and ap-

proaches in order to avoid monotonious classes for the creative workshops of translation. It is therefore important that teachers are highly qualified individuals who have the relevant theoretical know how regarding translation, literature, stylistics as well as other areas which are related to a translator's job.

Alongside with the practical skills, teachers of translation studies could ideally be part of national or international institutions/associations, benefiting thus of actively participating in congresses and academic activities where new translation studies research is presented or even be part of translation journal boards where they are given the opportunity to publish or peer review based on their 'on the field experience' as well as their academic background.

With regards to the translation teaching staff of the Faculty of Foreign Languages in Albania, and especially the translation teaching staff of the English Language department, 65% belong to the age group of below 40 years old, while 35% are over 40. Even among the teachers that are below 40 years old, most of them are between 35 and 40 years old, with only a few under 35. The average age of the teachers teaching translation will most probably be 45 in a few years. At the moment all the experienced teachers are sharing experience with the young group of colleagues and are supporting them in their career path. All of the young group of translation teachers are attending and mostly finalizing their PHD studies in Translation related subjects. Those over 50 generally have the degree of Professor and have had a long translation and teaching experience to provide a solid support basis for the young teachers.

Many conferences have been organized to upgrade the capacities of the Translation teachers with the support of the European Commission as well as the Translation School of Strasbourg. Moreover, In the face of the new socio-economic developments in Albania, most of the above mentioned teachers have many opportunities to work in the field as translators, which serves them as an on the job training. However, this doesn't interfere with their university work commitment.

3-Teaching translation and the approaches employed

The main purpose of translation educators should be that of training and preparing good professionals who will in turn successfully make a living out of their studies making thus the students responsible for the act of translating and its importance.

Translation educators seem to fall into two categories when it comes to the approaches they employ inside the translation labs. It's widely accepted that the product-based approach seems more contemporary and applies to the new globalized world. It is important that the students interact with their teacher and not passively receive a teacher's comment related to certain potential translation problems; this because a translation product is not to be judged as good or bad, or diagnosed as appropriate or inappropriate. The teacher instead, should support the trainees/students to feel confident in supplying them with the tools or strategies for them to overcome challenges arising during the process. The teacher of translation should not be imposing, but on the opposite he/she should inquire in the decisions made and on the results achieved.

The comparing and adjustment of the source and target texts should be the last phase where the teacher, as per the product base approach, basis the findings on a translation theoretical framework, making thus the process valid, theory as well as practice-wise.

Hugely different from the product base approach which gives more voice to comments of the teacher as well as to the fellow students in the translation lab, the process based approach stimulates students to absorb micro and macro strategies required for the translation process through the translating exercises. The teachers has a say when reviewing the tasks in what regards the processes applied and not only. The teachers will also comment on choices and grasp an understanding of the choices made, underlining that there is no right or wrong in the process. This approach will improve self confidence of the students by simultaneously helping them to solve problems and understanding reasons and encouraging them to move on with other choices. A positive climate is created, thus in the translation lab which will breed future professional motivated agents, mediators and facilitators.

After the theoretical teaching process for the reinforcement of the

theoretical material, exams are a very important tool. They should reflect the content of the course and address the barriers faced by the students in order for the teaching to be useful and fruitful. A test should not be another task during which students merely translate words, sentences or even paragraphs, as it wouldn't reflect the overall grasping of translation theory and practice. When designing translation tests and exams we should bear in mind and ensure that the test is feasible for the students and that partially the questions are related to theory of translation and partially to practice. Exercises in a test could be fill-in-the-blanks type, essay answers, translation analyses, discussion of one of the theories, choosing accurate translations.

4-Translation studies' Students and their involvement in the process

Each and every student who are undertaking translation studies courses aim at their improvement translation competences-wise due to the fact that it is those skills that will make the difference from the other students who will have a degree in teaching or FL literature. At the end of this trip they will compete for a job in the labor market as per the skills they will have acquired.

The learning experience will be satisfactory if all micro and macro strategies, faithfulness and other critical criteria as well as text analyses techniques and cultural know how together with the suitable use of dictionaries, will have served the final purpose, that is being able to tackle all differences of the texts as per the needs of the contemporary society.

After students of translation studies will have 'been part of different situations the greater will be the range and flexibility of the abilities to perform and adapt themselves to changing norms', by becoming thus, 'native translators' (Toury 191). They should ideally be given the opportunity to travel abroad through programs such as ERASMUS to acquire in depth knowledge of the target culture and face its norms, politics, aesthetics etc.

The communication between translation students and their respective translation lecturers should be an open one in which students will openly discuss issues such as the content of the course related

to their language proficiency, teaching methods should they be top-down beyond the relevant extent, efficiency of the teaching equipment and other aspects of their learning experience.

4-Conclusions

Nobody is born a translator. At Tirana Faculty of Foreign Languages each year almost 100 translators have their degrees in the first and second cycles of studies. The new reforms University of Tirana is undergoing in the framework of Bologna Process, reflect a good will from teachers of translation to collaborate and have more fruitful and effective translation classes. New curricula have been discussed and compiled and are now being implemented for all subjects including Translation.

The teachers of translation according to Zamel (1985: 96-97) should try “to respond by participating in the making of meaning means that we no longer present ourselves as authorities but act instead as consultants, assistants, and facilitators. Thus, rather than making assumptions about the text, taking control of it, and offering judgmental commentary... we need to establish a collaborative relationship with our students, drawing attention to problems, offering alternatives, and suggesting possibilities.”

There is general agreement that translation definitely is a subject that should be discussed and teacher-student communication as well as collaboration amongst colleagues within a cooperative learning environment are basic elements of the process.

More should be done in terms of fund allocation from the government so that the publication of a journal on teaching translation research is enabled and continuous in-service staff training should be put in place. More initiatives should be coordinated and arranged in order for the students to receive information on potential exchange programs such as ERASMUS.

These recommendations would contribute to have useful and fruitful training of future translators, both for teachers of translation courses as well as future translator, who will be updated and well aware of the developments occurring in both translation studies as well as teaching theories.

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