

Session VIII

Reflective Practice in Interpreter Education: A Report from the Interpreting Classroom

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This presentation reports on the evolution of a course aimed at improving learning among student interpreters through action research. The first part describes the motivation for developing a stronger reflective component in a curriculum environment focused on professional practice. The multiyear process of syllabus design, implementation, review and enhancement is outlined. The second part describes concerns of students, highlighting their work in action research projects. Their learning processes, interaction in the classroom and at real interpreting events, and ensuing synthesis of theory and practice are illustrated through their initial selection of project topics, iterative development of project focus and methodology, and discussion of learning outcomes.

For Better and for Worse: The Transformation of a Diploma Program into MA Studies

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Miriam Shlesinger has been teaching translation and interpreting as well as translation theory since 1978. She is a professional translator (of Israeli literature, from Hebrew into English) and interpreter, as well as a T&I scholar. Her research interests center on the workings of conference interpreting, but she also has a keen interest in community interpreting, the pedagogy of translator and interpreter training, translation/interpreting universals, drama translation and the translation process. Together with Franz Poehhacker, she was co-editor of the Interpreting Studies Reader (Routledge 2002) and currently co-edits the journal Interpreting (John Benjamins). She has published in Target, The Translator, Interpreting, The Interpreters' Newsletter, Meta and Across (in print).

Rachel Weissbrod's Ph.D. dissertation (submitted in 1989) examines the translation of prose fiction from English into Hebrew in the 1960s and 1970s from the point of view of the relations between canonized and non-canonized fiction. Her areas of interest include theory of translation, history of literary translation into Hebrew and inter-semiotic translation. She has published in Target, Multilingua, The Translator, Meta, Across and more. She currently teaches at the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

Introduction

The Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Bar-Ilan University (Ramat-Gan, Israel) was founded in 1972 as a postgraduate diploma program. Situated in a multi-cultural country, it has offered professional education to students with a wide range of native languages. In 2002, the department underwent a drastic change when, after seeking and ultimately receiving certification from the Israeli Council for Higher Education, it was "upgraded" from a diploma program into full-fledged academic studies granting a Master of Arts degree (with a choice between the thesis track and the non-thesis track). In 2004, the department's mandate was extended to include supervision of doctoral students as well.

In our presentation, we would like to discuss the challenges and hardships entailed in such a transformation, and to raise some theoretical and pedagogical questions that may be of general interest.

1. Starting Late

Since there is no BA program in Translation Studies anywhere in Israel, students enrolling in our MA program must, in effect, start from scratch. Their BA degrees are in a variety of disciplines and very few have ever studied translation or translation theory in any forum. Thus, their two years in our department must somehow provide both the practical-professional and the theoretical knowledge that a modern translator cum translation scholar requires.

The program is of necessity very dense. To make things harder, students in Israel, and MA students in particular, are usually not very young, and scholarships are rare, so that many of them have to work for a living and even maintain a family. Despite these difficulties, studying translation as an MA program is not necessarily a disadvantage. The students' life experience and former academic studies guarantee that they have the maturity which, we believe, is needed to understand and internalize the multi-faceted nature of translation.

However, the need to condense the studies into two years puts a great responsibility on the department's faculty. The first issue we would like to discuss in this context is the tension between theory- and practice-oriented studies.

2. Theory-Oriented or Practice-Oriented?

In a thought-provoking article by María Calzada Pérez (2005), the author rejects the dichotomy between theory and practice in the training of translators and interpreters. According to Pérez, training is never "free" from theory because teachers always have in mind a certain conception of the nature and goal of translation, namely a theory, which inspires their teaching. Following Pym (2003), her advice to teachers of translation is to be explicit regarding the theory which underlies their courses. Moreover, she recommends that teachers expose their students to various theoretical approaches and let them practice translating according to each of these.

Though we do not contest the view that theory is beneficial for practitioners, we would like to take this one step further and raise the following question: if translation studies at the university are meant not just to train translators and interpreters, but also to inspire the next generation of researchers, doesn't it mean that the teaching of theory should be freed from any consideration of its benefit to practitioners?

In fact, it is not only theory in the Popperian sense that we are talking about but also the history of translation and its conception by philosophers, critics and poets. We are hard put to answer the question (sometimes raised by the students themselves) of what is the benefit of studying these subjects. Should we try to convince the students (and ourselves) that everything is beneficial in one way or another, or insist that the question whether some object of study is useful or not is irrelevant?

The ideal of knowledge as its own end has been cultivated by thinkers and researchers throughout history, and has at times been regarded as the main role of universities (Newman, 1976 [1852]). We too find ourselves wondering how to reconcile it with the need to give our students the best possible professional training while also promoting the knowledge-for-its-own-sake value.

3. Screening – What Are We Looking For?

The department is expected to train translators and interpreters as well as provide a home for rising scholars. This raises the question of how to pre-select the most fitting candidates. Technically, admission requires fluency in at least two of the languages taught at the department and a BA degree with a grade average of at least 80 (for the non-thesis track) or 85 (for the thesis track). The proficiency criterion is aimed at professional aptitude and the high-grade BA is aimed at ensuring academic excellence. But will those who meet the first criterion necessarily be willing and able to undertake research as well? In other words, do the two criteria necessarily go together? Intuitively, translation research requires traits such as intellectual curiosity and analytical thinking. True, would-be translators and interpreters do presumably exhibit these traits as well; but they are not normally the focus of institutional screening criteria. By the same token, proficiency in two or more languages is basic for both translators and researchers in the field; but in research, a more passive command of the languages may suffice. And indeed, students who do well on their (skill-oriented) diploma examinations are not necessarily those who have been prominent in the theory classes, and vice versa.

Further support for our intuition comes from personality tests used by institutions involved in job placement. Though psychologists themselves hold such tests in dispute, it is interesting to note that the widely used MBTI tests, which are based on the theories of Carl Jung (Thompson, 1996), refer to translators and college professors as having distinct personality profiles.¹

However, if we put psychology aside and take a sociological point of view, it is not so much the pre-disposition of the student that matters, but his/her potential “habitus”, or “socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 126). According to Bourdieu, society comprises fields and the habitus is field-dependent. One may therefore claim that whatever the personality profile of the student, he or she will eventually acquire the habitus of a translator, an interpreter, or a university scholar – depending on the cultural field he or she will integrate into. The challenge of sorting out the most fitting candidates in advance thus gives way to another: that of helping the students to find out what is expected of them and how they can fit into their future habitat(s).

4. Students’ Future Careers

Since the launching of the new program, 35 students have completed their studies and been granted an MA degree. Six of them have completed the thesis track, and about twenty more are in the process. At present there are 78 students in the department, 5 of whom are doctoral candidates. The subjects of the dissertations vary: court and community interpreting, translation from a pragmatic point of view, translation of the Scriptures and literary translation.

The satisfaction felt at this outcome of the academic upgrading of the department is mingled with new concerns. Being well aware of the difficulties involved in finding a job and earning a living as a translator or interpreter, how can we assume the extra responsibility of sending new scholars out into the world, trained in a discipline which is still not very well established in Israeli academe?

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To sum up then, we hope to have outlined the four main challenges posed by the (clearly preferred) status of MA:

1. the fact that the MA is the students' first exposure to Translation Studies
2. the need to strike the golden mean between theory-oriented and practice-oriented courses
3. the need to screen for two seemingly distinct types of students
4. the ethical issues.

A Newly Opened M.A. Program in Interpreting and Translation Studies in Osaka, Japan: Prospects and Tasks

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Osaka University of Foreign Studies is an 84 years old, rather small scale, and the national government-supported university (with a total student population of just over 4,000), located within the suburb of the second largest metropolis in Japan. Here, an undergraduate or graduate student can major in one among 25 languages, and at the same time pursue the linguistics, language education, social sciences, international studies and/or area studies. To name the languages in alphabetical order, one can major in Arabic, Burmese, Chinese (or Mandarin), Danish, Filipino (or Tagalog), French, German, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Persian (or Farsi), Portuguese (-Brazilian), Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. And 30 or so other non-major languages can also be studied.

The learning of English as the first "foreign language" is done for most Japanese for six years during the junior and senior high schools. The Japanese children study English ABC as the second language but only from when they already reached 12 years. Very few would get to actually use the foreign language, and that is why the Japanese are until today among the highly educated but the least, if not worst, English speakers within Asia.

Osaka University of Foreign Studies has just initiated a graduate program in inter-lingual interpreting and translation studies. We call it "inter-lingual" because we cover many different languages, and we always juxtapose "interpreting and translation" because in Japan the so-called

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community interpreters are almost always involved in translation works in the course of interpreting services. In other words, interpreting and translation are inseparable in this field.

When I opened and handled in 1997 a course entitled “Special Lecture on Judiciary Interpreting and Translation,” it was literally the first of the kind among graduate schools within Japan. And incidentally it was 11 years after I myself first acted as Court Interpreter in an appealed case at the Osaka High Court in 1986. Since then I have been a practicing interpreter in Filipino-Japanese and/or English-Japanese in the High and District courts, prosecutor’s offices, police headquarters, bar associations, and even in prisons without a formal training at all. Until now I am not a certified interpreter simply because there has been no certification system for judiciary interpreters in Japan. And so in 1997 I stated sharing the experiences in my graduate school.

Today there are actually several other graduate schools within Japan that offer a program or courses in interpreting training and studies. However, the language combinations are specific only to English-and-Japanese or Chinese-and-Japanese, and the emphasis is more on conference interpreting rather than social service interpreting and translation. Those graduate schools include Daito Bunka University, Rikkyo University, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (all in Tokyo), and Kobe Jogakuin University (in Hyogo Prefecture).

Our initial emphasis in inter-lingual interpreting and translation has been on judicial interpreting and translation. Four new subjects began to be offered at the same time during the school year 2003 for which the legal practitioners themselves (whose institutions are the ones to “employ” interpreters and translators) give lectures and supervise the practicum. The university has successfully invited high-ranking police officers, Ministry of Justice officers (such as Immigration Director and Prison Superintendent), public prosecutors, judges and practicing lawyers. The significance of this approach is confirmed by the assumption that the Japanese government and the judiciary are highly centralized. They are almost every three or so years assigned and reassigned to different cities anywhere but within Japan.

As direct users of interpreters and translators, they explain the national system, local situation, and standardized policy on using interpreters and translators, and give lecture on the terms and usages in their profession. And so the judges, public prosecutors, immigration officers or police officers themselves directly supervise the mock trial, mock investigation and the like within the classroom wherein the role-playing is done among the students. It is important to note that through the questions and feedbacks from the students, these have clearly effectively become the “user’s education.”

In October last year, we started to offer a subject entitled “Foundation for Medical and Healthcare Interpreting and Translation,” again inviting the medical practitioners like doctors, nurses and pharmacists as lecturers. This literally is the first such subject being offered in Japanese graduate school. It is envisioned to add more subjects in medical as well as other community interpreting and translation.

Osaka University of Foreign Studies has since this last April 2005 opened a full-fledged M.A. degree program specializing in interpreting and translation. Theories, skills and praxis in language studies and various forms of interpreting and translation are being taught. Three students had already become Ph.D. candidates and are working for their dissertation. This new program is envisioned to train professionals, especially for judiciary, medical-healthcare and other social service fields. There has been no similar graduate school in Japan, while the demands for various public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) have increased tremendously for the last decade or two.

The current student population of the M.A. Program is 13, of which 8 are in Japanese-Chinese, 2 in Japanese-Spanish, and 1 each in Japanese-English, Japanese-Korean and Japanese-Vietnamese language combinations. Of those 13, six are the Japanese native speakers and seven are international students from China, Vietnam and Malaysia.

The curriculum includes theories and methods of interpreting and translation, language-specific interpreting skills, and lectures and praxis by the “users.” While some 40 lecturers handle a total of 22 courses during the current school year, there is still only one fulltime faculty member who acts as a coordinator of the Program. Because Japan does not have any publicly recognized certification system for any area of the PSIT, it will be a big task for future graduates of this program to prove their qualification as well as professionalism. The paper explores such situation and seeks advises from the experts.

Promoting General Knowledge among Apprentice Translators

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A graduate in French literature, linguistics and translation studies, Isabelle Collombat is an assistant professor at Université Laval, in Quebec City, Canada, where she has been teaching translation and comparative stylistics (French-English) for six years. Her translation experience covers various fields, including technical translation (maritime industry and navy), international relations and literature (mystery novels). Her research interests include retranslation, pseudo-translation, the translation of metaphor, translation as a social practice, translation pedagogy.

Since the 70's, education in North America has focused on specialized knowledge, sometimes leading to overspecialization to the detriment of general knowledge, a development many theorists have deplored. Specialists in teaching translation also deplore the lack of general knowledge among first-year translation students, a deficiency that is often considered to compromise further acquisition of specialized knowledge.

1. What is general knowledge?

General knowledge is generally defined as “such knowledge and skills that are essential for everybody to be able to live as a human being and a citizen”.

As human beings, we acquire general knowledge through experience, gained through our interactions with the physical world. As citizens, our general knowledge is fed by our interactions within society and is thus culturally marked and related to “general culture”.

General knowledge is widely identified as a very good indicator of what is termed “crystallized intelligence“, in opposition to “fluid intelligence”. Fluid intelligence, which is thought to be innate, “relates to how well an individual perceives complex relations, uses short-term memory, forms concepts, and engages in abstract reasoning”. Crystallized intelligence, on the other hand “consists of acquired abilities such as verbal comprehension, numerical skills, and inductive reasoning. It is based on acculturation, including those factors learned in formal schools and in society.”

Fluid intelligence is relatively static, while crystallized intelligence tends to improve with age. Also, fluid intelligence appears to be independent of experience and education, while crystallized intelligence is by nature education- and culture-based.

In short, fluid intelligence is the “ability to develop techniques for solving problems that are new and unusual, from the perspective of the problem solver”, while crystallized intelligence is the “ability to bring previously acquired, often culturally defined, problem-solving methods to bear on the current problem”.

2. Why is general knowledge important in the translation process and in translation training?

It is generally required that candidates who wish to become translators have basic logical abilities. But logical skills involve fluid intelligence, which is innate and independent of education. So it may be more effective to select candidates on the basis of their crystallized intelligence and to offer training to help apprentice translators improve their general knowledge by using previously acquired problem-solving methods to deal with translation problems.

In fact, since translation is a semantic process, it seems critical for translators-to-be to acquire skills to help them map and network information—precisely the object of crystallized intelligence. The wide range of translation problems a translator may face is better addressed by application of a method than by memorization of information as such.

Moreover, unlike fluid intelligence, crystallized intelligence is enhanced by experience and education. Thus, the only way to make sure that learners acquire translation problem-solving tools during their studies is to help them improve their general knowledge and learn to summon up general knowledge when translating. In short, only crystallized intelligence may be improved by any training curriculum.

3. How is general knowledge involved in the translation process?

Delisle, among others, discusses translation problems caused by the absence of cognitive complements; actually, the problem is rather that during the translation process, beginners often “forget” their cognitive complements or general knowledge.

An example is the phrase “litter after litter” in a text about mouse reproduction, which one student translated by “litière après litière” instead of “portée après portée”. *Litter* and *litière* are partial false friends; but in any case, speaking spontaneously in French, this student would never have said *litière* instead of *portée* in the sense of “a group of young mammals comprising all those born at a single birth”. So the problem is definitely not a lack of general knowledge, but a failure to summon up one’s previously acquired general knowledge while translating.

The previous example involves trivial knowledge, the kind which is essential to be able to live as a human being. As we saw earlier, the second kind of general knowledge is that relating to our ability to live as citizens. In order to translate the phrase “the federal and provincial governments in Canada” into French properly, the translator must know that Canada has one federal government and ten provincial governments. So the only acceptable translation is “les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux du Canada”. In this case, extralinguistic knowledge leads the translator to use one singular and one plural adjective to modify the plural noun (adjectives being marked for number in French but not in English).

As explained at the beginning of this paper, general knowledge is not a question of acquiring a particular amount of information but of structuring information, an ability based on personal experience, which allows us to question and doubt. So it appears that general knowledge leads to vigilance that can help translators avoid pitfalls. Also, experience allows translators to gain speed and efficiency in solving translation problems, which is highly important considering the tight deadlines professional translators face.

4. How can translation teachers incorporate the acquisition of general knowledge in their courses?

In practical terms, some specific strategies can be used to promote the acquisition of general knowledge among translators in training.

Throughout a given course, it is pertinent to refer to previously studied and translated texts or exercises, with a view to teaching or reviewing not only translation strategies but also knowledge or information acquired. The instructor may, for example, simply ask factual questions, such as “What is the capital city of Pakistan?” a few weeks after translating a text about Islamabad.

Since information structuring is the key to acquiring general knowledge, it is also crucial to refer to other courses in the program.

Another interesting way to enhance students’ general culture and show them how translation problems often relate to general knowledge is to have them do translation commentaries, focusing for example on cultural equivalents.

When Meaning Is Not the Issue in Consecutive Interpreting

By Dr Kevin Lin

Chief Interpreter (Chinese) of the British Foreign Office

Dr Kevin Lin is the Chief Interpreter (Chinese) of the British Government. He is responsible for interpreting for Tony Blair and his senior cabinet ministers and for providing definitive translation service to the British Government. He published a textbook on Consecutive Interpreting in Beijing and Taipei last year. He is Guest Professor of two Chinese universities and runs his own consultancy company in London specializing in communication in Chinese and the internet. He was awarded PhD in Linguistics at Lancaster University, England, in 1990.

Is it meaning?

There are four situations in which concepts such as meaning, fidelity and accuracy are insufficient in explaining what an interpreter needs to convey in Consecutive Interpreting.

The first situation is what I would call a “Retrospective error”. This is when an interpreter has done a good job at one turn of the conversation, but appears to have committed a fatal error after the next turn of the conversation is heard. Here is a classic example among Chinese interpreters.

A Chinese Minister used a Chinese proverb in his conversation with his western counterpart at dinner. If translated literally, it was this. “The matter is like blending chopped Spring Onion with mashed Tofu”, meaning there is no confusion of which is which. The interpreter, worrying

about the proverb making no sense to non-Chinese speakers, said: “the matter is crystal clear”. The Chinese Minister then asked his guest: “Do you have Tofu in your country”.

The story illustrates a fundamental difference between translation and interpreting. Translators deal with conversations already written out in front of them. The interaction between the two conversing parties is already established.

Interpreters participate in live interactions. What is said at the next turn of the conversation depends very much on how the previous turn has been interpreted. The interaction is yet to take place. In this case, meaning and accuracy are often negotiable. What is accurate, faithful or having equivalent effect is not clear to the interpreter until sometime after s/he has done the interpreting.

The second situation is when an interpreter is faced with an implicature (Levinson 1983). When a British host says: “it’s a bit cold in here, isn’t”, s/he could be asking her/his guests to close the window. But if that is said to a group of guests from China, and if the interpreter conveys the linguistic equivalent in Chinese of the original utterance, the Chinese guests may well answer “yes” and do nothing to close the window. That is because Chinese requests need to be expressed much more explicitly linguistically.

But if the interpreter crystallises the implicature, s/he risks making explicit something the speaker has taken great pains to disguise linguistically. In this case, criteria of quality of interpreting based on concepts like meaning, fidelity and accuracy are not very helpful to the interpreter.

The third situation is humour. Very often, there is nothing inherently funny in individual utterances of a speaker. It is when these utterances are said and heard together in a certain sequence given a certain cultural context that they sound funny. In that sense, humour is an effect that a speaker produces which an audience feels or misses.

The fourth situation is what I would call “cues”. This is when a speaker says something to cue an action from the audience. One of the most frequently used cues is a punch line that sets off laughter. Another is the cue for audience to applaud. In this latter case, an interpreter needs to come up with a cue in the target language.

In both third and fourth situations, concepts like meaning, fidelity and accuracy have difficulties. First, you can hardly call humour a cue or meaning. Neither humour nor a cue is inherent in any linguistic components of the utterances that sounded humorous or worked as cues. Second, reproducing humorous effect or a cue in the target language can hardly be called conveying meaning and are difficult to measure in terms of faithfulness or accuracy.

No meaning

There are four situations in which concepts like meaning, faithfulness and accuracy become irrelevant to the interpreter’s effort to do a good job. I call these four situations the Four Didn’ts.

Didn’t hear it - this is when the interpreter simply did not hear what was said. It could be because the interpreter was placed too far away from the speaker or the speaker suddenly turned his/her head to one side and was off mike, or the speaker suddenly lowered his/her voice or the interpreter was simply not there – the speaker started speaking before the interpreter walked into the room. As the interpreter did not hear what was said, there was no meaning to interpret, let alone achieving accuracy.

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Didn't understand – this is when the interpreter heard what was said, but did not understand it in the source language. This is usually when the word used or idea expressed was not in the interpreter's repertoire.

Didn't capture it - this is when the interpreter heard it, understood, but did not manage to capture and retain it either in memory or in his/her notes.

Didn't have a clue – this is when the interpreter heard it, understood it, and captured it but did not know how to express it in the target language. In this situation, the interpreter needs to find a way out of the situation. The issue is no longer meaning, faithfulness or accuracy, but how to minimize the problem and continue interpreting.

One might be tempted to say that the Four Didn'ts are exceptional circumstances and so are not to be dealt with by a theory of Consecutive Interpreting. But the reality is that the Four Didn'ts are part and parcel of Consecutive Interpreting. Excluding them from a theory will only discredit the theory. There is a practical aspect too – we need to train students to be able to deal with these situations. How to handle “no meaning” needs to be an integral part of a theory on Consecutive Interpreting.

Show me “what you say”, I’ll tell you who you are!
Changing the discourse in dialogue interpreting to reflect new realities and to promote the professionalization of dialogue interpreters in Canada

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This presentation will attempt to demonstrate the link between professionalization of dialogue (or community) interpreting and professional discourse in Canada. The traditional definition of the “Roles and Responsibilities” of the dialogue interpreter is prescriptive and has mainly served to support a well-established but necessary “myth [reflecting] the professional need to unify around certain working principles” (Wadnsjö 2004:119).

Given that new realities and challenges suggest a need to re-think such definitions, the author will examine the notion of “Role” and its indiscriminate use to signify both the *goal* of the interpretation and *the various roles* an interpreter may assume in a communicative situation (responder, reporter, recapitulator in Wadnsjö’s taxonomy). Then she will delve into the question of neutrality and the need for cultural adaptation in dialogue interpreting. According to Wadnsjö, a neutral interpreter is a reporter. Cultural adaptation and awareness mobilize the interpreter’s recapitulation capacities and shift the focus of communication from faithfulness to functionalism. The challenge lies in attempting to reconcile the various roles and acknowledge their interaction.

Finally, the author will stress the importance of theorizing with a view to adopting a *descriptive discourse* on “who dialogue interpreters are and what they do” as part of an overall effort to gain respect for dialogue interpreting and to press for its recognition as a profession.