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Teaching Translation : Realities and Challenges

تعليم الترجمة: الواقع والتحديات

Enseignement de la traduction : Réalités et défis

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Introduction

Translation teaching is a vital component of linguistic education, aimed at equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to transfer texts from one language to another both accurately and effectively. As a multifaceted field, it encompasses more than just the conversion of words; it involves the transfer of meaning, cultural nuances, and context between languages. The complexity of this task necessitates a robust educational framework that balances theoretical understanding with practical application.

The primary goal of translation education is to train competent translators who can navigate the intricate demands of various texts and contexts. Effective translation demands a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, including grammar, syntax, idiomatic expressions, and cultural connotations. Additionally, translators must possess the ability to interpret and convey the intended message while preserving the tone and style of the original text.

In recent years, numerous efforts have been made to develop innovative methods and techniques in the field of applied translation teaching. However, despite these efforts, translation teaching curricula remain generally limited, often relying on traditional approaches, such as academic lectures, group translations, and a read-and-translate approach. This method typically involves presenting a selected text that is detached from its original context, often without a name or title, and usually modified by the teacher to such an extent that it loses two of its most important features: accuracy and naturalness. The tasks associated with these texts remain repetitive across educational situations, failing to foster deeper analytical engagement or real-world applicability.

1. Traditional Teaching Methods

According to the traditional method, the teacher is the sole speaker in the class, responsible for conveying information to learners who seek answers to questions he has posed, using his own phrases and words. Students translate the text chosen by the teacher, then read their translations one after

another. The teacher then comments on these translations, offering feedback by accepting some suggestions and rejecting others, until he selects what he considers to be the best translation, usually after making the necessary reformulations and paraphrasing.

Students are expected to accept the teacher's ideal translations without debate, memorize them, and possibly reuse them in future translations. In this framework, the teacher is expected to answer all student questions, be familiar with various text types through translation practice, and possess persuasive abilities to convince students—who require more than intuition—to accept the proposed solutions. As for the students, they are only expected to listen, memorize, rephrase, and produce. Consequently, this method fosters an exceptional teacher—versatile and highly skilled—paired with a passive learner, entirely shaped by the teacher's influence and lacking autonomy in making decisions or translation choices.

These traditional teaching methods often produce translators who lack critical thinking skills and struggle with teamwork. They are frequently unprepared to interact with clients or colleagues and more concerning is their limited ability to collaborate with others and solve problems effectively.

For this reason, John Delisle, a prominent translation scholar, opposed these methods, arguing that they limit learners and negatively impact them, especially when educational content lacks clear objectives. (Delisle, 1980, p. 14)

He identified three major drawbacks of these classical approaches:

- They lack substantive educational content.
- They are not based on any specific teaching method or pedagogical approach.
- Even when they address challenges, it is done arbitrarily, leading to unpredictable outcomes. (Delisle, 1988, p. 211)

Following Delisle's perspective, it is crucial to define general and specific learning objectives before engaging in any teaching process to ensure that the chosen program effectively meets pedagogical goals. Consequently, many current university programs emphasize the importance of understanding learners' needs, motivations, characteristics, and resources to respond appropriately to the teaching context.

In language and translation education, where translation serves as a crucial link, the goal is to transform learners into competent language users, capable of professional, academic, and personal engagement. This includes the development of general competencies—linguistic, social, contextual, and

cultural—as well as cognitive, procedural, and pragmatic abilities, enabling students to use language effectively across diverse domains.

The core issue remains: while degrees in translation are awarded, many graduates fail to establish themselves professionally. Most face challenges early on and often divert from their field of study. Only a minority—those with strong linguistic foundations and demonstrated proficiency—pursue translation as a career. Yet even they confront practical obstacles, entering a professional environment where performance is judged by quality and timeliness, not by internal academic standards. At this level, there is no supervisor to evaluate or revise their work—only clients with demands, deadlines, and no tolerance for error.

2. Modern Teaching Methods

In contrast to traditional methods, modern approaches focus on actively engaging learners in the educational process and encouraging them to construct their own understanding and knowledge. Students are encouraged to discuss and collaborate with peers and instructors on content that is most relevant to their lessons. This method not only captures the learner's attention but also enhances motivation by exposing them to diverse text types. Furthermore, it promotes critical thinking, which is often lacking in traditional methods that neglect learner engagement and intrinsic motivation (González, 2016).

Alvaro Echeverri proposes five fundamental concepts to be integrated into translation training sessions to surpass conventional models:

2.1. Basic Pedagogical Training for Translation Trainers

The goal is to acquaint trainers with educational theories, pedagogical approaches, and the various types of knowledge—procedural, declarative, and practical. It also covers teaching and learning strategies, motivation, types of memory, and key research methodologies. This training allows future instructors to recognize that there are multiple effective ways to teach and that different methods can be applied depending on the intended objectives. (Echeverri, 2008, p. 74)

Practical experience has demonstrated the relevance of this point. How can we train competent students in translation without examining the frameworks that shaped their own education? Those who teach at the university today are often former students who transitioned into teaching after completing their theses. Their competencies stem from research practices reflected in their dissertations—but research competence differs significantly

from teaching competence. Many emulate their past teachers, while others seek methods from colleagues or by attending peer lectures.

This becomes even more problematic in translation and applied translation courses, where the gap between theory and practice often widens. The translation lab, where skills should be honed, suffers from this disconnect. Thus, pedagogical training is essential and should include effective methods such as objective-based and task-based learning to help students reach optimal outcomes.

2.2. Considering the Metacognitive Component of Learning

Essentially, it comprises two key components:

2.2.1. Metacognitive Knowledge

Metacognitive knowledge refers to the learner's awareness and understanding of their own cognitive processes. This includes being conscious of one's strengths, weaknesses, learning habits, and the strategies most suitable for approaching specific tasks. Learners who possess strong metacognitive knowledge can reflect on their previous experiences, predict the difficulty of a task, and determine what tools and techniques might be most effective in addressing it.

In the context of translation training, this means recognizing which types of texts or linguistic challenges require more preparation, identifying personal areas of difficulty (e.g., legal terminology or cultural equivalences), and knowing when to consult external resources or collaborate with peers. According to Echeverri (2008, p. 77), fostering such awareness helps learners become more autonomous and strategically competent, ultimately improving their translation performance.

By actively engaging in self-assessment, taking notes, recording difficult terms, or revisiting previous errors, students build a personalized toolkit of strategies that they can mobilize depending on the situation. This self-awareness not only enhances learning outcomes but also prepares them for the demands of a constantly evolving translation market.

2.2.2. Metacognitive Regulation

Metacognitive regulation involves the actions and decisions that learners take to control and guide their cognitive processes while working on a task. It comprises three main phases:

- Planning: analyzing the task at hand, setting specific goals, selecting appropriate strategies, and defining criteria for evaluating the outcome.

- Monitoring: observing and assessing one's progress throughout the task, noticing mistakes or inefficiencies, and evaluating whether the current strategy is working.
- Adjusting: revising the plan or switching strategies when necessary, based on real-time feedback and reflection.

In translation education, metacognitive regulation is particularly crucial during complex assignments such as literary or technical translations. Students who regulate their thought processes are more likely to question their own lexical or syntactic choices, verify the coherence of the translated text, and revise based on target audience expectations.

This capacity to manage their own learning fosters independence, resilience, and critical thinking—qualities that are indispensable for any professional translator facing deadlines, revision cycles, or quality assurance processes. As emphasized in learner-centered pedagogy, metacognitive regulation is not innate but can be explicitly taught and nurtured through reflective practices, guided feedback, and iterative assignments.

2.2.3. Involving the Learner in the Learning Process

Actively involving learners in the educational process enhances their engagement and deepens their understanding. It fosters self-directed learning, participation, and collaboration. When learners are actively involved, they develop a greater sense of responsibility and autonomy and acquire essential skills such as decision-making, argumentation, and critical reflection.

This is achieved by assigning students tasks traditionally performed by teachers. For example, they may be asked to lead a peer revision session, explain the translation approach they used for a specific task—including planning stages, tools selected, and obstacles encountered—and defend their choices before a group. This inversion of roles empowers students and shifts the instructor's function from authority figure to facilitator.

Such participation requires learners to be accountable for their translation work. Decisions are made collaboratively, and the justification of each choice becomes an opportunity for discussion and learning. Teachers guide the process, helping students explore better resources, adopt new strategies, or rethink ineffective decisions.

Another valuable activity is peer revision. Rather than simply correcting one another, students are encouraged to engage in dialogue, ask questions, and require explanations for translation choices. This method enhances their capacity to:

- Justify and defend their work
- Analyze peer work critically
- Revise and improve collaboratively
- Accept constructive feedback

This participatory model creates an environment of mutual respect and shared responsibility. It mirrors professional translation settings, where translators work in teams, negotiate meaning, and must defend their linguistic or terminological choices to clients or colleagues.

Ultimately, students become more invested in submitting complete and well-thought-out translations, knowing that these will be examined by peers and discussed collectively. This model breaks away from dependency on teacher correction and promotes intellectual initiative, essential for professional success.

2.2.4. Raising Learners' Awareness of Their Active Value and Importance in the Classroom

One of the key principles in learner-centered pedagogy is making students aware of their personal value and the importance of their contributions within the learning environment. This recognition not only enhances their self-confidence but also increases their sense of responsibility and investment in the learning process.

According to Echeverri (2008, p. 83), learners should be considered essential participants and resources in the classroom. Their presence is not passive; instead, it actively shapes the learning dynamic through shared knowledge, interaction, and peer collaboration.

This principle is implemented by encouraging students to work in groups, exchange ideas, question each other's translation decisions, and justify their own. These collaborative activities promote the development of analytical thinking, autonomy, and mutual support. Through interaction, learners detect and correct their own linguistic, technical, or cultural errors, gaining a deeper understanding of translation challenges.

This pedagogical approach also echoes the expectations of the professional translation market, where teamwork, communication, and co-responsibility are key competencies. In many translation agencies, professionals must collaborate to ensure terminological consistency, coherence, and quality control—skills that can be cultivated in academic settings through shared translation tasks.

However, this dynamic has been challenged by the rise of online education. While digital tools provide accessibility and flexibility, they often reduce opportunities for meaningful human interaction. The absence of in-person exchanges may limit the learner's social engagement and ability to develop interpersonal and collaborative skills. Therefore, it is important to find ways to integrate active collaboration into digital platforms or prioritize hybrid and face-to-face modalities whenever possible.

2.2.5. Exploration of Competency-Based Training Formulas

The exploration of competency-based training formulas involves researching various strategies that develop practical, applicable skills through contextualized learning. This approach emphasizes the acquisition and application of competencies in authentic contexts, aligning learning tasks with professional realities.

Lasnier (2000) states that

“competence is a complex and multifaceted capacity that requires the integration, application, and sequencing of a range of competencies and skills, which may include cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social dimensions, as well as declarative knowledge, used precisely in common contextual situations” (p. 481).

Tardif (1992, 1999) outlines several strategies to support this approach:

- Individual strategies: including case studies, problem-solving, and personalized exercises.
- Interactive strategies: such as role-playing, discussion groups, and applied tasks.
- Social development strategies: involving group work, peer teaching, and collaborative projects.

In translation pedagogy, two particularly effective approaches stand out: problem-based learning and project-based learning. In the former, learners are confronted with realistic problems that must be solved using a body of knowledge and critical thinking. These tasks are designed to simulate professional conditions, enhancing learners' motivation and preparing them to respond to actual market needs.

Project-based learning emphasizes teamwork and the integration of prior knowledge to complete real tasks—such as translating a publication or managing a multilingual document. These projects often target real clients, introducing responsibility and rigor into the training process.

Donald Kiraly (1995) exemplified this in his German-English translation courses, where students were assigned genuine translation projects. The intended recipients were informed that students were involved, but the instructor retained final responsibility. This methodology empowers students, makes them accountable, and exposes them to the realities of client satisfaction and professional precision.

As Tardif (1992) rightly points out, universities often lag behind societal and professional evolution. While the job market requires adaptability, critical thinking, and autonomy, academic institutions tend to rely on lecture-based and reproductive methods. Students are trained to repeat rather than analyze or transfer knowledge to new contexts. This gap underscores the urgency of pedagogical innovation.

Hence, the continuous adaptation of educational methods—through flexibility, technology, and competence-building—is essential to align learning outcomes with the evolving expectations of the modern world.

Conclusion

The field of translation education stands at a pivotal juncture, requiring a balance between rigorous academic training and the practical demands of the professional world. As discussed throughout this paper, effective translation instruction must combine theoretical knowledge with the realities of professional practice, while also addressing the shortcomings of outdated pedagogical models.

Translation pedagogy today aims to provide students with a solid foundation of practical skills, intercultural competence, and familiarity with technological tools. By embracing learner-centered strategies such as problem-based and project-based learning, academic programs can offer students realistic experiences that reflect professional scenarios, allowing them to develop autonomy and accountability in a structured environment.

Despite recent advancements, traditional teaching methods often fall short in preparing students for the real-world challenges they will face as professional translators. Passive learning, memorization, and teacher-centered instruction are no longer sufficient to meet the increasing complexity of today's translation demands, which require adaptability, critical thinking, and technological fluency.

To effectively address these challenges and advance translation pedagogy, several strategies should be considered:

- Incorporate practical experience
- Integrate technological tools

- Foster critical thinking and problem-solving
- Promote collaboration and active learning
- Adapt to market demands

This holistic approach better prepares future translators to navigate the complexities of their field, ultimately enhancing their professional effectiveness and global competitiveness.

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Abstract

Translation teaching plays a key role in academic language training. However, many university programs still rely on outdated traditional methods, which are often misaligned with the demands of the modern professional market. This study critically examines the limitations of classical approaches—such as lecture-based instruction and group translation exercises—by contrasting them with learner-centered pedagogies. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Delisle, Echeverri, Kiraly, and Tardif, the paper explores the core competencies expected from professional translators and highlights effective strategies to develop them. Findings indicate that innovative methods, particularly project-based and problem-based learning, enhance students' autonomy, critical thinking, and adaptability. The article concludes by advocating for a structural shift in translation curricula to better equip graduates for real-world challenges, while also opening perspectives on the integration of technology and transversal skills in higher education.

Keywords

Translation teaching, competencies, active methods, project-based approach, pedagogical innovation, higher education

الملخص

يُعدّ تعليم الترجمة جزءاً أساسياً من التكوين اللغوي الجامعي. ومع ذلك، لا تزال العديد من المؤسسات التعليمية تعتمد على طرق تقليدية قديمة لا تتماشى مع متطلبات سوق العمل الحديث. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم فعالية هذه الأساليب التقليدية من خلال مقارنتها بالمقاربات البيداغوجية الحديثة التي ترتكز على المتعلم. واستناداً إلى أعمال ديليزل، إتشيفيري، كيرالي وقارديف، يقترح المقال مقاربة تحليلية للكفاءات الأساسية التي يجب أن يتحلى بها المترجم المحترف، مع التركيز على الآليات التربوية المناسبة لتنميتها. وُتُظْهَر النتائج أن الأساليب المبتكرة، ولا سيما التعلم القائم على المشاريع والتعلم القائم على المشكلات، تعزز الاستقلالية والتفكير الناقد والقدرة على التكيف الميّز لدى الطالب. وفي الختام، يدعو المقال إلى إعادة هيكلة برامج تدريس الترجمة بما يواكب تحديات الواقع العملي، ويفتح آفاقاً جديدة لإدماج التكنولوجيا والمهارات العرضية في التعليم العالي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

تدريس الترجمة، الكفاءات، طرق نشطة، التعلم القائم على المشروع، الابتكار البيداغوجي، التعليم العالي

Résumé

L'enseignement de la traduction occupe une place centrale dans la formation linguistique universitaire. Toutefois, de nombreuses institutions continuent de s'appuyer sur des méthodes pédagogiques traditionnelles, souvent inadaptées aux exigences actuelles du marché professionnel. Cette recherche interroge l'efficacité de ces pratiques en analysant les limites des approches classiques telles que les cours magistraux et les traductions de groupe, et en les comparant aux méthodes modernes fondées sur la participation active de l'apprenant. En s'appuyant sur les travaux de Delisle, Echeverri, Kiraly et Tardif, l'article propose une réflexion critique sur les compétences nécessaires au traducteur d'aujourd'hui et sur les moyens de les développer. Il ressort que les méthodes innovantes, notamment l'apprentissage par projet et par problème, favorisent l'autonomie, la pensée critique et l'adaptation professionnelle. En conclusion, l'article plaide pour une refonte des programmes de formation en traduction afin de mieux préparer les étudiants aux réalités du métier, tout en ouvrant la voie à une réflexion plus large sur le rôle des technologies et des compétences transversales dans l'enseignement supérieur.

Mots-clés

Enseignement de la traduction, compétences, méthodes actives, approche par projet, innovation pédagogique, formation universitaire