

BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER

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Beyond the Ivory Tower

Rethinking translation pedagogy

AMERICAN TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION

SCHOLARLY MONOGRAPH *SERIES*

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Introduction

Translation pedagogy: The *other* theory

Brian James Baer and Geoffrey S. Koby

Much of the discussion of translation pedagogy today is drowned out by the endless debate over theory versus practice. Practitioners in the field typically see little value in academic theorizing on translation that is often the product of influences emanating from the humanities and social sciences. As Emma Wagner put it: “Translation theory? Spare us...” That’s the reaction to be expected from most practicing translators. Messages from the ivory tower tend not to penetrate as far as the wordface. (The wordface is the place where we translators work — think of a miner at the coalface)” (2002: 1). Translation theory is typically criticized as at best irrelevant to the professional translator and at worst distracting and misleading. “It is time,” Douglas Robinson stated in *The Translator’s Turn*, “to offer translators tools, not rules” (1991: xvi).

The prejudice against theory on the part of practitioners is understandable, for while translation may be “the world’s second oldest profession,” it has only recently been institutionalized as a unique discipline within the academy. Its position outside or on the margins of scholarship has helped to foster a profound skepticism toward translation theory, fueled by popular beliefs that translators are born, not made, or that translation is something that is learned on the job, not in the classroom. This view made its way into the academy in the concept of *natural translation*, proposed by Harris (1977) and Harris and Sherwood (1978), according to which translation was seen as a skill inherent in bilinguals. This effectively conflated translation pedagogy with that of language acquisition.

While there have been many significant attempts to think beyond the opposition of theory versus practice, the real loser in this debate — which is essentially a debate about curricular content — continues to be the whole question of *how* to teach translation. Is the challenge faced by translator trainers

really just a choice between teaching tools or rules? We may hope to better prepare students for the workplace by offering them appropriate tools, but if our teaching methodology is of the traditional kind — the *performance magistrale* described by Jean-René Ladmira (1977) in which the master passes on his/her knowledge to a passive apprentice — we may fail to produce translators who are capable of the flexibility, teamwork and problem-solving that are essential for success in the contemporary language industry, not to mention the creativity and independent thinking that have always been the hallmark of the finest translators. It may be, in fact, that the *how* is as important, if not more so, than the *what*: “If the translator has no formal training [in translation pedagogy],” writes Maria-Luisa Arias-Moreno, “the experience is more than chaotic and catastrophic for students” (1999: 335). Moreover, the very small number of doctoral programs in translation studies and the practical orientation of master’s programs means that many instructors of translation have no formal training in pedagogy and must pick it up, if at all, on the job.

Throughout the 1990s, however, a growing number of translator trainers have addressed what Donald Kiraly has called the “pedagogical gap” in translation skill instruction, reflected in “the lack of clear objectives, curricular materials, and teaching methods” (1995: 5). Translator trainers interested in issues of pedagogy have looked to new methodologies developed for use in the teaching of foreign languages and various applied disciplines in order to challenge traditional classroom practice that “bears a strong resemblance to the antiquated grammar-translation method of foreign language teaching” (7).

Developments in foreign language pedagogy over the last twenty-five years that were engendered by the shift from behaviorist models (Skinner) to cognitive models (Bloom, Piaget, Vygotsky) of language acquisition, offer translator trainers a variety of new instructional methodologies.¹ These models seek to engage the student’s higher-level cognitive processing — as elaborated in Bloom’s taxonomy — involving “the interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning, both in and out of the classroom” (Lee and Van Patten 1995: 14). The attempt to “bring the real world into the classroom” (Krahnke 1987: 57) is another common feature of these new pedagogical initiatives, as is the creation of more learner-centered classrooms, in which teachers function as facilitators, guiding learners in the completion of real-world tasks. In addition to producing more motivated learners and more effective learning, contextualization of language use in real-world situations also helps to develop a variety of extralinguistic skills in the learner, such as sensitivity to culture-specific issues and non-verbal means of communication (i.e., gestures, facial expressions, images).

Influenced by these trends in foreign language instruction and other applied disciplines that have adopted cognitive rather than behaviorist models of instruction, Jean Delisle, Daniel Gile, Donald Kiraly, F. G. Königs and Paul Kussmaul, among others, have called for a more process-oriented, learner-centered approach to translation training. Their work articulates challenges facing translator trainers that have little to do with the debate over theory versus practice so often articulated in our professional literature, where academics are unfairly pitted against practitioners.² Those challenges suggested by cognitive models are essentially threefold:

- (1) How to impart both declarative knowledge (facts, rules) and procedural knowledge (conceptual understanding) — often referred to as information and knowledge, respectively;
- (2) How to engage higher-level cognitive processing to make teaching more effective and learners more resourceful and flexible;
- (3) How to encourage professional conduct and the development of the student's self-image as a translator.

These issues are especially relevant today as developments in various technology-related fields (i.e., telecommunications, the Internet, computer-assisted translation) are altering and expanding the skill sets that are expected of a professional translator, putting pressure on translator training programs to add them to the curriculum without increasing the credit hours needed for completion.

The traditional tasks that professional translators perform have been intensively modified by the language engineering industry and the recent development of highly sophisticated and customized computerized programs and tools. Increasing numbers of translators are already working with computer-assisted translation software, and are expected to know desktop publishers and other presentation software. It is also becoming increasingly common for translators to interact with and revise the output of machine translation software. Consequently, translators are expected to acquire a growing number of new translation skills as they build their professional profiles, such as technological project management, production of translated texts using computer-assisted terminology databases, ability to use localization software, as well as methodologies of corpus linguistics. Inherent in all these changes is the possibility that the language industry has modified the protocols for quality assurance and quality assessment, that is, the very process of translation evaluation.

Clearly, the greatest danger is that the pace of technological change will obscure important pedagogical considerations. First, training in technology

may occur at the expense of other fundamental translation skills such as “learning how to read a text closely, writing, editing, researching” (Durban et al. 2003). Second, when introducing new technological skills, trainers may be tempted to impart only “declarative knowledge,” showing students which buttons to press, rather than the “procedural knowledge” that will help them deal with the inevitable modifications and developments in that technology. A responsible translation studies program should not only teach technological skills, but should impart knowledge of the underlying principles in areas such as terminology management and software localization.

As suggested by the foregoing discussion, the present volume focuses on those pedagogical issues typically ignored within the theory vs. practice debate. All of the contributors are translator trainers working in various institutional settings in North America and Europe. Informed by both experience and theories of pedagogy, they offer critical discussion of pedagogical methods, together with sample lessons and exercises, confirming, we hope, Mildred Larson’s observation that “as we look at the material that has been written on translation theory and practice, the books of particular significance are often written by persons who, in addition to being translators themselves, are also teachers of translation” (1991: 2). Moreover, it is our hope that such discussions of translation pedagogy can offer a way out of the impasse between theory and practice by suggesting different and perhaps ultimately more useful questions. Instead of “How relevant is what I’m teaching to the profession?” we might better ask, “How effectively am I teaching students to think about translation?”

This volume is divided into three sections. The articles in the first section explore various pedagogical interventions that are focused on the performance of translation, or translation as process. The articles in the second part discuss approaches to translator training that deal with finished translations, or translation as product, raising questions of assessment, evaluation, and text revision in both professional and academic settings. The articles in the third section of the volume address some of the pedagogical opportunities and challenges raised by developments in translation-related technologies. It should be noted, however, that the divisions here are provisional and the boundaries porous. For example, the approaches based on translation as product seek to influence translation as process, making students more aware of the ways in which they go about the translator’s task, while many of the pedagogical initiatives mentioned in sections one and two are facilitated if not made possible by the advent of new technologies. And while Judy Wakabayashi’s article on Think-Aloud Protocols has been placed in section one, we are aware that, using TAPs, “it is

only *products* which are available, although products of a different kind and order” (Toury 1977: 65).

The volume opens with Donald Kiraly’s discussion of process-oriented pedagogy. In order to displace the traditional objectivist approach to translator training, which is basically teacher-centered, Kiraly proposes the incorporation of an innovative social-constructivist approach that better reflects the multi-faceted activity of the contemporary language professional. He also encourages translator trainers to redefine translator competence in order to address the disparity between what is learned in the classroom and what is practiced in the field. After briefly describing social-constructivist educational epistemology, Kiraly asserts that fostering collaboration in the classroom is the key to shifting from a teacher-centered approach to a learner-centered approach. He argues that, by using a project workshop, students become more competent, reflective, self-confident and professional.

Sonia Colina addresses similar concerns in her discussion of the applicability of communicative competence as developed in the field of Second Language Acquisition to the translation classroom. The aim of communicative translational competence, Colina argues, is to encourage a more sense-oriented approach to translation that would address the traditional weaknesses of the beginning translator, such as the tendency to ignore “the global, textual, and pragmatic considerations used by professional translators.” Colina then demonstrates how such translational competence can be fostered in the classroom by offering a well-structured lesson plan.

Sharing Colina’s goal of encouraging more sense-oriented translation, Judy Wakabayashi explores the effectiveness of using Think-Aloud Protocols (TAP) in the classroom. TAPs can be used, Wakabayashi suggests, in order to highlight the differences between the processing performed by novices and that of translation professionals. TAPs can be performed by students in order to make them more aware of their general approach to translation. However, they can also be performed by the instructor in order to model professional translator behavior.

Alex Gross’s contribution also aims at improving the student’s self-image as a translator. By teaching translation as a form of target-language writing, Gross suggests that translator trainers can help dismantle the enduring stereotype of translation as an inevitably dim reflection of an authentic original text.

Section two’s focus on translation as product begins with Julie Johnson’s exploration of the ways in which portfolios can be used as an assessment tool in order to make the translation classroom more learner-centered. The proper use of portfolios, Johnson argues, can contribute to the preparation of translators

who are skilled, intuitive, and self-reflective by fostering critical thinking and facilitating process-oriented learning. Moreover, they not only teach translators-in-training to evaluate their own work, they prepare them to present their work in a professional manner to potential employers. Johnson discusses two types of portfolio: the course portfolio, presented as a terminal project in a single course, and the professional portfolio, prepared as an exit project at the end of a course of study.

Fanny Arango-Keeth and Geoffrey Koby address the disparity between student evaluation in translator training and quality assessment as practiced in the translation industry. They report on a survey of such practices that they conducted in early 2002 which highlights these disparities, and argue for greater harmonization and coordination between the two.

Jonathan Hine discusses the challenges of teaching the important but often neglected skill of text revision within a multilingual environment, offering a case study of one such course. Born out of necessity, this course might serve as a model for meeting student needs when an insufficient number of students is working in a single language pair to meet minimum course enrollments. Monolingual and bilingual components were broken into modules and a protocol was developed for handling assignments outside the languages of the instructor.

Carol Maier continues the discussion of translation as product in her exploration of various ways in which the comparative study of translations can help literary translators become self-aware, more sensitive to issues of class, gender, race, religion and ethnicity in their work. Maier evaluates the effectiveness of the approaches she has used in translation workshops to encourage self-reflection and foster discussion among translators — professionals and students alike — concerning the general workings of ideology as reflected in the translation of gender.

Natalia Olshanskaya's contribution also makes use of evaluation of works of translation, but with the object of improving the student's communicative proficiency. Making reference to various translations into English of the works of Isaac Babel, a Ukrainian-born, Russian-speaking Jew, Olshanskaya isolates those moments in which the translations demonstrate communicative deficiencies. Like Maier, Olshanskaya suggests an important role for translation criticism in the teaching of translation competence.

Beginning section three, Lynn Bowker explores the pedagogical possibilities opened up by new technology, specifically for the building of corpora. Recognizing the growing importance of corpus creation and analysis in language-related disciplines and the value of using textual corpora as a translation

resource, Bowker proposes an innovation to the pedagogical approach known as corpora-based translation instruction. Bowker advocates a collaborative approach to corpora building that allows students to build a corpus in the translation classroom. In order to demonstrate the viability of this proposal, she describes several different experiments she conducted in the building of targeted textual corpora related to the subject of computing. Bowker's learner-centered approach to corpus building encourages students to become independent learners and critical thinkers.

Geoffrey Koby and Brian James Baer address some of the challenges posed to translation pedagogy by the development and proliferation of new technologies. The urgent need for technical translators, localizers, and project managers may result in a failure to address fundamental questions of teaching methodology in an attempt to produce as many qualified professionals as possible in the least amount of time. Koby and Baer suggest that Task-Based Instruction (TBI) may be an appropriate methodology for teaching translation-related technologies in that it increases student motivation, replicates real world situations, engages higher-level cognitive processing, and addresses a variety of useful competences above and beyond technical proficiency. In order to demonstrate the applications of TBI to the translation classroom, the authors offer a number of tasks that can be used in the teaching of localization.

Takashi Kosaka and Masaki Itagaki also address general pedagogical issues related to the teaching of software localization, as well as specific problems involved with localization between English and Japanese. The authors dispel a number of myths surrounding translation of English text into Japanese and recount their own experiences as teachers of localization. Finally, Kosaka and Itagaki suggest that the dearth of qualified localization instructors can be remedied through a social-constructivist approach to teaching that offers a collaborative structure through which students and instructors can share knowledge and skills.

All of the phenomena discussed above — the development and implementation of new methods in foreign language pedagogy, pedagogical initiatives introduced in various applied disciplines, changes in the rapidly-expanding language industry, and the advent of new technologies for use in both the classroom and the workplace — are presently affecting the development of translation pedagogy, in both its content and its methods, leading it into new directions. They challenge teachers of translation to respond with a pedagogy that addresses not only the acquisition of new practical capabilities, but also the ability to re-conceptualize the translator's task and the evolving role of the individual translator. Moreover, it is our hope that this volume will further

discussion of pedagogical methods among translator trainers, lending new visibility to the subject of translation pedagogy, which has been for too long the other, forgotten theory in translation studies.

Notes

1. While the theories of Bloom, Piaget and Vygotsky may all seem to be concerned with cognitive processes, there are fundamental epistemological differences among them. For Bloom and Piaget, there are innate structures in the brain designed specifically for language acquisition, while for Vygotsky, these structures do not exist *a priori*. Rather, they are constructed through the negotiation of meaning in language.
2. For a good discussion of the (often inaccurate) assumptions that structure the debate over theory versus practice, see Pym 2001.

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1. Translation as process

From instruction to collaborative construction

A passing fad or the promise of a paradigm shift in translator education?

Donald C. Kiraly

Introduction

After some fifty years of a shadowy existence at the periphery of the emerging field of translation studies, translator education has reached a crossroads. Now that its parent field has matured to become a full-fledged area of study in its own right, there is increasing concern that the development of methods for educating professional translators has been neglected in favor of a “hand-me-down” principle, where each new generation of translators merely does unto their students what was done unto them. Over the past decade there have been some articles, a few books, and even some conferences on the teaching of translation, but so far there has been little concerted effort to either justify existing pedagogical models or create innovative ones for the education of non-literary translators.

This situation is finally beginning to change; witness the title of this volume, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: Rethinking Translation Pedagogy*. The question I have posed in the title of this paper is one that we, the community of translation teachers, need to answer for ourselves. There is a lively debate going on in other educational circles today that revolves around a family of concepts including “collaboration,” “radical constructivism,” “social constructivism,” “empowerment,” and “reflective practice.” At the same time, job announcements in the language mediation field rarely fail to mention “the ability to work as part of a team” as a requirement for employment. The time is indeed ripe to ask ourselves if collaboration represents no more than a passing fad in educational jargon (and in job descriptions), or whether it might not serve as a key to

innovation, allowing us to adapt our conventional hand-me-down approach in order to meet the exigencies of a much changed translation market and to address the challenges posed by contemporary views of the translator's craft.

In making a case for considering collaboration as a particularly valuable element in developing innovative methods for translator education, I particularly hope to demonstrate that the first step in the process of creating any educational approach must be the specification of the underlying epistemology, that is, our understanding of what it means to know and to learn. These philosophical underpinnings will form the essential conceptual foundation that will inform, justify and link together all subsequent stages of teaching, from curriculum and syllabus design to the creation of classroom techniques and methods of evaluation.

In this article, I will take the reader on a brief reflective journey through my own process of selecting and interpreting sources of inspiration from the extensive literature on collaboration, and through the development of my personal approach to translator education. Of course I understand that there is nothing absolute about my choices, interpretations or conclusions. Each teacher will draw on different sources and derive his or her own conclusions from them. However, if we tackle the philosophical, pedagogical and didactic problems of teaching as a community of practice, if we begin as a team to research and debate these issues, we can jointly develop collaborative approaches that can inform teaching on a systematic level throughout the field of translator education. My task here is to raise issues and incite debate that I hope will lead us far beyond my exploratory deliberations.¹

Objectivism: A commonsense epistemology

Every educational method must be based on an epistemology: a theory, understanding or set of beliefs about what it means to know, and hence to learn. Of course, the shades of gray in this matter are infinite, but for the sake of argument, I will be presenting conventional epistemology as if it were monolithic so that it can be contrasted with its theoretical antithesis: social constructivism. I have no pretense to being impartial or "objective" in my portrayals here. I can only present and explain my interpretations, let you reflect on them, and encourage you to come up with your own.

Until recently, few authors of educational publications claimed to represent an "objectivist" viewpoint. The common sense view that teachers transmit truth about the world to their students has needed neither explication nor

justification. It has been largely left to constructivists to define and specify the features and implications of this ubiquitous “common sense” epistemology. For example, in the words of the renowned linguist and cognitive scientist George Lakoff:

Objectivism is a view of the nature of knowledge and what it means to know something. In this view, the mind is an instantiation of a computer, manipulating symbols in the same way (or analogously, at least) as a computer [...] Knowledge, therefore, is some entity existing independently of the mind, which is transferred “inside the mind.” Cognition is the rule-based manipulation of the symbols via processes that will be ultimately describable through the language of mathematics and/or logic. Thus, this school of thought believes that the external world is mind independent (i.e., the same for everyone). (1987: 20)

From this viewpoint (also called “positivism” or “foundationalism”), meaning is believed to exist objectively in the real world independently of the observer, and the goal of learning is to come to know these objective meanings. In the objectivist classroom then, the teacher is privy in some sense to the right answers, that is, to truth, and the learners are there to find out what those answers are. Social constructivists claim that conventional teacher-centered instruction, where the teacher’s knowledge is supposed to be passed on to students, is derived from the common sense positivist belief that:

Experience plays an insignificant role in the structuring of the world: meaning is something that exists in the world quite aside from experience. Hence, the goal of understanding is coming to know the entities, attributes, and relations that exist. (Duffy and Jonassen 1992: 2)

Evidence for the prevalence of such beliefs about meaning, knowing and learning within the teaching profession can be found in instructional practice in classrooms “the world over, from the two Cambridges to Tokyo, from first grade to the Ph.D.” (Bruffee 1995: 66).² Published accounts of anecdotal evidence³ and my own informal survey of translation teachers and students at a number of translator education institutions in Europe over the past six years suggest that “didacticism” or knowledge transmission is the order of the day in translator education programs as it is in many, if not most, other institutionalized educational environments. A closer look at the “classical” didactic technique used in translation practice classes, as described by Christiane Nord (1996), reveals an underlying objectivist epistemology:

The students have more or less thoroughly prepared the text to be translated at home, and then take turns reading their translation suggestions sentence by sentence. These suggestions are discussed by the class as a whole, with comments being made by the instructor, until an “optimal solution” is reached that everyone

can agree on. This solution is usually written down by the students. (320, my translation)

The chart in Figure 1 illustrates my interpretation of how learning is actually supposed to come about through such a classroom activity:

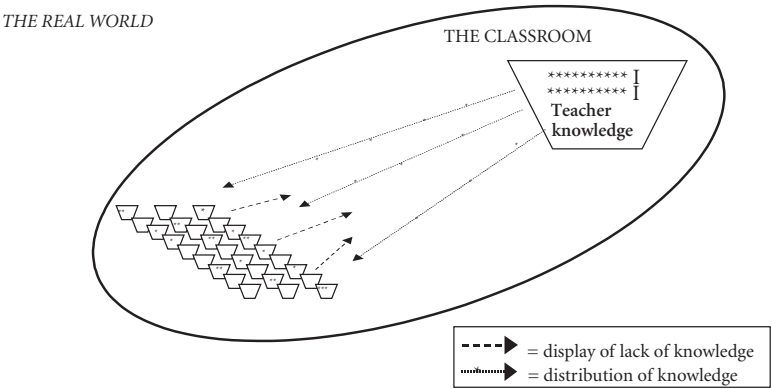


Figure 1. Interaction in a typical translator education classroom

Here, the primary teaching activity in the classroom involves the verbal “transmission” of some of the teacher’s amassed knowledge to the minds of the learners in the form of the comments on the students’ generally faulty suggestions. It is the learners’ task to absorb this transmitted knowledge and commit it to memory. If students say anything at all in class, it is usually to display their lack of knowledge as they read off passages from their rough translations and ask questions so that the teacher can correct their errors and provide them with the right answers. Talk between students is generally considered disruptive to the transmission process. In decrying the evils of the collaborative classroom, a professor of history and dean of humanities and social sciences at an American college wrote recently:

The teacher’s role is to transmit [his or her] laboriously acquired assets to students and to open intellectual doors hitherto closed. The student’s role is to pay attention, benefit from superior knowledge and experience, study diligently, and participate fruitfully when the moment is ripe. (Stunkel 1998: A52)

This statement eloquently illustrates Donald Schön’s concept of “technical rationalism,” the implication of the objectivist perspective that professional action is rational, rule-bound behavior predicated on the prior ingestion of ready-made cognitive tools. One question that comes to my mind immediately

upon reading this statement is how does one know that “the moment is ripe” for fruitful participation, and when does the metamorphosis from being a passive recipient of knowledge to a competent professional occur? Is there actually a progression toward autonomy built into our curricula and teaching methods? Do we gradually wean students from dependence on our knowledge, as strongly recommended by Freihoff (1998):

[...] it is the teacher’s job to move to the background right from the beginning, and to eventually withdraw completely [...] Learning and teaching can thus be seen as an interactive process, in which learners become increasingly independent [...] (29, my translation)

Or, do we not in fact tend to treat students at all levels as if their main task were to absorb our knowledge right down until the moment when expertise and professionalism are conferred along with the diploma at graduation?

There are, of course, innumerable variations on the objectivist theme, but in my view, the model depicted here illustrates the most basic underlying assumption of the conventional approach to learning and teaching. In this type of classroom, “collaboration” is reduced to merely playing by the rules of the memorization game, which serves a largely passive secondary role to the main attraction, which is the instructor’s display and distribution of amassed knowledge and experience. Here, there can be no team spirit, no lively interaction, and none of the negotiation of meaning that is the hallmark of more natural forms of discourse. Given the underlying understanding of what it means to learn and know, collaboration in such a classroom is a red herring. As Kenneth Stunkel has said:

Virtually by definition, students are incapable on their own of exploring the topic at the same level. The reason is simple: A good teacher is an authority. He or she has more knowledge, experience, and insight into a subject than the student does. (1998: A52)

Decades ago, translation led but a shadow existence at the edge of the humanities, when translators were considered little more than bilingual scribes. Back then, it might well have been a viable educational approach to adopt an objectivist viewpoint and transmit the necessary knowledge about contrasting linguistic structures to students. Then, before researchers in translation studies had produced the wealth of research and literature on the cultural, social and professional aspects of interlingual mediation that is part of our community self-concept today, translation was surely seen as an essentially rational, rule-based, highly structured linguistic activity. As our earliest translator training programs were just emerging half a century ago, the teachers at that time had

to come from other academic domains. They were not necessarily translators themselves; instead, they were philologists or linguists, and some were expatriates of other countries who found themselves employed as translation teachers because they happened to be native speakers of other languages. (This was in fact my own experience, although I was not hired to teach translation until 1983). In the absence of practical translation experience, teachers have little alternative but to deal with their subject matter as if it were primarily a pedagogical linguistic exercise rather than a multi-faceted professional activity.

If we believe in the efficacy of a transmissionist teaching approach, there is no real need for a debate on how to improve teaching. If students can acquire their teacher's expertise by listening to them talk about the subject at hand, so too can novice teachers learn from proficient ones by sitting in on classes and mimicking their mentors' behavior. In both cases, knowledge and experience can be distilled and communicated through verbal symbols and handed down from a better-stocked mind to less knowledgeable ones.

The training of translation teachers has in fact proceeded in a manner analogous to the training of translators themselves. It is only now that the first academic programs for the education of translation teachers are beginning to emerge.⁴ I believe that this new interest is in part due to an increasing awareness that translation has become a full-fledged craft and profession, that there is far more to the translation teaching process than passing on acquired knowledge, and that direct transmission is certainly not the only (and perhaps not the most effective) way to help students acquire the wide range of skills and expertise that translators must have to complement their knowledge of contrastive linguistics.

Since translator education programs have now been around for decades, more and more representatives of the younger generation of translation teachers actually have academic training as translators and professional translation experience, which may encourage them to adopt a less ivory-tower and more praxis-oriented approach. As I will attempt to show later in this chapter, a focus on the actual practice of translation outside the classroom naturally leads away from a teacher-centered, transmissionist approach and toward one that puts the spotlight on students and (collaborative) learning instead. At this point I would like to introduce the social constructivist epistemology, which I believe can serve as a strong theoretical cornerstone for the development of student- and praxis-relevant teaching methods.

A family of alternative perspectives: The construction of reality

Constructivism is of course no more monolithic than the objectivist perspective. The two primary strains (around which are clustered numerous variants) are “radical constructivism,” which derives primarily from Piaget’s developmental psychology, and “social constructivism,” which draws considerable inspiration from the work of Lev Vygostky, but also from John Dewey (1938) and Richard Rorty (1979). These two poles of the continuum share the fundamental idea that people construct their understandings of the world rather than reflect nature in their minds. In the Piagetian tradition, perhaps most vociferously defended by Ernst von Glasersfeld (1988), the “radical” variant focuses on the individual mind as the constructor of meaning and knowledge, whereas the “social” variant emphasizes the role of interaction between members of a community in coming to understand the world. My belief in a social constructivist perspective is a personal one, based on my own experiences as a learner and teacher. There is nothing inherently wrong or right about it, but it is viable for me. I see the best degree of “fit” between this viewpoint and my understanding of knowing and learning. The selection of a particular perspective is clearly one that will have to be made by each individual teacher. What is important, I think, is that the choice we make at this level will clearly have a profound impact on the implications we draw for our teaching practice, and specifically on whether we see learning as an essentially individual or collaborative process.

At the heart of the social constructivist perspective is the belief that there is no meaning in the world until we human beings make it — both individually and collectively. Learning and cognitive development — the lifelong creation of the mind — are seen to derive, first and foremost, from the interplay of communicative interaction and sense perception. In this view, while there is a reality outside of subjective interpretation and belief, we cannot come to know that reality in any objective way. Instead, we construct dynamic, viable understandings of the world on the basis of experience, the interpretation of our sense perceptions, and the resolution of conflicts with our existing beliefs.

In this view, learning is a constructive process in which the learner is building an internal representation of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is constantly open to change, its structure and linkages forming the foundation to which other knowledge structures are appended. Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience. Conceptual growth comes from the sharing of multiple perspectives and the simultaneous changing of our internal representations in response to those perspectives as well as through cumulative experience. (Bednar et al. 1992: 21)

An essential difference between a conventional, objectivist viewpoint and a social constructivist one, particularly for translator education, lies in the awareness that from the latter perspective, the teacher's experience and knowledge simply cannot be transferred to the learner. All input from the environment, including a teacher's utterances, will have to be interpreted, weighed and balanced against each learner's prior knowledge:

[...] the argument is that meaning is imposed on the world by us, rather than existing in the world independently of us. There are many ways to structure the world, and there are many meanings or perspectives for any event or concept. Thus there is not a correct meaning that we are striving for. (Duffy and Jonassen 1992: 3)

The way Duffy and Jonassen have phrased the essence of constructivism points to a crucial realization for translator education: none of us, neither student nor teacher, can possibly have "the" right answers. When faced with translation decisions, we can come up with solutions that we believe are plausible and viable on the basis of our prior experience. But this experience has to be our own, not the distillation of someone else's experience handed down in an abstract, verbal form.

Of particular interest here is the finding of expertise studies that what the expert knows is neither separate nor separable from the professional activities in which that individual engages. In Donald Schön's words:

I shall use *knowing-in-action* to refer to the sorts of know-how we reveal in our intelligent action — publicly observable, physical performances like riding a bicycle and private operations like instant analysis of a balance sheet. In both cases, the knowing is *in* the action. We reveal it by our spontaneous, skillful execution of the performance; and we are **characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit**. (Schön 1987: 25, my emphasis)

Schön sees the professional practice of lawyers, doctors, and engineers more as a matter of intuitive "artistry" in practice than of conscious, rule-bound decision-making. His realization that experts generally cannot express in words how they do what they do suggests that the transmissionist approach cannot accomplish what it purports to accomplish: the transfer of expertise from one mind to another. From a social constructivist viewpoint there is thus a need for extensive and intensive action (and interaction) on the part of each individual if learning is to be effective. Regardless of the domain involved, it entails actually using the tools of a profession to fashion and re-fashion one's own concepts and translational artifacts, strategies and procedures in conjunction with peers and experienced professionals. Hence, the collaborative undertak-

ing of authentic tasks with the support of the teacher is at the heart of social constructivist teaching methods:

Perhaps, then, learning *all* forms of professional artistry depends, at least in part, on conditions similar to those created in the studios and conservatories: freedom to learn by doing in a setting relatively low in risk, with access to coaches who initiate students into the “traditions of the calling” and help them, by “the right kind of telling,” to see on their own behalf and in their own way what they need most to see. (Schön 1987: 17)

Over the past decade there has been a massive movement in many educational domains, from social studies to mathematics, from composition to distance learning, and from elementary school to teacher education programs, to devise and justify teaching methods on the basis of social constructivist principles. Nevertheless, while constructivism today is often portrayed as the dominant paradigm in contemporary educational philosophy and teacher training programs, didactic practice reflecting an objectivist viewpoint continues to persist in the classroom. The field of translation studies is starting to question the viability of the hand-me-down approach to translation pedagogy and is looking to collaborative methods for inspiration. It is ironic that this development is occurring while constructivist collaboration is both at its zenith in theory and under attack in practice in other educational domains. The main concerns seem to be that constructivist approaches are seen to fall short in the areas of academic rigor and classroom discipline, that they promote a chaotic, laissez-faire environment in the classroom where the teacher is no longer in control, and that they waste the teacher’s laboriously amassed knowledge:

[...] in much of higher education, no interactive model can substitute for a well-organized lecture that structures a mass of information, illuminates basic concepts, suggests applications, reviews relevant literature and major interpretations, and displays what it means for someone to care about learning, inquiry and teaching. (Stunkel 1998: A52)

I would not say that Stunkel is wrong; he is merely drawing logical conclusions from his underlying assumptions about the nature of knowing and learning. Interestingly, the article from which this quotation was taken is entitled, “We Want to See the Teacher: Constructivism and the Rage Against Expertise.” It assumes that in a classroom based on constructivist principles, teachers set up learning environments and then withdraw to the sidelines, essentially leaving students to their own devices to make their way in the dark. This criticism may indeed be justified in the case of several other alternative educational movements, like the “discovery learning” or “autonomous learning” methods.

However, from a social constructivist perspective, the teacher in fact remains a key figure in the learning situation. One of the best-developed methods for teaching based on social constructivism is “cognitive apprenticeship” (Defalco 1995, Bednar 1992, Collins, Brown, Newman 1989), where groups of learners create pieces of work (rather than perform exercises) under the tutelage of and with the collaborative support of an expert practitioner. And while there is sure to be considerable conversation and interaction in a social constructivist classroom, one of the teacher’s main jobs is to be attentive to those potential moments of developmental progress that Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development” in the course of students’ collaborative learning experiences. The teacher must also provide just enough assistance at those moments to help the group move to a new level of understanding.

Another key concept for social constructivists is “scaffolding” (see Fisher 1994), representing a framework of support for learning created by the teacher at the beginning of a program of study, a course or a lesson. It is a supportive intellectual framework that can be gradually dismantled as learners become more independent and assume more responsibility for their own learning. As for chaos, the social constructivist classroom may well be a less orderly place than many conventional, teacher-centered classrooms; but it can be a learning environment that is more full of life, marked by mutual respect and true team spirit among the learners as well as between the learners and their mentor. It is a place for authentic work and not just for exercises.

In educational circles in the English-speaking world, more and more voices like the one quoted above are calling the constructivist paradigm into question and plead for a return to traditional (i.e., teacher-centered and transmission-based) values in teaching. As the debate mounts in other applied fields, we in the field of translator education are only just beginning to become aware of the innovative potential that constructivism might have for our learning/teaching environments.

Preparing for the translator’s craft: From translation competence to translator competence

For me, perhaps the most compelling reasons for considering a radical change in the way we understand the acquisition of translation-related skills and knowledge and the way we instruct novice translators can be found both in changes in the profession itself over the past half century and in recent findings of the extensive and multi-faceted academic work and research in translation