Teaching Translation from Spanish to English

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CHAPTER 10
THE TEACHING CONTEXT

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment opportunities for prose translation were discussed in the introduction. It was suggested that there are opportunities for oral translating, in which TL errors may be acceptable if they do not interfere with the informative communicative intent of the discourse or break politeness rules in the TL culture. It was also suggested that formalized prose translations in restricted registers will be asked of translators as a part of their job. It is important for translators to know their own limits and recognize which texts they can cope with and how much documenting they will need to do. They should also know if their translation is a rough draft that will be edited.

STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Motivation is obviously the clue to any successful learning situation. Trainee translators are usually motivated when they start, and it is the teacher's job to organize the course in such a way that this precious motivation is not lost.23

The person who has chosen to work with languages will usually find the puzzles provided by translation infinitely beguiling, at least in the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom, if not when hurrying to meet a deadline or in an exam. Surprisingly, Spanish students usually enjoy translation into English. At the beginning of the year, the task before them appears enormous, so it is important to start with exercises that they can do without too much difficulty to build up their confidence in the achievability of the task. If they have been learning English for a long time, they have probably reached a plateau at which it is difficult to realize that progress is being made. In the translation class, the approach allows progress to be observed.

23. This has been the case in Spain, where there has been a very limited number of places for translation training.
They are at a stage in their language development at which it is constructive to reflect on the differences between the two languages and the reasons for these differences.

**STUDENTS’ EXPECTATIONS**

The maintenance of motivation is closely linked with students’ expectations and whether or not they are fulfilled. Of course, when students begin a new discipline, they may have expectations that are unfounded, and these should not be encouraged. For example, students should not be led to think that the teacher has a list of secret techniques and that, if they receive this list, they will become skilled translators. However, most students are more sophisticated than this, and some teachers would be surprised at how aware they are of incoherence and lack of cohesion in a teaching program. Certainly, students’ expectations should be taken into account when planning teaching.

At an impromptu seminar with a small group of teachers during the International Congress on Translation held at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona in April, 1992, Delisle described the results of a questionnaire that he had administered to Canadian translation students about what they expected of teaching and evaluation. These were the students’ main ideas with regard to course organization:

1. They are aware of the organization or lack of organization of the classes.
2. They appreciate attempts by the teacher to give variety to their teaching.
3. They like problems to be delimited.
4. They find “sight translation” boring and uninstructive. (By sight translation, they mean a class in which the teacher brings a text to the classroom and they translate on the spot.) They make the distinction between a translation class and a *stage* (training course). In a translation course one learns to translate, while a *stage* is an opportunity to develop one’s translation skills through practice.
5. They would like to cover a wide variety of fields in one course.
6. From the second year on, they would like to see more “theory” in the practical translation classes. By theory, they seem to mean “rational, systematic presentation of translation problems.”
7. They would like to take as many courses of “general translation” as possible, as opposed to specialized translation. General translation is considered more difficult.

Discussion with students from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona showed that their hopes and expectations were very similar to those of the Canadian students. They, too, appreciate an effort on the part of the teacher to provide
an organized, systematic, and yet varied approach to overcoming translation difficulties. This is no easy task, because, as I have shown, translation is a complex process that involves a variety of skills and different types of knowledge. Although we can draw diagrams separating hierarchically the different levels of the process in a theoretical model, in practice, all elements, both macro- and micro-, are continuously interacting and essentially interdependent.

**Specific Objectives of Teaching Prose Translation**

Having compared student translator competence with ideal translator competence within the teaching context, it is now possible to adapt the list of general translation teaching objectives to the specific demands of the prose translation class.

The following objectives are suggested:

1. Gaining the metalanguage necessary for talking about the translation process at an elementary level.
2. Understanding the process of translation, according to Delisle’s four stages—comprehension, deverbalization, reformulation, and verification.
3. Achieving advanced reading skills in the SL and recognition of limitations in this area.
4. Learning grammatically correct, pragmatically adequate “plain language” writing and composition skills in the TL.
5. Getting an introduction to documentation techniques: first from parallel texts, encyclopedic articles, and “experts” brought to the class by the teacher; later, using documentary searches as a pre-translation task.
6. Maintaining work habits by executing regular assignments, which will be corrected individually and returned promptly.
7. Gaining knowledge of typographical differences between the SL and the TL.
8. Gaining knowledge of lexical differences between the SL and the TL within certain fields and registers (defined by the students’ competence and the demands of the work market).
9. Gaining knowledge of syntactic differences between the SL and the TL.
10. Achieving familiarity with text types, with an emphasis on pragmatic texts (predominant informative function) and restricted fields and registers now in demand in the work market.

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24. Principles of intelligibility defined by the Plain English Movement started by lawyers and administrators in the United States in the 1960s.
11. Gaining knowledge of discourse differences between the SL and the TL: textual coherence and cohesion.

12. Expanding knowledge of pragmatic and semiotic differences between the SL culture and the TL culture: (a) by choice of texts, (b) by taking advantage of exchange programs (students visiting countries where the TL is spoken/ TL speakers in the translation class), and (c) by reading newspapers, magazines, and books, and seeing films and television programs in the TL that reflect that culture.

13. Improving communicative oral skills for professional use (conversation interpreting, contact with clients, public relations, etc.).