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## 22 Research-driven translation teaching: doing Applied Linguistics to empower the learning organisation

**Abstract:** This chapter considers a transversal approach to research-driven teaching, exploring how research at the IUED Institute of Translation and Interpreting at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences has fed into didactic and action-research initiatives in an attempt to narrow the theory-practice divide in translator and language-mediator education. After discussing process-oriented and situated methods in translation teaching, it presents research initiatives designed to investigate learning effects among the various actors involved. Moving from curricular and expertise development to the learning organisation itself, it concludes by situating the initiatives within a recent fractal model of co-emergent learning.

### 1 Introduction

The diversity of activities pursued in applied linguistics today is reflected in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (Kaplan, 2010), whose second edition contains chapters ranging from language performance and learning to multilingualism, language policy and translation studies – including translation didactics. Applied linguists themselves have differing, though complementary, perspectives on their field. For example, while Brumfit (1995: 27) describes applied linguistics as “the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue” and Grabe (2010: 42) defines it as a “practice-driven discipline that addresses language-based problems in real-world contexts”, Strevens (2003: 112) stresses its instrumentality: “[Applied Linguistics] is a technology that makes abstract ideas and research findings accessible and relevant to the real world; it mediates between theory and practice.” What these and other definitions have in common is the condition of relevant practical applicability, be it to education, work or indeed any sociotechnical locus of linguistic interaction and transfer.

Like Strevens, this chapter foregrounds the instrumental function of applied linguistics within the context of our own teaching and learning organisation. It considers how translation-process-pedagogy and action research may be used to bridge the theory-practice divide amongst stakeholders of the professional

translator and language-mediator education we offer – researchers, teachers, students and the professions we serve. In seeking to explain the effects suggested by our research and observations, we apply a fractal co-emergent model of expertise development proposed by Kiraly (2016). We maintain that such a model provides a viable overarching framework to account for individual, collective and organisational learning.

## 2 Research-driven teaching

As part of a Swiss university of Applied Sciences, we are mandated to offer our students research-driven competence-oriented teaching. This has encouraged administrators, teachers and researchers to address what has been called the “academy-industry divide” (Drugan, 2013: 38) in translator and language-mediator education, regarded as a major cause of the graduate employability gap recurrently criticised by language industry employers (e.g. European Commission Directorate-General for Translation, 2014). But the presumed lack of practical work-related skills amongst graduates addresses only one side of the issue. Translation has long been recognised as an expert activity where complex, idiosyncratic, ill-defined problems are the norm. These can only be solved by adaptive expertise (Muñoz Martín, 2014: 9), whose development depends decisively on fostering the metacognitive self-regulatory capacities associated with reflective deliberate practice (Shreve, 2006: 38–39; see also Schön, 1987). We believe that such an outcome can be most effectively achieved by enriching our teaching and learning cycles with applied research – in other words by doing applied linguistics.

The more conventional didactic approaches to promoting the metacognitive components of reflective practice encompass thesis writing, research workshops and theory courses. However, it has been convincingly argued by leading translation educationalists (e.g. Kelly, 2007; Kiraly & Hofmann, 2016) that such compartmentalised curricular design limits the ability of students to transfer the skills and knowledge acquired in one module to support what they are learning in another. The same can be said of staff development, as separate modules dedicated to theory and research tend to encourage teaching specialisation, thereby reinforcing institutionally the very divide they seek to overcome.

A potentially more effective solution for student and, by extension, organisational development is the transversal integration of research methods and studies across the curriculum. It is this approach that has been gaining increasing momentum at our institute. Two principal areas of implementation can be

identified, corresponding broadly to what Toury (2012: 67–69) and Chesterman (2013: 155–157) refer to as the cognitive “act” of translation, on the one hand, and its situated “event”, on the other. In the first, teachers and students have been directly exposed to the diagnostic and didactic deployment of cognitive process research methods used to investigate the practices and competences of (individual) translators as they work, with studies conducted on who learns what. The second area extends to the environment of translation, with explorations of the complex situated interactions and effects on the various actors involved in authentic experiential learning scenarios. The ostensible objective of all these studies is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of didactic approaches and improve the structure and content of teaching. However, the principal *organisational* aim is to persuade students, staff and external actors – such as clients who have commissioned real-world translations – of the value of a reflective, research-driven approach to translation expertise and its development.

The methods employed to investigate learning phenomena in both areas rely heavily on case study and/or action-research approaches, predicated on Kiraly’s (2013: 222) conviction that conducting a broad range of qualitative studies will help us understand better how translation expertise can be developed. Especially congruent with our mandate is the practical and participatory nature of action research, which has the advantage of involving teacher-researchers directly with the beneficiaries of their work (see Cravo & Neves, 2007; Hubscher-Davidson, 2008; Massey, Jud, & Ehrensberger-Dow, 2015). From an institutional perspective, it harbours the added potential to narrow the theory-practice divide amongst the actors involved in any given learning scenario. In the context of translator and language-mediator education, this means not only translation students and teachers, but also real-world clients, source-text writers, revisers, terminologists, technologists and so on. The possibility of including certain actors outside our educational institution also lends a transformative dimension to the impact of the research carried out. It offers a real opportunity for clients and groups unfamiliar with the profession to learn more about its nature and demands. Moreover, by identifying strategically suitable actors to include in such projects, we might ultimately achieve a heightened awareness in society at large of translation as an expert activity.

In the following, a brief overview of research-driven teaching at our Institute of Translation and Interpreting is presented. The third section addresses teaching, learning and researching translation as a cognitive act within the minds of individual translators, while the fourth considers how translation is taught, learned and researched as a situated event comprising multiple actors and factors.

### 3 Teaching translation as a cognitive act

The methods used in the first area of implementation, directed towards the cognitive act of translation, derive from techniques commonly used in writing and translation-process research, such as direct observation and reporting of peer performances, or screen recordings with retrospective commentaries of one's own and others' translation processes. Students have been asked to comment on what they were seeing, but also on what they believed they could learn, and had learned, from their observations. Participants' comments have been elicited both in writing, with questionnaires, and orally, by means of concurrent think-aloud and retrospective techniques as well as semi-structured interviews and moderated group discussions. Where the didactic focus falls on intermodal awareness, cognitive ergonomics and instrumental competence, such as in subtitling courses, eye-tracking data has supplemented the screen recordings to provide teacher-researchers and student observers with richer visualisations of areas of student attention. In all the studies, qualitative data from the different sources have been triangulated and combined with statistical analyses of quantitative data, such as pausing, information retrieval and gaze behaviour, to provide a multi-layered repository of data on which to reflect and act. Staff specialised in translation-process research are frequently on hand to assist those teachers unaccustomed to research work.

The results have been presented in various publications. Hofer and Ehrensberger-Dow (2011), Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow (2011, 2013, 2014), and Massey and Jud (2015) describe how screen recording and eye tracking have proved beneficial for both teaching and diagnostic purposes on BA, MA and continuing professional development programmes. The research outcomes strongly suggest that process-oriented techniques in general, and screen recording in particular, can achieve positive learning effects amongst students in conventional and audiovisual translation (AVT) courses by heightening procedural and strategic awareness and by encouraging students to extend their problem-solving repertoires. In this respect, the studies replicate results of other didactic experiments using similar techniques to track and ameliorate student translation processes (e. g. Angelone, 2013; Enríquez Raído, 2013; Pym, 2009).

What is more, adopting process-oriented teaching methods has also had a distinct learning effect on the teachers and the institution they work for. In the first place, it has improved the ability of both to identify group and individual needs on the basis of the actions and behaviours leading to target-text production. For example, the premature exposure of less experienced students to AVT and other tools appears to have the detrimental effect of cognitive overload (Massey

& Jud, 2015), suggesting the need for increased scaffolding in early courses using language and multimodal translation technologies.

Secondly, the good practices identified amongst better students and professionals furnish teachers with a ready catalogue of indicators to look out for when guiding their students through the process analyses. These include targeted problem-type identification, problem solving through the consistent deployment of internal cognitive resources, the selective use of external resources adequate to the type of problem identified, larger translation segmentation operationalised in longer writing bursts, minimal self-revision and reduced multiple tasking to avoid cognitive overload. Research has also shown that even short, 10- to 15-minute sequences of recorded or observed processes deliver robust performance measures for quality translation output (Massey & Ehrensberger-Dow, 2014: 93–96), increasing the feasibility of implementing such techniques despite time and group-size constraints.

Third and last, the teachers' recognition of the usefulness of process data and techniques has led both them and their educational managers to question their own underlying, but often unconscious, epistemological positions and the normative, product-based methods of teaching and assessment they underpin. Such realisations have lain at the heart of organisational development learning theory for a number of years, described by Argyris and Schön (1978: 29) as “double-loop” learning and defined as the ability of an organisation to enquire into the very norms that govern it.

## 4 Teaching translation as a situated event

As an instance of situated cognition, translation involves interaction with all kinds of partners and a variety of environmental factors beyond the specific cognitive act of interlingual or intralingual transfer. It therefore seems wholly appropriate that preparing students for such a reality should be based around the authentic collaborative experiential learning now flourishing in translator and language-mediator education (see Kiraly et al., 2016). It is here that educators have responded most obviously to the challenge of narrowing the graduate employability gap, and it is also here that the second focus of our didactic research lies.

A salient example is provided by Massey & Brändli (2016), who report on a real-world commissioned collaborative translation project performed by a group of MA students working in four sub-groups and using the SDL TRADOS Studio translation memory system as a tool. The translation project was overseen by the class teacher, who together with another researcher and an assistant

conducted a concurrent study on the feedback flows and learning effects as the project unfolded. The data were fully anonymised and collected with a combination of instruments: a pre- and post-project questionnaire to elicit self-report and peer data on the student participants' assessment of their competences; a learning journal in which the participants were requested to document the feedback sought and received, the sources from which it came and the perceived degree of its usefulness; a concluding plenary meeting in which the students discussed their experiences during the project as both learners and participants in a research study; a final student questionnaire about the feedback they had received on the translation product; a short written report by the client organisation assessing the outcome of the project after the target text had been received; and a statement by the teacher with her own observations on the translation project, on the students' involvement and on her own role and individual development in the course of the project.

The results supply important insights into who learns what, where and how. The students' assessment of their own development shows a perceived improvement in individual competences, particularly in the technological and interpersonal aspects of translation service provision. Those who saw themselves as especially weak in the interpersonal skill cluster felt that working in a collaborative project really helped them improve. A similar awareness of emerging interpersonal competence can be seen in the peer assessments, where those judged weakest in language and production skills were deemed strong in the interpersonal sphere. This suggests that every member of a given group appears to have a role to play, and is also seen to fulfil that role by their peers. For its part, feedback was reported in the learning journals, plenary discussion and final questionnaire (Massey & Brändli, 2016: 190–193) to have worked best when it was timely, task-relevant, peer-sourced for process-related issues, which ranged from technology use and project management to problem solving and quality assurance, and client- or teacher-sourced for the product, where the principal stress lay on target-text quality. The most useful modes of feedback delivery were considered to be bilateral, dialogical, interactive and unmediated. These findings not only reinforce many insights gained from general pedagogical research on effective feedback (see Wiliam, 2010), they also supply our institution with practical corrective measures to enable more effective feedback flows to take place in future collaborative learning scenarios.

Equally pertinent from an organisational perspective are the results indicating complementary experiential learning effects on actors other than the students. The teacher explicitly refers to learning from the project, both technologically and didactically. Her comments also strongly suggest the role conflict she felt when adopting a minimally invasive approach as she coached her students. Such

metacognitive reflections reveal an incompatibility with her underlying pedagogical epistemology, which may well unleash the cognitive conflict needed to initiate conceptual change (see Bergen, 2009). In other words, the teacher's participation in this action-research initiative embodies the reflective (teaching) practice necessary to developing or maintaining adaptive expertise, which in turn holds obvious implications for the learning organisation that employs her.

Finally, the client's assessment of the students' performance demonstrated advanced awareness of key features of the translation event, in which language *per se* seems to play an unexpectedly minor part: notions of stakeholder involvement and interests, distributed cognition and functionalism can all be inferred from the comments made. This indicates the presence of feedback loops between the learning organisation and external actor-participant, suggesting a marked potential for concurrent learning effects on both sides.

## 5 A co-emergent model of expertise development

The research described above shows learning to have taken place amongst the various stakeholders of translator and language-mediator education: students, who learn from each other, and their teachers, who learn from their students, and (fellow) researchers, who learn from (fellow) teachers, students and client-actors, who learn from students, teachers and researchers. All along, our institution has also been learning – through and from the teachers and researchers who work for it, and through and from the students and external stakeholders it services. How might we account for this phenomenon?

A plausible answer can be found in a recent emergentist model of expertise development proposed by Kiraly (2013: 241; 2016) to serve as a “heuristic for researchers, teachers and learners”. Based explicitly on a relativist “postpositivist” epistemology, it conceptualises learning as a set of multiple dynamic vortices, each representing a learning element within a larger system and supported by environmental features or “affordances” (Kiraly & Hofmann, 2016: 81–83). The multi-vortex metaphor attempts to capture the non-linear, embodied, enactive and autopoietic essence of learning systems. These are assumed to be fractal, enabling the model to “depict learning within an individual, a class session, a group or even a community of practice” (Kiraly, 2016: 64). As Kiraly (2012: 87–88) succinctly puts it in an earlier paper: “[T]ranslators are not *trained*, they *emerge*. In fact, they co-emerge with their fellow learners, their teachers, the institutions they attend and the entire community of translation practice with which and whom they interact [...]”

Scaling up to the institutional level, we see that the model can effortlessly accommodate an organisational perspective. It sits well with classic theories of organisational development and learning, which posit that learning capacity can only be achieved by what Argyris & Schön (1978: 29) call “deutero-learning”, that is the ability of an organisation and its members to learn how to learn. For Senge (1999), this signifies engaging in five concrete “disciplines”: systems thinking, the personal mastery to commit to lifelong learning, the need to scrutinise and constantly challenge deeply ingrained mental models, the intrinsic motivation to build shared visions and, finally, the capacity to learn from one another in teams. Organisations should therefore empower their members by providing the context to do all five. When applied to professional education, this means facilitating individual and organisational learning by developing the fields, traditions and incentives for reflective practice (see Schön, 1987: 311; Senge, 1999: 258–259). That is precisely what our initiatives endeavour to do.

## 6 Conclusion

In the concrete reality of translator and language-mediator education, the co-emergent learning triggered by our research-driven teaching has the potential to become a strategic mainstay of how we facilitate and incentivise reflective practice. Alongside more conventional ways of operationalising institutional feedback and reflection cycles, such as curriculum evaluations, stakeholder sounding boards and graduate career tracking, doing applied linguistics provides a ready means to empower our organisation not only to teach, but also to learn.

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