

## EVALUATION IN TRANSLATOR-TRAINING COURSES: THE LEARNER'S TURN

**Marcia A. P. Martins\***

**Maria Paula Frota\***

*ABSTRACT: According to Education specialists, evaluation is a topic at once controversial and relevant due to its pedagogic, psychological, and socioeconomic implications. In their search for a fair and accurate evaluation, teachers tend to favor practices that are supposedly objective. This paper challenges this notion of objectivity and presents an alternative approach involving interaction and negotiation. These are processes that take into account the inextricable subject/object relationship and the circumstances of each piece of work to be assessed.*

*KEYWORDS: education; translation teaching; evaluation*

As recent literature indicates,<sup>1</sup> the traditional pedagogical approach in the teaching of translation, still adopted in schools around the world, is characterized by two significant features:

- the effacement of theory (expressed through the belief that 'one learns translation by doing it' – that is, the notion that the practice of translation does not require reflection);
- the central position occupied by the teacher (who in most cases is hardly aware of the fact that he or she takes on the roles of client, target public, and critic).

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(\*) Pontifícia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

(1) See Rosemary Arrojo, *O signo desconstruído*. São Paulo: Pontes, 1992, and *Tradução, desconstrução e psicanálise*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1993; also, *Anais do III Encontro Nacional de Tradutores*. Porto Alegre: UFRGS, 1988.

The method usually adopted in translator-training courses is commented translation, where translations previously made by learners are compared. The discussions are commanded by the teacher, who supplies the parameters for the evaluation of the various solutions proposed – parameters that in most cases are of a strictly linguistic character. With this type of approach, which privileges the product of translation rather than the actual process of translating, students have no opportunity to justify their choices, particularly when they happen not to match those labeled ‘good’ or ‘correct’ by the teacher as judge.

In such a context, the three translations below – made by students in an introductory course – of a poem from the children’s book *Chicken Soup with Rice*<sup>2</sup> – would not be considered equally acceptable. Usually, when no previous specification has been made, the rendering closest to the source text is privileged by teachers, while others that ‘stray’ from it are, as a matter of principle, ruled out or labeled *adaptations*.

<b>Translation 1</b>	
<p><b>JANUARY</b></p> <p>In January it’s so nice while slipping on the sliding ice to sip hot chicken soup with rice. Sipping once sipping twice sipping chicken soup with rice.</p>	<p><b>JANEIRO</b></p> <p>Em janeiro todos nós adoramos tomar canja de galinha enquanto patinamos. Um gole daqui, um gole dali, cuidado com o gelo para não cair.</p>

(2) Maurice Sendak. New York: Scholastic Book Services [undated].

Translation 2	Translation 3
<p><b>JANEIRO</b></p> <p>Mês de brincadeiras,  Na areia e no mar.  Mas gostoso mesmo  É ver navios,  Tomando muito sorvete  Até se fartar.  E a canja, meu senhor,  Quentinha, nesse calor?  Ora, ora, que coisa louca,  Pode ser fria, morna,  Ou geladinha.  Só não pode faltar...  A canja de galinha!</p>	<p><b>JANEIRO</b></p> <p>Janeiro é bom demais.  De férias com os irmãos,  Vovô, vovó e meus pais.  Brincar na beira da praia,  Fazer castelos de areia,  Sabendo que, na barraca,  No isopor, a sobrar,  Tem bolo, frescos de jaca,  E sombra pra descansar.</p>

The book from which this short poem was taken contains twelve rhymes, each for a month of the year, characterizing it as to climate, national holidays, school or vacation activities, and so on. Students were given the entire book to translate, with no further instructions given. Our intent was, from the very outset of the course, to make them aware of difference, of the multiplicity of translations that particular original, we believed, could give rise to. As expected, students brought to the classroom widely diverging translations. Reacting in accordance with common sense, and even with many critics, they rejected those solutions that contrasted too sharply with their own translations. Clearly, each individual text derived from different motivations and strategies, but students were not sufficiently aware of them to justify the choices they had made. As we will discuss in detail below, disregard for the relevance of the context of each translation is a major obstacle to be overcome by a new pedagogic and evaluative methodology for translator training.

In our examination of the three translations above, we aim to show results that, though quite different, we find acceptable, depending on the goal defined by each translator. Together with

the class, we constructed hypothetical contexts that were consistent with each alternative. Thus, the first translation would be adequate if the goal was to show Brazilian children the characteristics of a foreign country, to make them aware of the fact that such circumstances typically associated with January and February in Brazil – summer heat, school vacations, and Carnival – have nothing to do with these months in the US and in the Northern Hemisphere in general. The second translation, which might be destined for the same client as the first – say, a department of education – as well as the same public – children in the eight-to-ten age bracket – might have the purpose of teaching children the characteristics of the months of the year in our culture and land. The third translation has a less generic character, and might be classified by many as an adaptation, not least because it does without the ‘chicken soup with rice’ refrain; however, it could be seen as perfectly satisfactory in a context in which there was the intention to avoid stereotyped cultural marks and replace them with more personal and individualized experiences. In this way, we believe, it is possible to demonstrate the inescapable necessity of stating, even if only hypothetically, the conditions providing minimal orientation for the professional work of a translator.

In the light of the new epistemology underlying contemporary studies, which assumes that there is no reality independent of the observer, the philosophy of pedagogy has been changing so as to make room for the plurality of interpretations. In the case of translator training, this new epistemology has led to an emphasis on the process of translating as a way to enhance the participation of learners in classroom discussions. In this way, instead of presenting the final output of their work or superficially criticizing their peers’ translations, concerning themselves with the problem of which is ‘the best,’ students will justify the choices they have made, on the basis of specifically defined criteria and aims (Martins 1993c: 52).

This redesigning of classroom strategy clearly has a major impact on evaluation criteria and methodology. Here it is important to distinguish between the two levels of evaluation implied by a context of formal instruction: evaluation in a wider sense –

the constant process, in which all learners participate, of commenting on their own performance and on that of their peers – and the specific evaluation of written assignments read individually by the teacher. The new attitude we propose implies a movement away from the teacher and toward the student as regards the setting of parameters that guide the choices made. This setting of parameters is associated with the notion of contextualization of translation – that is, the definition of the target public, the medium in which the translation will be read, its aim, etc. And it is in the light of this contextualization (for whom? why? how?), defined by the individual would-be translator or by the class as a whole, that his or her choices and strategies can be criticized. This kind of evaluation, centering on students' actual experiences during the process of translating, and thus on each of them individually, helps them develop their capacity for (self-)criticism and reflection, which in turn should enhance their self-confidence and self-reliance.

Considering, on the one hand, the nature of our topic and, on the other, the scarcity of discussions of it in the literature on the teaching of translation,<sup>3</sup> an attempt was made to find, in the

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(3) Evaluation is largely neglected not only by teachers and researchers in translation studies but also by higher-education institutions in general, where teacher-training programs deal with the subject only in the most cursory fashion, in practical-pedagogy courses. In the field of translation, this statement is borne out by an analysis of conference programs and proceedings. For example, here are some of the events in the field of translation held in the last ten years, with the total number of papers presented or published and the number of papers concerned with evaluation: (1) Proceedings of the Brazilian *Third National Congress of Translators*, dealing with the topic "The Teaching of Translation," Porto Alegre, August 1987: 31 papers presented, only one on evaluation; (2) Proceedings of the international conference *First Language International Conference on Teaching Translation and Interpreting*, Elsinore, Denmark, June 1991: 34 papers selected for publication, none on evaluation; (3) Program of the international conference *Translation Studies: An Interdiscipline*, Vienna, September 1992: 175 papers presented, two on evaluation; (4) Proceedings of the *Second Language*

field of education, reflections on and proposals for the general topic of evaluation.

In a recent article, the educator Veer Taverns de Souza points out that few issues in education spark so much emotionalism and controversy as the evaluation of learning; however, she notes, in spite of this fact, or perhaps because of it, the subject is often neglected (1994: 13-14). She also stresses that specialists frequently disagree as to the value of evaluation: whereas to some it is a constructive and motivating tool that generates wholesome competitiveness and leads to innovation and improvement in teaching practices, to others it is a destructive activity that threatens spontaneity, breeds an atmosphere of tension, and has a paralyzing effect on creativity. Thus we see that evaluation has not only strictly pedagogic implications but also psychological and socioeconomic ones.

Although there are some who feel that evaluation is intimidating, the fact remains that teachers have to evaluate. It is a requisite of the structure of education, as well as of society at large. Evaluation is an activity that is present in widely differing situations in life. It is up to the teacher to devise, together with the students approval, forms of evaluation that allow a more constructive feedback and that are attuned to contemporary epistemologies and philosophies of education. In their book *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989), Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln attempt to synthesize the conceptual transformations undergone by evaluation, presenting them as a succession of four generations. The first consists of **measurement**, with emphasis on measures and tests; the second relies on **description**, center-

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*International Conference on Teaching Translation and Interpreting*, Elsinore, Denmark, June 1993: 35 papers published, four on evaluation (two on evaluation of translations, two on evaluation of quality of simultaneous translators' performance); (5) *Proceedings of Third Language International Conference on Teaching Translation and Interpreting*, Elsinore, Denmark, June 1995: 31 papers published, four on evaluation (again, two on qualitative evaluation of translations, two on same of simultaneous interpretations); and (6) Program of EST Congress, Prague, Czech Republic, September 1995: 82 papers presented, four on teaching and evaluation.

ing on the analysis of results achieved vis-à-vis the original goals; the third is based on **judgments**, where the evaluator plays the role of judge; and the fourth consists of **negotiation**, involving human aspects of a sociocultural and politico-ideological nature.

Given the goals and limits of the present paper, we cannot discuss here this change of concepts. Rather, our intent is to concentrate on some characteristics of the so-called fourth generation, the only one that meets our expectations. Its emphasis on negotiation is consistent with the requirements of post-modernity and its conceptions of language, translation, and teaching. It is a form of evaluation in which the learner is valued and which rejects models that fail to consider the differences between subjects. Negotiated evaluation follows two fundamental guidelines:

- to allow the learner's voice to be heard, and to listen to the learner's explanations of his or her motivations, doubts, and aims;
- to emphasize not only the learner's evaluation by the teacher but also the learner's self-evaluation and his or her evaluation of the teacher and the course.

As Taverns de Souza remarks, there is a growing emphasis on techniques of self-evaluation and of evaluation of both the teacher's performance and of the tools and strategies that allow learners to master learning (1994: 15). The teacher is no longer the sole evaluator; he or she now shares this task with the students. Consequently the role of judge is decentered; rather than being attributed to the teacher, it is shared by all members of the class.

It should be mentioned that Guba and Lincoln's study is not aimed at teachers interested in renewing their evaluating practices, but mostly at professional evaluators, a profession that has been officially acknowledged in the US for some years now. Thus the authors are not discussing the evaluation of student work, but that of products and services offered by businesses in general. Nevertheless, we have found in their book theoretical formulations and practical suggestions that are applicable to the context of college-level courses.

A central aspect of Guba and Lincoln's proposal, which is also one of the basic premises of the reformulation we present here, is a radical critique of scientific positions, characterized by the adoption of statistical techniques of evaluation used by a single evaluator. Also, emphasis is given to the definition of criteria based on social and ideological values that recognize the possibility of singularity. The evaluative process and its results are seen not as objective descriptions of facts but as interpretive constructions, products of the interaction of all agents involved. These constructions are seen as resulting from the values of the 'constructing' subjects, values that may be either common or distinct; and when they are distinct, the negotiation of differences takes on special importance.

Evaluations and evaluators, constructions and constructors are indissolubly caught up in the socio-historical contexts that constitute them. These contexts, in turn, are also seen as constructions. That is, the objects evaluated, the evaluators, and their contexts are all seen as constructions resulting from possibly conflicting perceptions or interpretations, so that they cannot be considered 'true' in any absolute sense. They are constructions in which the subject is necessarily implied, and therefore they should not be seen as objective – as they are by the traditional conceptions of the act of translating and of the act of 'teaching' criticized at the beginning of the present paper.

Affirming their opposition to the centralization of evaluative power, Guba and Lincoln emphasize that the division of this power is the factor responsible for the emancipation of learners, who thus take on more responsibility for what they do by justifying and criticizing their own work. Each evaluation is seen as part of a wider process in which the parties involved interact and negotiate on a constant basis, in accordance with an ethics that is also different from that of conventional negotiators. The ethics proposed by Guba and Lincoln, in consistency with their principles, assigns priority to difference, but also suggests an attitude of respect and partnership in the elaboration, implementation, and other actions that are a part or result of evaluation. The valuing of differences and of firmness of convictions should not be confused with intransigence. A radical individualism should be avoided, for it would have the effect of bringing



about a stance just as authoritarian as the one rejected at the start.

This evaluation methodology is to be distinguished from the entire tradition that relies on standardized forms of evaluation of objectives. This tradition is also attacked by post-structuralist theories of translation, which affirm that the translator is necessarily present in the texts he or she reads/writes and deny the possibility of a neutral reproduction of meanings, intentions, and effects external to him or her.

But how can this proposed evaluation be effected in actual practice, not only in routine classroom discussions but also in the reading and grading of student translations? Evaluation, in this context as well, should first of all take into account a number of factors (Martins 1993c:53):

- the aims of the student translator in each specific task, so that the final output is judged in relation to these aims, rather than in isolation;
- the decisions made by the student translator throughout the process and the motivation behind each of them; and
- the procedures used and their adequacy to specific situations.

How to make all these details explicit, in the particular context of the evaluation of a written assignment? Learners are encouraged to hand in, together with their translations, comments that explain, whenever they feel this to be necessary, the strategies, difficulties, and various alternatives which they faced or made use of. These comments will serve to ground and justify their choices when their work is read in isolation by the teacher.

Thus, for the evaluation of the assignments, the teacher will have more data on the basis of which to understand the process experienced by learners, the criteria governing their choices, and the goals they had set for themselves. The teacher can increase this knowledge by requesting additional clarifications concerning passages he or she would like to discuss further before arriving at an evaluation. However, it is important that the teacher single out these passages and indicate the reason for his or her interest, so as to provide orientation for the

student. For instance, the teacher may ask a student to justify his or her use of an instance of cultural adaptation, choice of a particular metaphor, or resort to a lexical item that is apparently at odds with the prevailing register of the text. The teacher may also recommend that the translation be revised with an eye to spelling, prepositions, specific cases of agreement, or even wider formal aspects such as the text's fluency/opacity.

In this way, the teacher dialogues with the learner in a series of exchanges, until the two interlocutors feel they are sufficiently informed as to the proposals and criteria relevant for that particular translation. Often it is only in the course of the dialogue with the teacher that a student will become aware of some of these aspects, as he or she is asked to reflect on them and make them explicit. Even if in many cases no consensus is arrived at, the very articulation of differences is a goal worth reaching. **Negotiation** here is not to be understood in the sense of 'compromising,' but rather in that of expressing, discussing, understanding plurality and divergences, and perhaps revising one's opinion. Once difference and negotiation are valued, learners gain the right to voice their questions, expectations, and interests, so that they are taken into consideration. Without such information, the teacher will not be able to conduct an evaluation that respects the new ethics.

To illustrate this proposal, an example of a negotiated and interactive evaluation follows.

One of the first exercises undertaken by students at a recent course of Technical Translation I was the translation of 'The history of the English language,' the introductory text to another publication for children<sup>4</sup>, a dictionary rather than a book of poetry. Before we began working on the text, we defined some important variables to provide a basis for the formulation of decision criteria and guidelines for the choices to be made, and we arrived at the following table:

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(4) *Children's Dictionary (Monolingual)*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1979; introduction by Stephen Krensky.

Initiator of translation:	A publisher of children's books.
Medium:	An English-Portuguese dictionary for children.
Target public:	Children in the 10-to-15 age bracket
Objective:	To offer Brazilian children learning English a bilingual dictionary with introduction and entries written in language adequate to the age bracket of the target public and, whenever possible, including examples adapted to the target culture.

Once these variables were defined, we proceeded to translate the text, the first paragraph of which is transcribed below:

*THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE*

*Language is something that most of us take for granted. Words seem to appear automatically in our heads; sentences pop out at our request. We hardly think about how and why we choose them. We read and write, speak and listen, as though we have done it always. This is not true, of course. We are not born with a language at the tip of our tongues, nor do we put on a language like a new winter coat. Learning a language is more like gathering leaves in October. We rake them up, either deliberately or at random, watching the pile grow larger as the leaves fall in ever increasing numbers.*

This fragment gave rise to widely diverging translations, although the contextualization and the parameters were established by consensus. To illustrate the process of negotiated evaluation, here is one of the translations handed in:

### A HISTÓRIA DA LINGUAGEM

A maioria das pessoas acha que a língua é algo inato. Palavras parecem surgir automaticamente em nossas mentes; frases saltam ao nosso comando. Dificilmente pensamos em como e por que as escolhemos. Lemos e escrevemos, falamos e ouvimos, como se sempre tivéssemos feito isso. É claro que não é verdade. Nós não nascemos com um alfabeto na ponta da língua, nem vestimos um idioma como se ele fosse um biquíni novo. Aprender uma língua é a mesma coisa que mudar de cor no verão. Pegamos sol, deliberada ou involuntariamente e observamos a pele ficar cada dia mais bronzeada<sup>5</sup>.  
(FPM)

In the process of evaluation of the passage above, the following observations were made, with no implications as to the grading of the assignment:

- 1 Reflect on the title and comment on your choice.
- 2 Revise and comment on the absence of articles.
- 3 Comment on the choice of the word 'alphabet.'
- 4 Revise the punctuation of the last sentence.
- 5 Don't you think that 'vestir um idioma' sounds much stranger than 'to put on a language'? Think about the difference in use of both phrases, based on the research you may find necessary.
- 6 Justify your choice of getting a tan as an image.

(5) Here is a literal retranslation back into English: "THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE. Most people think that language is something innate. Words seem to appear automatically in our minds; sentences spring up at our command. We hardly think about how and why we choose them. We read and write, speak and listen, as though we have done it always. Of course, this is not true. We are not born with an alphabet at the tip of our tongues, nor do we put on a language as if it was a new bikini. Learning a language is just like

After analyzing her translation in the light of the comments above, the student wrote a reply, part of which is transcribed below:

- 1 I used the title 'A história da linguagem' because this was the neutral way I found to translate it, since the approach I adopted in my translation privileges the target culture and, therefore, the Portuguese language rather than English (as in the original title). However, if I were to do it over again, I would use 'A História da Língua', for I believe 'língua' would be more adequate to the subject of the text.<sup>6</sup>
  
  - 2 The two situations in which I detected the absence of the article are in the second sentence. In both cases, I did not use the article so that 'palavras' and 'frases' would have a wider, more generic meaning. Having reread my translation, I insist in not using articles, because I do not want the nouns in question to be determined.
  
  - 3 [...]
  - 4 [...]
  - 5 [...]
  
  - 6 The image used in the original text (gathering leaves) implies a gradual process. Since the translation was geared to the target culture – that is, Brazil – I decided to use an emphatically Brazilian image while preserving, however, the notion of a gradual process. That is why I used the image of getting a tan, because you don't get a tan right away; you have to go to the beach for a number of days before you reach this goal.
- (FPM)

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changing color in summer. We catch sun, deliberately or involuntarily and watch our skin getting more and more tanned each day.  
(Translator's note)

- (6) *Linguagem* means "language in general," whereas *língua* means "tongue, a specific language." (T.N.)

The first item of the student's reply gave rise to the following comment by the teacher:

1 Your observation shows that you are unaware of the difference between the concepts of 'linguagem' and 'língua.' It also shows that you failed to read the text to the end before beginning to translate it, because the difference between the two concepts is clearly established later. For the next class, read up on the two concepts, read the entire text, and revise your translation once more.

By now it is possible to grade the assignment, and the student once again will have an opportunity to negotiate. It is important to stress that, although the teacher shares with the learner not only the task of evaluating but also the planning and development of the course, the teacher cannot escape playing a role different from that of the student. We do not advocate the extinction of the teacher's role; our intention is to present a critique of the way how this role has been traditionally understood and to suggest changes. Thus we believe the teacher should know how to conduct the course in a negotiated manner, but without giving up an authority that is institutionally conferred on him or her and which provides learners with the experience of an asymmetrical relationship, similar to the one they will have to face in the labor market. In this way, the possibility of an endless negotiation, in which every reply is followed by another reply from the opposite party, is eliminated.

The implementation of this pedagogy is no simple matter. Students are often reluctant to accept both a role for themselves that requires them to work harder and a teacher that does not act in accordance with expected patterns, by refusing to provide immediate and definitive answers to students' questions. The teacher, in turn, may at first resent students' negative reactions to the new methodology, as well as find it difficult to adapt to this new role.

However, we believe that this method is positive for all: for students, who are encouraged to think critically about their own work and to search for new knowledge; for teachers, who feel

much more fully in charge of their functions as educators by sharing with students the possibility of multiple readings, questionings, and solutions; and for the translation market, since new professionals will tend to be more conscious and able to adapt their strategies to specific situations. Also, we believe that evaluation as negotiation contributes to the development of learners' self-assuredness and their (self-)critical abilities, and thus promotes one of the major aims of education. As Tavares de Souza observes, the essence of education is change, and one of its most important objectives is to teach how to think effectively and critically (1944:13).

Awareness of the fundamental role of evaluation in the context of educational activities points to the need for in-depth studies of the topic of evaluation in general and its practical applications to translator-training pedagogy, which is beginning to attract considerable attention in institutions around the world, now that the formal teaching of translation is increasingly valued.

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