MAXIMISING PRACTICE WITHIN THE TRANSLATION MODULE: LESSONS FROM A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

According to Abdellah (2010), translation courses at university level afford students an opportunity to exercise their languages and linguistic abilities into real use. However, until recently the translation curricula were generally ill-designed, and conducted on informal bases, and unfortunately, very little attention was devoted to changing this. The theoretical part is often regarded as superior to the practical component. This is unfair to the training, as practice is equally important in the translation exercise. The translation pedagogy is not complete until the actual translation skills are perfected and can be used judiciously. The purpose of this study is to explore ways, albeit from a lecturer's perspective, on how a translation module can maximise practice at a university of technology in South Africa. A qualitative study was undertaken where open-ended questionnaires were handed out to three lecturers involved in the practical translation classes, as well as participant observation of the first-year students, 95 in total over a period of one week. The narrative data analysis results indicated that there is indeed scope for development in maximising practice within the translation module. Amongst other recommendations, was that the practical translation model be expanded to include editing and revising competencies.

Keywords: language practice; translation; South Africa; modules; African languages

1. INTRODUCTION

There is usually a very close relationship between the industry and the training institutions in every country. This close relationship affects both how the institution of learning offer training, what modules are necessary and what the industry values and demands from the candidates that could be employed. This is particular important in the face of changes that have been experienced in the South African situation following the regime change in 1996, and this is noticeable globally as well. Carrell, *et al.* (2000) in the preface to the book entitled, *Human Resource Management in South Africa*, ask a crucial question when they say, "… how can companies in South Africa deal with the complexity, speed and magnitude of these changes and still create and achieve a competitive advantage?" This question speaks volumes about the role and relevance of training institutions in South Africa following the regime change in 1994.

The challenge portrayed in the above paragraph, is not only a South African phenomenon, but it is what is being experienced all over the world. In Jordan for example, the Jordanian Association of Translators and Applied Linguists (JATAL) head, Prof Abbas lamented that there are few translators and applied linguists, because few join the Association, and once registered, many are reluctant to renew their registration. The major reason for reluctancy to renew is that the Association is unable to assist them with job prospects. The reason why the Association is unable to assist with job prospect is because of a mismatch between training

and market or industry requirements. In addition, Olimat & Mahadin (2022: 5) cite Khoury (2017) as recommending that there should be amendments done on translation programmes as well as curriculum design to prepare Jordanian university students with necessary competencies as translators and applied linguists. It is thus a clarion call to all language practitioners and applied linguists to ensure that the theory learnt in class is aligned to the practical part of translation or applied linguistics and the market.

Translation as one of the professions that gained prominence in South Africa after the multilingual dispensation was enacted in 1996, is complex, debatable and still regarded as a fairly new field - as it is in the whole world. It is no wonder then that there are many schools of thought regarding basic concepts such as 'translation.' Munday (2016) for example, sees translation as the process that converts the original written text (ST) in the original verbal language into a written text in a different verbal language (TT), that happens between two different written languages. The conversion or changing aspect between the two languages is the part that keeps translators turning, because it is so much dependent upon the platform from which the translator or user of the translation stands. Dharwadker (2002) argues that Ramanujan (1994) believed that there are freedoms and constraints, several of which are crucial in defining the real task of a translator. It is these freedoms and constraints (such as rendering textual meaning and quality to transpose aspects such as syntax, design, form, etc. from one language to the other) that make the work of translators complex. Loureiro (2019) seems to highlight this aspect when he argues that translation is an art of making choices, exactly appropriate ones, with regards to words, phrases as well as sentence structures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 6 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, (Act 108 of 1996) proclaims eleven languages, viz. Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, and isiZulu as official languages of the country. However, since July 2023, South African Sign Language has been added as the twelfth official language in the Republic of South Africa. Before 1994, the South African government recognised only two languages, English and Afrikaans as the only official languages. The era before 1994 was thus dominated by language practice activities on both English and Afrikaans and practically little regarding the other nine of the official languages. Translation practice involving English and Afrikaans was as a matter of fact, not complex and easy to manage (Dlamini, 2021).

Du Plessis (2000: 95) argues that it appears as if all new states in Africa face similar challenges when it comes to languages issues. When the nine previously marginalised languages - now ten with the recent addition of Sign Language, were added to the then two official languages - English and Afrikaans, a new set of challenges became evident. The bilingualism dispensation catapulted into multilingualism, and this was coupled with a myriad of managerial challenges. At the Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus for example, there are as a matter of fact, mainly three conspicuous language combinations for the students in language practice, viz. English-Afrikaans, English-Sesotho, and English-isiXhosa. Apart from these combinations, there is also a new combination need, English-isiZulu, which is steadily rising. To cater for the needs of these students, three lecturers were appointed to cater for the needs of these three main language combinations, with regards to the practical translation component. There are different challenges that lecturers are faced with in each of these practical classes because of several existing issues such as that, these languages are not on the same level of development; the availability of specialised, general dictionaries and other related resources is also not on the same level; and lastly, the language users themselves experience different expectations from the South African communities, and so forth.

According to Motala & Ngandu (2023), there is a deep unemployment crisis in South Africa particular amongst the youth. The fact that many such young people have university qualifications, implies that there is mismatch and tensions between academic knowledge and the industry expectations. Ehrensberger-Dow (2014) argues that students in their institution (Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Switzerland) agreed that some courses prepared them well for the realities of the professional workplace, but a range of tasks expected from them in the workplace often do surprise them. For example, many of their graduates find themselves having to adapt, edit, revise and proofread texts instead of doing actual translation only – as expected. The role that is played by the lecturers who oversee the practical component of the translation module is therefore important. Firstly, these lecturers need to ensure that sentences that are written by the students can be easily understood by the targeted readers, in this case the same lecturers, themselves. Secondly, the texts written by the students need to conform to the linguistic rules and expectations of a particular genre as well of that target language, which lecturers are supposed to master.

These challenges call for lecturers to be gatekeepers in ensuring that translators (students) as writers, do produce work of an acceptable quality. As a measure to reduce tensions mentioned in the above paragraph, language practice at the Central University of Technology, Free State, Welkom Campus for example, comprises two crucial components, viz. the theory as well as the practical components. The university of

technology graduates of language practice need to be efficient in both the theory as well as the practical part to be recognised as having passed the translation module. The input of lecturers is important in making sure that the practical component achieves what is intended. If the role of the practical lecturers is not highlighted, the university of technology will produce translators who will write work that is unreadable, full of errors and mistakes, unclear, inappropriate genre, and so forth. The purpose of this article is therefore to look at challenges from the perspectives of the educators, with an aim of generating solutions that would lead to the theoretical and practical development of the language practice students at the Central University of Technology, Welkom campus and beyond.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following methodology was adopted in this study:

3.1. Research approach

To achieve appropriate results, a correct research type needs to be followed. Mc Millan & Schumacher (2001) and Fox & Bayat (2012) discuss two types of research, viz. qualitative and quantitative. These accomplished authors define qualitative research as presenting data as a narration with words while quantitative research, as based on the statistical results represented with numbers. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Van der Merwe (1996: 283) contends that qualitative research creates a better self-understanding and accelerates insight into the human condition. It is through this approach that the researcher hoped to gain improved understanding regarding translation practice and experience from the participants.

3.2. Mode of inquiry

Mc Millan & Schumacher (2001) differentiates qualitative modes of inquiry into noninteractive as well as interactive. This article adopted an interactive inquiry, where the researcher interacted with both the lecturers as well as the students. A critical studies mode of interactive inquiry was adopted, as the general assumption here is that knowledge is subjective. An attempt to critique and challenge power structure is done through this study so that at the end, it should lead to a better interrelationship between all the stakeholders, and alignment towards a common goal of maximising practice in the language practice modules.

3.3. Data collection technique

Two data collecting techniques were used in this study, viz. the participant observation as well as questionnaires. The two techniques jointly fulfil triangulation in order to attain authenticity as well as trustworthiness of the data collected (Fox & Bayat, 2012). A total number of 95 registered students for 2023 were observed by the researcher in a period of about a week, where there were two classes which were attended by these students. The researcher used observational notes to record what was observed. The participants were informed at the beginning of the session as well as when the session was ending, to keep them fully in the picture regarding the research exercise and also to fulfil ethical demands in social research such as voluntary participation, prevent harm to participants as well as anonymity and confidentiality (Babbie, 2007: 62). Also, the lecturers labelled Lecturer 1 (L1), Lecturer 2 (L2) and Lecturer 3 (L3), responsible for the practical sessions were given open-ended questionnaires to complete. The thematic analysis, as outlined below, was used to reduce data obtained from this research exercise into patterns that respond to the research questions. Maguire & Delahunt (2017) define thematic analysis as a process that identifies patterns or themes within the qualitative approach. The two scholars (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) are of the same view with Braun & Clarke (2014) that the thematic analysis is achieved through a process of six steps, viz:

3.3.1. familiarising oneself fully with data

3.3.2. marking data to generate initial codes

3.3.3. looking for the themes

3.3.4. further reviewing data related to the themes

3.3.5. extracting the final themes; and finally

3.3.6. reporting.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Abdellah (2010) argues that translation pedagogy has essentially three dimensions, viz. method, testing translation as well as designing a curriculum. As a matter of fact, in this study the emphasis is on the

designing and improvement of a curriculum, particularly maximising the translation practice. Jagtap (2016) mentions several qualities of a teacher/ lecturer such as being a guide, counsellor, information provider, inquirer, and facilitator. It is therefore important to glean information from the lecturers as is the case in this study, because lecturers are expected to make learning more interesting and interactive so that students can learn maximally. From the open-ended questionnaires responded to by the lecturers and the observations done on students, themes related to maximising language practice in the translation module emerged. These themes are named and discussed here below:

4.1. Attendance

Attendance of practical classes is crucial for the students to master translation skills. Regarding the question on attendance, lecturers were asked to express their views on the general attendance of lectures by the students. This is important because in terms of the observation done, students seem to attend theoretical classes better and some students may wrongly perceive practical translation classes as inferior to the classes where translation theory is taught. From the responses, classes where there are few students (37% for both Afrikaans and isiXhosa), the attendance was good, while bigger classes like the Sesotho (63%), the attendance was not so good. It could be argued that in smaller groups, the interests of the students are taken care of, while in bigger groups there is a possibility that this could be a challenge. Gunter, Estes & Mintz (2007) talk about a development model which affords students differentiation opportunities, where a variety of students' needs are met. Students are not the same and their interest also, are not the same. It would therefore be helpful to attend to students in terms of their individual needs, to keep them interested in the learning activities. The issue of creating smaller groups in the larger group could also be explored. If the students' challenges are met and addressed in this way, the attendance of practical classes by the students, would certainly improve, including where there are many students. Lecturer 2, for example comments that their 'students are keen to improve their language usage on a practical level, as well.'

Afolabi & Oyetoyan (2021: 329) argue that one of the latest and important trends in development in the last decades, is development in the virtual teaching methods. This includes teaching-learning exercises done, assessed, or stored using computer technology. One such virtual teaching method is the synchronous approach. This is another method that could be used in the place of person-to-person lecture room encounter. According to Afolabi & Oyetoyan (2021: 329), the synchronous online learning allows real time participation by the students. This means that it does not matter where the students may be physically, the students would still be in a position to receive the lecture through videoconferencing, Zoom, Teams and other similar tools. This is an important development because synchronous online learning could also assist in case of emergencies where students may have to learn from home, for example during the COVID-19 epidemic that affected South Africa immensely in 2020 and 2021. In the case of the Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus, the E-Thuto platform could also be used to achieve this outcome.

The asynchronous online teaching is the opposite of the synchronous approach and involve storing learning materials in the electric format or soft form, on a computer or online platform. Such stored information is made accessible for the students at defined suitable times, other than in real time. Using this method will allow the students to work on their own pace, at suitable times for them as individuals, and so forth. Students could be given translation exercises by the lecturer/s, and they will be able to do this at their own times, as well. This is another approach that could make class attendance for the students not a train smash, should they be unable to attend for whatever reasons, including matters of emergencies. Lowenthal et al. as cited by Afolabi & Oyetoyan (2021), argue that asynchronous video discussions, for example, may increase student engagement in the learning material, awards students with more space and time to reflect, accelerates equitability amongst students while ensuring that as few technological issues as possible, materialise. This is particularly important for the South African context which is affected by serious power outages.

Furthermore, Afolabi & Oyetoyan (2021) argue that asynchronous teaching is crucial in creating several activities that could be used to support experiential learning for the students. This encourages participation by the students on their own and in a manner that suits their abilities. Students with learning abilities also benefit from the asynchronous teaching approach as well, irrespective of their learning difficulty. Students could thus be given translation exercises that they could do on their own. The E-Thuto platform currently used by the Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus can thus be maximally used to achieve this objective.

As part of looking forward and be proactive, Afolabi & Oyetoyan (2021: 342) propose a hybrid or blended learning approach, as viable option for the future. This approach is a combination of both the online as well as the person-to-person approach. To develop modules along these lines of teaching-learning encounter would require significant resources in the form of time and money. Students would be able to benefit from

the hybrid or blended learning approach while their translation practice is being maximised at the Central University of Technology, Welkom Campus. This would assist South Africa and the rest of the world indeed, in case of another emergency or epidemic that may hit our country or even the whole world.

4.2. Students' participation

Agarwal (2018) cites an old Chinese proverb, 'Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand.' It is important for the students to participate actively in their practical lecture as part of their learning for life. If at any stage there is no involvement by students, this usually leads to poor performance (Ganyaupfu, 2013). Once the students have mastered the translation theory part, it should be exciting to put the theory into practice, for example, how do you deal with translating a proverb or idiom from the source language to the target language.

The general comments received from the respondents are that most of the students do not participate maximally in the practical class because they fail to master appropriately the theorical knowledge. Lecturer 1, says, 'in most cases they (students) do direct translation.' According to Jagtap (2016) a teacher or in this case a lecturer needs to create a social environment through curriculum selection, teaching techniques etc, in working close with the students. This assists students to study on their own as well as learn by doing. Through this, Jagtap (2016) contends that students develop a sense of accurate observation as well as entrench dignity of labour in their person as they roll up their sleeves to work. Gunter, Estes & Mintz (2007) argue that what students know about the content, helps determine their learning (participation) of the new information.

Students' participation in their learning is crucial. Gunter, Estes & Mintz (2007: 336) are of the view that understanding cannot be given to the students directly. Example, a parent cannot teach a child to swim by merely telling the child how to swim but must allow the child to practice swimming. In the same way, no translator can master translation skills by merely learning theory without actual practice. This actual practice is defined by Gunter, Estes & Mintz (2007: 336), as meaningful engagement – the law of meaningful engagement. Thus, students need to be allowed to practice translation and as they do this, maximise the practice in the translation module.

According to recent studies done in Jordan where the attention was directed at checking the relevance of training given, it was discovered that university graduates, particular in this case translators, are not yet ready to operate in the market (Olimat & Mahadin, 2022: 5). The market is looking for well-equipped translators who can deliver the product, for example, a target text that meets all the elements of a translational competent text such as linguistic, subject-related, inter-cultural, transfer as well as communicative competencies. This can only be achieved by allowing translators to be actively involved in the actual reproduction of the necessary product.

In order to engage in the process of their own learning, Gunter, Estes & Mintz (2007) argue that students need to be put directly in contact with what they need to learn, as well as receiving frequent opportunities to explain what they understand as they learn. In the case of the former statement, students may be given texts to translate following the theories that they have learnt. In the latter statement, students may be required to explain to fellow students as well as to the lecturer on what they understand, so that the output of their effort is of a good quality. To do this as best as they could, students would need to master the use of resources such as dictionaries - general and specialised.

4.3. Students' Challenges

Dlamini (2021) argues that translation may appear easy, while in reality, requires deep thinking, skill, experience and knowledge to make sure that the complete subtlety of meaning and significance is captured. Abdellah (2010) contends that translation involves mainly linguistic as well as cultural problems. The researcher's observation indicated that students experience challenges when they are expected to translate, for example, some texts in line with a particular translation method. The respondents (lecturers) in the questionnaires indicate that the issue of the languages, source, and target, is a serious challenge for the students. Lecturer 2 commented that students do not seem to prefer even using dictionaries, though as far as their (students') knowledge is concerned, requires them to do so. Also, according to the lecturers, students need exposure to their language combinations (to master their languages) to do better in the translation exercises that they do.

Abdellah (2010) further adds that translation is a science, art, and skill. By science, it is meant that the students must master the knowledge, structure, and even the culture associated with both the source and target languages. Without the expert knowledge and also the culture of these two languages, one will experience challenges and subsequently cannot be a good translator. By art, Abdellah (2010) refers to art as

the creativity employed in producing a text presentable to the target text reader, who normally has no knowledge of the original text (ST). Finally, when they refer to translation as a skill, it is directed at the special ability to harmonise any difficulty in the expression of the translation and also the capability to give a translation of a text that has no equal in the target language – which is the essence of maximising translation practice. It is no wonder then that students experience challenges when they translate, and by becoming effective and efficient in meeting these challenges, translation practice may be maximised.

Contrary to Abdella's (2019) assertion that translation is a science, López & Caro (2022: 1) contend that translation is not exactly a scientific effort. López & Caro (2022) further argue that scholars always fight tooth and nail to establish translation as a science, through use of greater precision as the translation progresses, and yet as far as the two authors are concerned, scholars do not achieve what they could either declare as black or white, correct or incorrect - in terms of categorisation of the translation product. This is because translation is a human activity, that deals strictly with humans. It is therefore not surprising that, López & Caro (2022) define translation as a 'fuzzy phenomenon that escapes easy definitions and categorisation.' This accounts to challenges that students often when they do practical translation, as they are unable to put the translation phenomenon into 'neatly cut categories' (López & Caro, 2022).

Afolabi & Oyetoyon (2021) mention that that there is a flagship project that is aimed at training a sizeable number of students to work as highly qualified translators and interpreters in Africa. As a result of this plan, a number of higher education institutions are offering programmes in translation and interpretation studies. To contextualise this, a number of research activities have been launched to study this phenomenon. Amongst other findings, it has been discovered that there is a challenge regarding sustainability of translation and interpretation curricula and the increasing need to align training with market requirements. This is important to ensure that students are equipped to meet all the challenges as translators, particularly regarding maximising language practice modules. If translation of the practical component is lacking, the students will be unable to meet all the requirements expected of the professional translators.

4.4. Interventions or Suggestions to Improve Practice

There are several suggestions raised by the respondents in order to improve or maximise practice in the translation module such as creating links to assist the students to master the languages from the Source Text to the Target Text. This is important, particular in the country like South Africa, where previously only English and Afrikaans were official, and thus entrenched in almost every sphere of life in South Africa. As part of the observation outcomes, the students need to master the use of resources such as different dictionaries as well as editing and revising competencies after doing their translation. Also, Lecturer 1, suggested that the practical component of the translation module be given the status of a module to encourage students to attend translation practice classes and work even harder.

Students need to be exposed to aspects of translation such as crisis translation. This study is defined by Olimat & Mahadin (2022: 2) as embracing translation of emergencies and crises. The Covid-19 could be an example of such a situation where translators and interpreters were not too prepared when it hit our country, and the whole world. It is not easy to work in a crisis because there are many challenges such as disruptions, conflicts, wars, death, sickness, and so forth, within an environment that is not conducive. Translators and interpreters should be in a position to work productively under such situations, and that could happen if they are properly trained to deal with such real-life cases. Thus, translator training needs to cater for this.

Those teaching translation modules must be trained or retrained in terms of the latest technology. Programmes such as *Autshumato*, Wordfast, Trados products, and so forth, should be made available for the lecturers. Also, relevant resources such as electronic dictionaries, spell-checkers, and diacritics software should be made available for both the lecturers and the students. The lecturers should be able to use such software to assist the students to optimally use. Lecturers need also to be knowledgeable about possible risks of using such technology.

Blended translation programmes for the students should be prepared. These programmes would assist the students, in case there are emergencies such as Covid-19 and other related pandemics. These programmes could also assist students as useful resource for self-study, learning and actual practical at a more suitable time in case there was a challenge regarding attendance. The blended programmes, however, should not be used as a method to discourage students from attending classes in institutions where such attendance is compulsory.

5. CONCLUSION

Considering the discussion, one can agree fully with Abdellah (2010), when he contends that 'translation

involves lots of problems.' Mossop (2001) argues that newly employed translators may find themselves expected to be jacks of all trades in as far as languages/ linguistics is concerned. In essence, it is therefore difficult to become a good translator without mastering the actual translation practice. A translator needs to be equipped with the skill of practical translation that need to be elevated equally if not over and above the theoretical knowledge. Good translation pedagogy is implied when students are armed to perform rather than merely regurgitating some theoretical information (Ganyaupfu, 2013). Therefore, this researcher recommends that practical translation be presented in full as editing and revising, to furnish translators with a plethora of competencies such as copyediting, stylistic editing, content editing, and so forth, needed. This will challenge students to be more involved in enriching their knowledge and expertise of the translation module. Finally, the limitation of this study is that it concentrated on the inputs from the lecturers and hope in the future some studies will look at the input from the students as well, as far as maximising the translation module is concerned.

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