

Planning a curriculum for translator-trainees

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Introduction

As reported in various writings, the major issue over which translation pedagogists seem to be split is the level at which the training of translators ought to be run. Should the training be conducted at under-graduate or post-graduate level ?

This inevitably has implications on the curriculum as a whole and the teaching of the languages in particular. At under-graduate level, the course is longer and various subjects are taught particularly languages. At post-graduate level, the course is shorter since languages are not taught.

This is the view of Gravier (1976) who states that translation schools should not be languages schools. However, in other schools, the trainees are admitted at under-graduate level and the courses are run for a period ranging from four to five years. In this category of courses, the teaching of languages occupies an important share in the curriculum. This is the case of the Institute of Translation and interpreting of the University of Algiers⁽¹⁾. The Institute runs a four year course during which the students undergo an intensive programme of language reinforcement during the first two years. Translation teaching per se are post-poned until the third and fourth years. However an initiation to translation is introduced in the second year. Beside language teaching, another issue over which translation pedagogists seem to differ is the teaching of theory ; i.e.- whether it should be taught at all, and if so, how ? and by who ?

This article examines these issues and others such as theoretical and contrastive linguistics which constitute the bulk of syllabus for training translators general studies etc...

2- The teaching of languages

For most schools, the main criterion for selection is that students should have a good knowledge of the languages, whether they come from secondary schools or after having completed their undergraduate studies. In the first group, translation courses include a certain amount of language teaching beside other subjects. The aim is to improve the student's language competence in order to be able to translate. In the latter, translation courses are not languages courses (Gravier, 1976 ; Coveney, 1971). Gravier points out that students who wish to train as professional translators should have a good language competence to be able to learn how to translate :

«Une école de traduction n'est pas - ne doit pas être - une école de langues vivantes, mais une école ouverte à ceux qui déjà maîtrisent solidement deux ou plusieurs langues vivantes et viennent apprendre l'art de traduire ». (1976 : 202)

However, at other schools, practical translation exercises are postponed until the students have reached a certain standard in their foreign languages. Wilss, in this respect, reports that as part of the curriculum content the first two semesters are devoted to intensive language training in language B and language C. This is how he explains the language training programme :

«The strong emphasis on foreign language training in the first two semesters is necessary because our beginners mastery of their foreign languages is not adequate for us to start translation training right away. So as to prevent translation classes from being misused for foreign language learning purposes, translation teaching is postponed until the third semester » (1977 : 119).

Similarly, in the United States, translation exercises are introduced only in the third semester, after the students have attained a sufficient degree of mastery in their B language (Horn, 1966 : 149).

In Canada, according to Horlequin (1966), students who have not satisfied a certain standard in their languages would have to undergo extensive teaching before they are admitted to the preparatory year. The preparatory year itself includes a language teaching programme, but more specialised during which the learners are prepared for translation courses.

Foreign language teaching during the preliminary phase of the training programme of university has proved very insufficient. Some pedagogists suggest that the students should spend some time in the country of their foreign language. In British universities, it has become almost compulsory for students to spend one year abroad. This will bring them to experience direct contact with native speakers and enhance their knowledge of administrative and governmental institutions. In this respect, in Kuwait University, it is compulsory for the M.A. students in translation / interpretation to spend the third semester in a British or American university as Kharma explains :

« The rationale behind this is that many of the candidates may never have had the opportunity to have contact with or live in the English (British or American) culture, an understanding of which is naturally an essential background to the full comprehension of most English texts » (1984 : 226).

3- The teaching of linguistics

Linguistics is also another topic on which pedagogists seem to disagree as to whether it should be included in the teaching programme or not.

Gravier thinks that the provision of linguistics will not automatically make competent translators : «est-il nécessaire d'avoir reçu un enseignement de la linguistique pour se préparer à la traduction ? Nous ne le pensons pas ...

Il n'est pas nécessaire que notre futur traducteur entre dans les grandes chapelles linguistiques de l'heure sera-t-on meilleur traducteur parce que l'on est devenu Saussurien Guillaumien disciple de Martinet, ou encore Chomskolatre è (1976 : 203).

This anti-linguistic view is also expressed by Hendrickx who argues that : «Students should be taught how to use languages rather than be given information about them. They should be given the instruction and training that will allow them to practice their craft properly, rather than that required for the theoretical and scientific study of the language» (1975 : 102).

On the other hand it is argued that linguistics should be part of translation teaching programme. In this respect, Tatillon (1984) claims that linguistics is indispensable in translation teaching. His argument is that translation is the transfer of text from one language into another. Further, given that a text is the fulfillment of a communicative act, it exhibits two linguistic patterns : the structural and informational.

The structural is the type of structures which organize the text ; macro-structures and transphatic structures.

Informational is the type of information communicated in the text. This can be :

referential : subject matter

psychological : attitude of writer vis à vis reader

socio-cultural : environmental

stylistic : symbolic

Drawing from these linguistic realities which compose text, he claims that these structural formatting of texts can be identified by means of contrastive approach. This method he argues can serve as a basis for the translation teacher to theorize their teaching methods. The outcome is as he explains : « On aura compris par ce qui précède que je tiens à la linguistique pour une matière de la traduction, dans la mesure où les connaissances théoriques qu'elle met à la disposition des élèves traducteurs leur donnent les moyens de réfléchir à ce qu'ils font lorsqu'ils traduisent » (1984 : 59).

Contrastive linguistics has also influenced some pedagogists. In Montreal University, the principles of stylistique comparee by Vinay and Darbelnet are taught throughout the three year course (Horguelin, 1966, 146). Similarly in the Arabic / English course at Bath University, the aim of teaching Arabic / English contrastive linguistics is to develop a high level of competence in the student's ability to translate. Thus, according to Coveney, contrastive linguistics : « aims to deepen the student's understanding to the structure of English and Arabic as well as to broaden their knowledge of linguistic variations in order to increase their sensitivity to translational equivalence between the two languages» (1983 : 4).

4- The teaching of theory

The other issue on which pedagogists do not seem agree is the teaching of translation theory. Some think that the teaching should concentrate on more practice, and that theory is unnecessary. Others think that the injection of some theoretical teaching could enhance the learner's competence in various areas.

This is the opinion voiced by some professional translators consulted by the editor of Meta and how were asked to answer this question :

Les cours de formation doivent-ils faire une part plus large à la pratique qu'à la théorie?

The answer were as follows :

Les cours de formation doivent faire une part beaucoup plus large à la théorie qu'à la pratique, étant donné que les cours ne durent que quelques mois ou quelques années alors que la pratique dure toute la vie.

La théorie ; car la pratique viendra quand le traducteur mettra la main à la pâte.

Il est primordial que le traducteur connaisse les différences intrinsèques des langues.

Théorie et pratique, mais primordialement de la pratique.

Je ne crois pas uniquement à la pratique, il faut aussi de la théorie.

- Si théorie signifie études des langues, il faut le plus possible mener de front la théorie et la pratique de la traduction, effectuant ainsi un «apprentissage rationnel».

Les deux s'imposent, vu l'importance extrême du sujet au Canada Français.

One would think that a professional translator would opt for more practice.

The argument is that a translator with no theoretical background, but who has a good practical competence, is better than a good linguist with lower aptitudes in translation.

If theory is to be taught, what is the aim ? What should be taught and how ? How does the link between theory and practice operate?

According to Vinay, one of the major preoccupations of a translation teacher is stylistics. Furthermore, he states that a given text deals with a particular situation coded in a particular style. Hence the teacher's task is to :

Teach how to investigate situations to reach the meaning

Teach equivalents of the two languages to match style (1957 : 146).

Mason examines the introduction of translation theory in a translation class to achieve the following target : to render the trainee translator more sensitive to the multifaceted nature of translation equivalence and to aid him to single out instinctively those stylistically relevant linguistic features of a text which characterize it and determine the kind of target language rendering its demands (1982 : 27).

By examining some of the theories put forward, such as free vs literal and stylistique comparee, Mason concludes that the former fails to render the full referential and connotative meanings ; the latter is artificial for it concentrates excessively on translation at word or phrase level. He therefore suggests the examination of a text as a unit of translation with its stylistic characteristics, such as text-type, text-tone and text-pragmatics.

While some recommendations for teaching theory are very specific as illustrated above, others are very broad. Wilss for instance complements his teaching programme with a course in the science of translation in the form of tutorials, lectures and seminars.

The aim in the introduction of the sciences of translation is to «investigate the various which can then be exploited factors involved in interlingual synchronization process ... for a number of theoretical and practical purposes» (1977 : 120). Classes are organised in such a way as to concentrate on the discussion of language pair based translation problems.

Reiss's programme also includes some concepts of translation theory. At a certain stage of the teaching, the learners must be taught both in theory and in practice ways of handling texts to be translated. Further, according to Reiss, the teaching should also comprise an introduction to the history and theory of translation with particular reference to the function of translation, translation methods and translation techniques related to the basic and specialised forms of translation. The main aim is to enable the students to grasp the theoretical principles of translational techniques (1976 : 335).

Fawcett (1981) also suggests a fairly comprehensive model for teaching translation theory. It ranges from the history of theory and practice to models of translation to text-linguistics. However, the opposition such as Gravier would claim that this training method is too theoretically-oriented and too dogmatic. He claims that translation is essentially an art, therefore teaching should concentrate on practical exercises (1976 : 203).

A similar view is voiced by Hendrickx who also claims that : « Training methods should in the first place be practical and aim at teaching the art rather than the science of translation » (1975 : 102).

To reconcile the two «belligerents», one may suggest that theory could be made use of during translation exercises. Teachers may consider selecting material which contains translation difficulties, and explain how these can be overcome on the basis of the application of the adequate theoretical principle. This is because the proponents of theory seem to teach this subject in a form of lectures and seminars which is out of context. On the other hand, the opponents of theory concentrate on practice which they yet have to define. The only way one can understand what is meant by practice is that translation is taught by the rule of thumb.

5- General studies

Beside the provision of languages, linguistics, translation theory and actual translation practice, other subjects have also been recommended to complement the programme. In addition to a good standard in languages and the mechanism of translation, the students should also have a good background in general education. In other words, the ability to understand and translate material should also be complemented with familiarity with the subject matter. The programme in this respect covers a wide range of subjects, such as economics, politics, law and some aspects of science and technology.

Students on the Bath course are required to follow courses in international economics, in international politics and in certain aspects of science and technology. Specialist staff from other departments are also invited to give lectures and seminars in some specialised topics of science and technology during the course.

The aim as Coveney explains is : «To confront the linguist with some basic concepts and some of the technical terminology of selected fields of science and technology » (1971 : 24).

Reiss emphasises the introduction of «a subject competence». In her syllabus, she suggests the teaching of the following :

- cultural studies
- specialised subject
- documentation

The introduction of cultural studies in the syllabus, she argues, is necessary to enhance the student's cultural knowledge of their foreign languages. This is because language is part of culture and both depend upon and mutually influence one another. In the context of specialised subject and documentation, the aim is to teach the students how to acquire specialised knowledge for themselves. The aim in the teaching of these topics is to bring the students to a complex understanding of the text (1976 : 334).

In the context of cultural studies, Reiss did not specify the means and ways this topic is to be taught. It is not known whether she opts for literary texts dealing with social studies. Gravier, for exemple, is opposed to the teaching of literary texts. He advocates mainly the teaching of texts dealing with science and technology and social studies (1976 : 204). Similarly, Horn (1966) also suggests the introduction of social studies in the curriculum for training translators and interpreters in the USA.

The course comprises the historical, cultural, social and political institutions and the human and economic geography of the countries of students foreign languages.

In the context of teaching aspects of science and technology, the issue terminology is emphasised in many writings ; «il est évident qu'un travail de terminologie par exemple peut-être une bonne orientation vers le métier de traducteur» (Michelet 1958: 167). De Vivienne also emphasised the teaching of terminology in this answer to the Meta questionnaire in which the question was : Sur quels sujets de formation devraient-ils porter ? The provision of terminology as it appears in these instances is not made specific in terms of its teaching means and ways. In other words, it is not known whether the technical terms should appear in scientific and technical texts, such as manuals, books, etc ... or given in a form of lists to be learned by the students. Gravier stresses that the systematic teaching of terminology is banned. he claims that the best teaching method is to expose the students directly to the study of scientific and technical material / « Il est plus facile de retenir les noms des pièces d'une machine quand on a vu cette machine sur place en photo ou en film ou sur la planche d'une encyclopédie. La terminologie ne s'acquiert qu'à propos de textes étudiés » (1976 : 206).

On the issue of teaching aspects of science and technology with emphasis on the acquisition of terminology, even in the method suggested by Gravier which shows more consistency, one fundamental question remains pending.

Should the students be taught to acquire a certain repertoire in science and technology or should they learn the whole discourse of science and technology ? If it is the former, then some translation tools such as technical dictionaries may well be a good aid. If it is the latter, then how much scientific and technical discourse should the learners acquire during their training ? In other words, should the translator be trained as a generalist or a specialist ? This is another debate among pedagogists. While a certain amount of specialization is necessary for the translator, full-scale specialisation is uncommon. At least pedagogists refer to this issue very cautiously. Some schools aim at producing general translators who would specialise at later stages, mainly because of lack of necessary resources, especially the specialised staff and the difficulty of predicting the requirement of future jobs as Hendrickx explains : « The teaching of languages and of translation should be supplemented by a general education covering a wide range of subjects such as economics, politics, law, technology. This again should be supplemented by some kind of specialisation, e.g. in electronics, medicine, commerce, agriculture, chemistry, the fine art.

Whether this specialisation should take place before, during or after the actual tuition period remains an open question. Since conditions may vary quite considerably as regards both the available facilities for language study and the nature of demand of translation » (1975 : 102).

Commenting on the issue of specialised vs general training with reference to the market situation, Strunz thinks that a translator should not specialise unless he is expected to be employed by a specific organisation. He claims that practice and experience will give the translator breadth of competence, from which base he can consult with scientists and specialists.

Nevertheless, there is an idea to link a specialised training with the job market requirements. Citroen (1966) suggests that schools should maintain close contacts with consumers.

The data collected would indicate the areas of specialisation needed so that specific tuition can be planned accordingly. However, Gravier (1967) admits that one of most difficult tasks for universities is to train technical translators. The main difficulty he claims is to find suitable candidates for such a training. According to him, suitable candidates would be qualified engineers who would be prepared to take a linguistic training.

However, qualified engineers who would be prepared to change their professions are very rare.

The alternative is to seek candidates who had linguistic and literary training during their undergraduate studies. At this stage, pedagogy will not only concentrate on planning a specialised programme, but also to gradually transfer the students from a literary training to a technical one.

6- Practical training

Some pedagogists think that the classroom only is insufficient. They recommend that the trainees should undergo a practical training within an institution for a certain period of time. This will enhance their translation competence before they take up their posts. Moreover, practical training will provide the students with opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge to real situations.

The idea of «stage» was emphasised by the professionals consulted by Meta when they had to answer the question «Est-ce qu'on peut réellement former un traducteur en classe ?» L. Forques and R. Mercier answered respectively as follows :

- que le stage fasse partie du programme d'études de façon à donner une formation plus professionnelle
- le stage s'imposerait

Most pedagogists and professionals agree that theoretical training given in the classroom should be complemented by a practical one. Michelet also suggests the idea of «stage». The trainees join an institution where their work is supervised by a reviser. They will get information on the life of the organisation and learn how to gather the necessary information (1958 : 167).

The department of Modern Languages at Bath University have made it possible for their translator-trainees to spend one month in an international organisation where they can gain practical experience (Coveney, 1971 : 24). Commenting on the classroom training and claiming that it is too theoretical, Roberts suggests an «in service practicum-training-scheme». The scheme is designed to encourage trainees to work for a certain period of time in a translation service. The aim is to familiarize students with the work environment and show the application of theory to practice. He claims the translation practicum has ten basic specific objectives which are as follows :

1. Familiarizing the student with the role of a translator in an office.
2. Familiarizing the student with various functions a translator may be called upon to perform.
3. Familiarizing the student with the tools and equipment normally available to a translator in an office.
4. Familiarizing the student with different types of translation done in an office.
5. Familiarizing the student with quality required of beginner translators.
6. Accustoming the student to the idea of revision
7. Accustoming the student to turning out a «finished product»
8. Familiarizing the student with the work methods used by translators
9. Familiarizing the student with the pressure of word counts and deadlines
10. Accustoming the student to working seven or eight hours a day.

Suggestions such as this are certainly very stimulating and theoretically ideal for students to complement their theoretical training. However, this feasibility depends only on the professional translators goodwill to participate in the practical realisation of such schemes by taking trainees in their offices. Alternatively translation schools may consider simulating their own translation offices. This can be realized in the form of workshops where professional translators or even teachers from other schools are invited to act as revisers.

In addition to the subjects described above, programmes also include the teaching of practical translation exercises. In this subjects students are taught how to transfer a text from one language to another. All the pedagogists agree on the teaching of this subject because it is the ultimate aim in the training. However, what they disagree on is the method by which it should be taught, since various methods have been suggested (see A. Abachi : The theoretical aspects of translation teaching methods; Annales de l'Université d'Alger, vol. 7, 1993, pp. 93-110.).

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