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CAN ANY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER ALSO TEACH TRANSLATION?

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Abstract

The article discusses qualifications necessary for a teacher of translation and interpreting. The authors analyse the practice of translation and interpreting being taught by foreign language teachers having neither special training as translators nor theoretical knowledge in translatology and translation pedagogy. It is shown that being proficient in a foreign language is necessary but not sufficient for being a translator and for teaching a translation class. A translation and interpreting teacher must have a clear understanding of the essence of translation as a professional activity, have skills of using translation techniques, know when and how these techniques should be used, understand what translation decisions are based on, how they depend on various parameters of the communicative situation in which a text is being translated. This requires specialized education or additional training in theoretical and practical aspects of translation as well as in translation didactics. It is also shown that requirements to linguistic competence of translators and interpreters differ from the requirements to foreign language teachers, which implies a different approach to teaching foreign languages to translation students. However, the most important thing in training translators and interpreters is the formation of a specific professional mode of thinking the main characteristics of which are described in the paper. Formation of professional translator's mentality requires professional knowledge on the part of the trainer.

1. Introduction

Training highly qualified translators and interpreters is one of the major concerns in the contemporary world of vast and extensive intercultural, cross-cultural and multicultural communication. With the ever-growing amount of texts to be translated daily, of books waiting to be translated, of conferences and meetings impossible without interpreting there also grows a demand for translators and interpreters who can do it professionally and competently. Hopes that machine translation would soon make human translators redundant proved to be overoptimistic, as well as the idea that the growing number of people learning foreign languages would make translation itself unnecessary. Despite all the progress in machine translation the quality of machine-translated texts leaves much to be desired and in any case such texts require post-editing done by a professional translator. Numerous misunderstandings in oral communication, sometimes bordering on a disaster, show that it is too early to expect mass proficiency in foreign languages, and often services of self-educated interpreters only aggravate such situations.

This being the case, the number of institutions offering translator and interpreter training is constantly growing all over the world. There appear various approaches to teaching, various types of programmes. A comprehensive survey of courses and programmes with an emphasis on twentieth-century developments is given in "Teaching Translation" edited by Venuti (2016) who believes that Translation Studies has already developed into an academic field. Today there is a wealth of translation studies literature on various aspects of translator training – from general principles (Colina & Angelelli, 2017; Echeverri, 2017; Orlando, 2016; Orlando, 2017) to ways of designing a programme (Pym, & Torres-Simón, 2016), specific methods and techniques (Calvo, 2015; González-Davies & Enríquez Raído, 2016; Hurtado, 2015) and teaching some particular types of translation (Andres & Behr, 2015; Daminova, 2015). But as Kelly (2008) rightly remarks, it is often the case that researchers concentrate on the process itself and ignore the participants of this process: students and teachers. Little has been said in literature about students and even less about teachers or trainers.

To some extent this lack of focus on teachers and trainers, on their problems and challenges is compensated for by numerous papers on how translation-teaching programmes can be designed, on what can and should be done in class, on how some particular problems can be solved (Petrova & Sdobnikov, 2019; Sdobnikov, 2017; Sdobnikov, 2018). But pretty little is said about who can and should teach translation and interpreting, what kind of professional should they be (Orlando, 2019).

In the Soviet times with the closed economy of the country and disencouraged transborder communication of its citizens the need for translation and translators was rather limited. There existed only three centres for training professional translators. They were well-established schools with highly qualified teaching staff well-versed in theory and having sufficient experience in practical translation. The breakup of the Soviet Union changed the situation dramatically. The country opened to the rest of the world and was literally flooded with all kinds of information from abroad. Translation became vitally important. Every institution of higher education that had a foreign language programme now wanted to start a translator training programme as well. And in many cases they did start such programmes. Having no qualified teaching staff for it they acted on the assumption that any person who is proficient in a foreign language can translate. And any person who can translate can also teach translation.

Such lay approach can be easily explained. Though foreign languages were taught in every Soviet school and the class was obligatory, the majority of people had no experience of real communication in those languages and had never been exposed to any foreign culture. They were aware of their own limited linguistic proficiency and looked up to people who could speak a foreign language fluently, could understand foreigners and be understood by them. Thus the widely spread opinion that a person who understands what a foreigner says or writes and can somehow express it in Russian is a translator.

So, many foreign language teachers having neither experience in translation or interpreting nor theoretical background in translatology were charged with the task of teaching translation. As a result, translator training was actually reduced to doing more translation exercises in foreign language classes and simultaneous self-educating and educating students in some arbitrarily selected aspects of translation theory. In some cases it was also supplemented by translating texts under the guidance of teachers who, as mentioned above, had neither practical experience nor theoretical knowledge and relied on their linguistic proficiency and intuition.

It worked – as a makeshift, temporary measure. But as we know, nothing is more permanent than the temporary. So where did it lead?

2. Problem Statement

It actually led to two things. First of all such training could not and did not result in producing highly qualified translators and interpreters. But due to the situation described above it was not immediately recognized. The graduates were trained in over-literal rendering of simple texts, that is to say in slavish translation, got a degree and considered themselves translators and interpreters. And here comes the second thing: they started teaching translation. Having no specific education, knowing nothing about the translation and interpreting pedagogy, taught only methods of teaching foreign languages, they began doing the only thing an apprentice can do – mimicking their own teachers. Thus the process of multiplication started.

There is nothing basically wrong about copying one's teacher. It all depends on the qualification of the teacher. Outlining different approaches in translator or interpreter (T&I) training Orlando (2019) mentions a "transmissionist tradition" – with reference to Kelly, or 'training by apprenticeship" – with reference to Pöchhacker. This approach was popular in the West in the 1950s and for some decades afterwards, the main belief being that training should be done by practitioners, and activities should mirror real-life situations well known to the trainers. However in the 1990s the situation with the new generation of T&I trainers in Russia was in many cases different. Had their own teachers been educated T&I trainers it wouldn't have been so harmful. But they were in fact imitating people who were neither educated and experienced practitioners nor trained translator trainers.

3. Research Questions

All those people were (and still are) linguists proficient in several languages, academics well versed in general didactics and methods of teaching languages. Moreover, as researchers show, teaching languages and teaching translation have much in common (Carrio-Pastor, 2016). So what skills and

knowledge do people educated as foreign language teachers lack when it comes to translating and training translators? What is the difference between teaching foreign languages and teaching translation? What is different in the very approach of language teachers to translation? These are questions the answers to which will on the one hand, show why not any teacher of foreign languages can teach translation without specialised training, and on the other hand will provide insight into the specific character of training translators, which might help those willing to acquire competences necessary for teaching translation.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to outline the scope of problems and tasks that T&I teachers face and are supposed to cope with. To define the main goal or even the mission toward which they must work. To show what knowledge, skills and competences are absolutely necessary for teaching translation. To convince people that teaching translation requires much more than just proficiency in several languages.

5. Research Methods

The findings described below are the result of both empiric and theoretical methods of research. They are based on observation and on analysis of hundreds of translations by students from dozens of universities and colleges participating in translation and interpreting contests; on the analysis of the information obtained be the author in the process of teaching course of advanced studies for translator trainers; on the analysis of views and approaches to the problem discussed by scholars in numerous papers and books, such as (Bnini, 2016; ; Pishkova, 2015; Pokorn, 2016; Sdobnikov, 2015); and many others; and finally on forty-five years' experience of teaching translation in Linguistic University of Nizhny Novgorod. In analysing contestants' translations and students' progress in translation classes various theoretical approaches were used (Buzadzhi, Gusev, Lanchikov, & Psurtsev, 2009; Knyazheva, 2018; Sdobnikov, 2014).

6. Findings

The main difference between a trained translator and a person who hasn't got such special training lies in the way they perceive a text. For a language teacher a text is a chain of sentences that follow one another. Each sentence is a separate unit having a certain grammatical structure and consisting of some words – or, to be more exact, word-forms. Hence their purely linguistic approach to translation: the text is translated sentence by sentence, every word of the original text is supposed to find a lexical correspondence in translation. Students are taught to translate words and constructions. This approach is easy to understand. In a language class, translation is mainly used as a kind of control device, a means of making sure that foreign forms and constructions are transparent for students. It is a well-known and time-tested technique in teaching languages, but it has nothing to do with the essence of translation as a professional activity.

For trained translators a text is a semantic whole, not a linearly viewed chain of words, sentences or some larger fragments. They perceive a text as a framework of intratextual interconnections. An element of a text acquires its meaning in context. But this contextual dependence is not limited to the

choice of a particular lexico-semantic variant of a word appropriate in a particular subject area. It is determined by all the connections – both lexical and grammatical – of a word with other elements of the text. For a professional translator the purpose of translating does not consist in finding target language correspondences to source language words and constructions. It consists in finding the best way of expressing exactly the same sense, the same meaning and implications that are expressed in the original text.

To be able to achieve this purpose it is often necessary to change the structure of some sentences or even of a whole paragraph, to express the same idea in a different way or even in a different place in the text, using for this purpose some special techniques (e.g. modulation or compensation). The information about these techniques can be easily found in any translation manual, so anybody can learn how to do it. The problem here is quite different. It is actually threefold: it is necessary to be able 1) to see where some changes are necessary; 2) to choose appropriate techniques and 3) to find the necessary and allowable measure of transforming the text (Latyshev, 2005). People who have no special training tend either to copy foreign syntactic constructions, thus violating norms and usages of the target language, or to change the structure of the text beyond recognition, retelling it rather than translating. To be able to avoid both syntactic calquing and free-wheeling translation it is necessary to have sufficient theoretical background and working knowledge of technology that can be acquired only through practical experience. Not just the experience of translating some texts, but the experience of doing it professionally. It means that T&I trainers must necessarily be practitioners.

The question of whether practitioners need or need not be educated in theory of translation is debatable. Scholars differ in their approach to the purpose, content and character of translation theory as a university course (Di Mango, 2019; Petrova, 2018a; Sdobnikov, 2016; Sdobnikov, Kalinin, & Petrova, 2019; Shlepnev, 2019; Wagner & Chesterman, 2016). The answer to the question depends on the very purpose of teaching and training students. If they are meant to become practitioners they probably don't really need to go deep into such matters as the difference between equivalency and adequacy, or levels of equivalency, subtleties of defining criteria for translation/interpreting assessment, or some other similar problems. But there is no doubt that a translation teacher should understand it all, as well as many other things that seem to be purely theoretical. They must be able to help students to understand the very essence of their profession, to see their own place and function in this profession, to understand their role in the process of communication, the degree to which they have the right to change the text, etc. And this requires knowledge of various models of translation, understanding of basic differences between them, ability to show how these models relate to communicative situations in which a translator/interpreter works, and of many other things discussed by researchers. Translator/interpreter trainers must not necessarily be researchers themselves. But scholars they must be. And it applies not only to those who teach theory of translation. In order to teach students how to make choices between many possible variants of translation the trainer must know what such decisions can be based on (Obdržálková, 2016; Petrova, 2018b).

Translation is not just finding lexical correspondences to source language words and arranging them in grammatically correct sentences. Translation is a creative process of interlanguage and intercultural mediation presupposing the translator's ability to take into account a wide range of

parameters. There are no rules and prescriptions in translation, which makes it so difficult to teach. Even such a seemingly formalised thing as pre-translation analysis is not just an algorithm to be followed. Even at this stage it is necessary to be able to assess the relevance of information. Apart from answering the standard questions of who, when and why wrote the text it is necessary to understand how the answers will influence decision-making while translating it. Analysis of the text itself is also closely connected with the translator's ability to estimate relative relevance of things in. For example, if there is an allusion in the text it is not enough for the translator to spot it (which is not always an easy thing to do either). It is necessary to see if this allusion to something supposedly well known to the readers of the original text will be understood by the readers of translation. It is for the translator to decide whether this allusion is important enough to be preserved even at the cost of adding some explanations (thus making the text more difficult for perception), or whether it is not so relevant and can be omitted without any sacrifice of content, sense or style of the text. A translator must be aware of cultural differences between the speakers of the two languages and be able to identify culturally specific and culturally sensitive elements of the text.

A T&I teacher must certainly be able to do it all, for you cannot teach a student something that you cannot do yourself. Everybody remembers jokes about a swimming coach who could not swim. However for a translation teacher being able to translate is necessary but not sufficient. It is also necessary to know how to develop these skills in students, and this knowledge cannot be empiric. Sometimes a person can translate intuitively. But intuition cannot be taught. Training students requires trained trainers.

The main task of a T&I teacher is to help students to develop a specific professional mode of thinking. It is impossible to train students in solving every particular problem that they will face in their professional life. It is impossible to equip them with some universal solutions, for there are none. If you show ways of solving a hundred particular problems there is sure to appear the hundred-and-first. If you warn students against a particular mistake or even a type of mistakes they will certainly make mistakes of another type. Not because students are not attentive enough or tend to ignore what they are told, but just because translation is a process in which one cannot possibly foresee everything. Training students in solving particular problems relates to making them translators like giving a fish relates to teaching to fish.

Professional translator's mode of thinking presupposes the ability to see a text as a semantic whole, to perceive it as existing not only in the context of real life at large (which is absolutely necessary too), but also in the context of a particular communicative situation. It presupposes the ability to make decisions in accordance with the purpose for which the text is now being translated; the ability to see how the text should be adapted to the potential recipient of translation. While forming such an attitude in students it is also necessary to develop in them the ability to visualise the situation described in the text – for them to make sure that their understanding of what is said in the text complies with outward things.

Formation of this mode of thinking is a painstaking job. It requires both understanding of the character of such mentality and knowledge of how to help students to develop it.

There is one more important aspect of teaching translation students. It is the way they should be taught foreign languages. The thing is that they need a foreign language for purposes quite different from those for which other people learn them. In institutions of higher learning foreign languages are usually taught to two categories of students: those who are trained to be foreign language teachers and those who

learn languages in order to be able to read special texts. Outside universities and colleges numerous programmes, however diverse, are mainly designed for people who need a foreign language not for any professional use, but merely as means of communication.

These different purposes presuppose different emphases. People learning languages just for communication usually need neither very rich vocabulary nor sophisticated grammar. As for teachers, they must have profound knowledge and understanding of various linguistic mechanisms and regularities, see the inner logic of grammar rules, etc., because they have to explain to their students how the language works. They must have model pronunciation for students to copy it. However, a rich and stylistically divers vocabulary is desirable but not vital for a teacher because it is seldom required in the classroom, where the language is used in a limited number of standard and fully predictable situations.

For translators and interpreters a foreign language (as well as their mother tongue) is a working tool. The emphasis here is not on understanding the nature and mechanisms of linguistic processes, but on the purely functional aspect. They must know grammar rules, know how to use various forms and constructions and – what is most important – understand their semantics. The most essential thing is for them to comprehend the meaning of every grammatical form, decode this meaning when reading or listening and be able to choose the right form for expressing this meaning in translation. Good articulation is more important for an interpreter than perfect pronunciation or a particular national accent. Rich and stylistically divers vocabulary is a must. Unlike teachers, translators and interpreters are never free to choose either the topic or the stylistic register. They are dictated by the situation and the speaker. Moreover, if a teacher's speech in class is mostly rehearsed, with interpreters it is practically always spontaneous.

Even such an incomplete list of differences shows that translators and interpreters use a foreign language in a way far different from the way other categories of learners do. This implies that the very approach to teaching it should be different (Zinovyeva, 2017). To understand how exactly different, what the priorities and emphases should be it is necessary for the language teacher to have insight into the T&I profession. In other words, teaching a foreign language to T&I students requires additional training.

7. Conclusion

Translating/interpreting is a professional activity. Webster's dictionary defines profession as "a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instruction in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods" (Merriam Webster, 1993, p. 1811). It means that students can and must be trained by people who themselves have such knowledge and skills. In the case of T&I training they must have practical skills and theoretical knowledge pertaining to translation and interpreting. Professions of a foreign language teacher and translator have only one thing in common, which is the knowledge of foreign languages. Unless additionally trained, a foreign language teacher has neither the necessary skills nor theoretical knowledge of how T&I students must be trained. It means that they lack the basic professional qualities of a T&I teacher or trainer.

It must be said that a practitioner having experience in professional translation/interpreting does not automatically qualify as a trainer either, for a trainer is also a profession. Apart from the knowledge of

translation principles and techniques a teacher also needs knowledge and skills of training translators and interpreters. They know **what** to teach, but they don't know **how** to do it.

So the general conclusion is that T&I training is a specific profession that requires practical skills of translating and/or interpreting, knowledge of basics of translatology and also skills and knowledge of translation pedagogy.

If the question is whether any foreign language teacher can also teach translation, the answer is certainly no. If it is formulated a bit differently – whether a foreign language teacher can also become a translation teacher – the answer is most certainly yes. A foreign language teacher has one of the required prerequisites: proficiency in a foreign language. Now it must be supplemented by additional training as a T&I teacher.

Unfortunately there are no specialized schools of higher learning for T&I teachers. Unlike teachers of biology, history, mathematics, or foreign languages, a T&I teacher is not viewed as a separate specialization. So the only way out for people willing to train translators but having no basic education in translation is to take further training courses and retraining programmes tailored for T&I teacher.

Acknowledgments

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