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Towards Authentic Experiential Learning in Translator Education

With 17 figures

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Don Kiraly

Preface

This volume brings together the voices of a number of translation scholars and educators (and one interpreter educator) representing several different cultures and language combinations to present their views on and experiences with *authentic experiential learning* in professional T&I educational programmes. The idea behind the book – and in fact most of its chapters – emerged from a panel on authentic translation project work in translator education that formed part of the *2nd Non-Professional Translation and Interpreting Conference*, which was held at the School of Translation, Linguistics and Cultural Studies of the University of Mainz in Germersheim, Germany in May, 2014. From the outset, it is important to point out that the particular variety of 'non-professional' translation and interpreting that was dealt with in the panel presentations and that is the focus of attention throughout this volume could actually be called *pre-professional* as it refers to translation and interpreting activities carried out by students being educated and trained to enter the language mediation professions. This clearly puts them in a special relationship with 'professional' translation and interpreting that distinguishes them from other types of non-professional language mediators. Several contributions to this volume (in particular those by Massey & Brändli, Hagemann and Dingfelder Stone) discuss the utility of this term.

This volume does not purport to offer a balanced view of the pros and cons of using authentic projects to educate translators and interpreters because, in the end, the set of contributions that came together, actually quite serendipitously, were all written by educators who have found authentic experiential work to be an effective platform for learning. Nevertheless, dissenting viewpoints are taken into consideration within various contributions. It is hoped that those readers of this volume who happen to be translator or interpreter educators that have not yet explored the possibility of incorporating authentic experiential learning into their teaching will be encouraged by this short collection of chapters to consider or reconsider this pedagogical option. In addition, given the virtual absence of significant teacher training for language mediation educators worldwide, it is also hoped that new and up-and-coming educators in this field will be inspired by the volume to reflect on their own understandings of what it means to know, to learn and to teach as they set out to educate translators and interpreters competently and wisely in this still new millennium.

In Chapter 1, Raquel Pacheco Aguilar begins by exploring the meaning of the concepts of 'authenticity' and 'translator education' from the perspective of educational philosophy. She considers the functions of education in general and of translator education specifically and she touches on a range of topics that have long been discussed in the philosophy of education in other educational domains but that are rarely broached in the literature on translator education. In Chapter 2, Susanne Hagemann discusses a wide range of terms and concepts that have been referred to in translator education – often with a plethora of denotations. Her objective is to establish some common terminological ground so that researchers and teachers can better understand different pedagogical approaches and techniques that may have been misunderstood in the past. Her argument for terminological rigor should contribute to better defined contours of the concepts educational researchers use as they work towards establishing exemplary innovative tools for teaching and environments for learning. Chapter 3 picks up on one of the topics Raquel Pacheco Aguilar broaches in Chapter 1: the question of pedagogical epistemology and its relation to authentic project work. In this chapter, Don Kiraly[1] outlines the origins of the still dominant positivist paradigm of pedagogical thought, which he claims is grounded in the empirico-rationalist worldview that has dominated science (and education) since the Enlightenment. This paradigm has justified the continued use of the conventional "who-will-take-the-next-sentence" instructional technique that has been used to teach translation skills and knowledge since the dawn of contemporary translator education. Kiraly goes on to briefly review social-constructivist epistemology as a step beyond positivism, and he concludes with his most recent proposal of an 'emergentist' epistemology as a plausible foundation for translator education for the 21st century, that includes authentic project work.

In Chapter 4, Kiraly and Hofmann take another step towards an emergent epistemology by proposing a postpositivist curriculum development model derived from their work on the European Graduate Placement Scheme (EGPS) – an EU project designed to create a platform for international placements for students of translation. Instead of seeing work placements as a an extra-curricular activity, Kiraly and Hofmann propose an approach that incorporates work placements directly into the curriculum in a sequenced and scaffolded manner. In Chapter 5, Lisa Rüth, Marcus Wiedmann and Don Kiraly discuss a multiple educational case study involving e-learning in translator education. In the study, the authors utilized the emergent model of learning presented in Chapter 3 and the findings that were surfacing simultaneously from the EGPS project to investigate: 1) the potential for using e-learning at different stages of translator education, and 2) the possibility of scaffolding learning by progressing, for example, from less authentic to more authentic learning activities over the course of a programme of study.

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[1] Faced with the quandary of reflecting my shifting roles in this volume, including editor, author and co-author, I found it expeditious to switch between first and third person narration in different parts of the book.

Chapter 6 stands out from the rest of the contributions to this volume in that it deals specifically with the education of conference interpreters rather than translators. In this chapter, Maren Dingfelder Stone discusses two teaching approaches that have been developed and applied at the FTSK in Germersheim: 1) the so-called 'Friday conference', which is a regular instructional offering where students can participate in authentic interpreting events, and 2) the Moodle Online Platform for Self-Study in Interpreting (MOPSI), which Dingfelder Stone developed with a University-funded grant in 2014–2015. While the author clearly sees the authentic Friday Conference as a suitable environment for promoting the emergence of professional interpreter competence, she also proposes the MOPSI e-learning programme as a complementary self-instructional technique. In her view, students would be expected to identify and reflect on weaknesses they perceive in their own authentic performances during the conferences, and then access the online Moodle course and choose appropriate remedial tasks to remedy those inadequacies in their performance.

In Chapter 7, Andrea Cnyrim focuses on the development of intercultural competence through authentic projects in the translation practice classroom. After reviewing the nature of the intercultural competence component of translator competence, Cnyrim introduces a series of projects carried out in the German Department of the FTSK involving authentic translations. She demonstrates how, with a suitable theoretical focus on appropriate translation commissions, students can be encouraged to develop the kind of intercultural competence they will need upon graduation. In Chapter 8, Catherine Way discusses an approach to undertaking authentic project work used in the Translator Education programme at the University of Granada that was specifically designed to avoid some of the concerns voiced by professional translator associations related to having non-professionals (students) undertake the work of professional (graduate) translators. In the experimental setting she discusses, translation students worked together with students in the University's school of law to provide the latter with translations that they needed for their coursework. Way shows how such authentic 'intra-university' projects can be used to provide students with authentic professional practice without encroaching on the market that professionals see as their own territory.

In Chapter 9, Carmen Canfora explores the concept of the ‘portfolio’ as a tool for instruction and assessment in heterogeneous learning groups involved in Translator Education. In her experimental work, Canfora had students involved in highly autonomous simulated translation projects submit portfolios of their work to their instructor for assessment and feedback. This chapter clearly shows the potential value of the portfolio concept as a component in highly autonomous learning activities – including authentic project work. And finally, in Chapter 10, Gary Massey and Barbara Brändli present research they have undertaken on collaborative feedback flows in authentic translation project work at the Zürich University of Applied Sciences. Drawing on the emergent epistemology of learning proposed by Kiraly in Chapter 4, Massey and Brändli emphasize the dynamic and inter-subjective nature of learning and focus in on the feedback provided by teachers, clients and students within the context of authentic projects and how it can enhance (or hamper) performance and learning.

Don Kiraly

Raquel Pacheco Aguilar
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Chapter 1: The Question of Authenticity in Translator Education from the Perspective of Educational Philosophy

Introduction

Translator Education increasingly resorts to authentic translation work to create meaningful, occupation-related learning experiences (Amman and Vermeer 1990; Baer and Koby 2003; González Davies 2004; Kelly 2005; Kiraly 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2012a, 2012b 2013, 2014; Mitchell-Schuitevoerder 2013; Galán-Mañas 2013, Hagemann and Neu 2013). As the theme of this volume suggests, one way to implement authentic translation work in the classroom is to use a real-project based methodology with near-professional working conditions, a learning-centred approach to Translator Education and a conceptualisation of learning as emergent and embodied action (Kiraly 2014). This methodology offers a framework for Translator Education that is based on "learner empowerment" (Kiraly 2000: 17), which means that by doing authentic translation work, students can be expected to take control of and responsibility for their own learning process and can also have an influence on social and political forces in their educational environment.

The objective behind undertaking authentic translation work within the educational setting is to strengthen the links between theoretical reflection and practical know-how in order to develop self-reflective professional translator expertise and generic skills like creativity, critical thought, autonomy, responsibility, cooperativeness and professionalism in a holistic way (Mitchell-Schuitevoerder 2013: 127–128). Adopting a holistic approach to translator education means educating each student "in an all-round manner […], as a 'whole person' […] and as a well-rounded translation specialist" (Tan 2008: 597). During their education, students grow as translators in their abilities and skills; rather than closing in on a predetermined ideal outcome, they are encouraged to evolve as unique, yet interconnected emergent selves.

My goal in this chapter is to investigate the nature of authenticity in Translator Education from the perspective of educational philosophy. In order to begin this exploration, I will first need to make some distinctions regarding the very concept of ‘learning’. While there may be a variety of suppositions about what learning entails, authenticity in Translator Education implies particular epistemological assumptions about this term. This aspect will be explored in this first section. Next, I will outline some of the background behind the term ‘authenticity’ as it has been the focus of considerable philosophical debate. In discussing this term, I will attempt to engage with some of the scholars that have dealt most directly with matters of authenticity on the one hand and Translator Education on the other. Finally, I will focus on other educational questions like the purposes of education and the relationships between educational agents and their environment. With these final considerations I hope to illuminate some of the implications of authenticity for the field of study and enterprise of Translator Education.

Learning in Translator Education

Exploring the notion of authenticity from an educational perspective leads us first to critical reflection on the epistemological foundations of ‘learning’. According to Biesta’s deconstructive interpretation (2006), learning is frequently understood as an “economic transaction”, in which:

> (1) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain “needs”, in which (2) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution is seen as the provider, that is, the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner, and where (3) education itself becomes a commodity – a “thing” – to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner. (Biesta 2006: 19–20)

This economic conceptualisation of learning views both knowledge and skills as consumer goods that can be transmitted from educator to student, and as student needs to be met by educational institutions. This concept of learning suggests a framework in which education can be reduced to a matter of technical implementation of a programme that defines the learner’s needs before they even begin the educational process (Biesta 2006: 21). Furthermore, once these needs are identified, they can be met by transmitting units of objective knowledge to the would-be learners.

As Hagemann illustrates using the example of the Germersheim School of Translation Studies, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies of Mainz University in Germany, this view of learning is reflected in common terms such as ‘learning outcomes’ or ‘needs assessment’ that have been introduced in many module handbooks and assessment regulations at numerous European universities through the implementation of the Bologna Process (Hagemann 2014: 157). Instead of promoting constructivist pedagogical practices as some translation researchers have suggested, these concepts are firmly embedded in a *modernist* or *positivist* view of learning (see Kiraly in Chapter 3 of this volume). As Hagemann affirms, the:

> […] elaborate specifications for teaching seem […] to be predicated on the assumption that all students will be able to learn the same things in similar ways – but this is actually one of the objections that have been raised to traditional talk-and-chalk styles. (Hagemann 2014: 158)

Hence, a view of learning as assessment and accomplishment of needs presupposes the following situations. First, the educational institution defines "what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process" ('learning outcome', European Commission 2008: 3). The identification of learning outcomes can be based on theoretical constructs and research findings or on negotiations between stakeholders (researchers, policymakers, practitioner communities and employers), or it can be adapted from pre-existing sets of learning outcomes (Bulgarelli et al. 2009: 50). The relationship between learners and those responsible for describing the learning outcomes is, in many cases, opaque. Bulgarelli emphasizes this muddy relationship in terms of vocational education and training: "It is often difficult to ascertain the source from which learning outcomes have been derived, how the development work has been undertaken and with which experts, partners and/or stakeholders" (2009: 39).

Second, the teacher develops tools to facilitate the learning process and to measure the extent to which the students have achieved the specified learning outcomes. However, even when some authors underline the use of formative assessment instead of summative assessment in the translation classroom[1], Firmino Torres and Leite show that in higher education and under the influence of the Bologna Process, "the use of more emancipatory methods of assessment does not become apparent" (Firmino Toores and Leite 2014: 26). In general, it is still student performance that is being measured, especially when the number of students in a group is excessive with respect to a particular set of norms, a programme of study or a set of learning outcomes.

Finally, once the learners' deficiencies are identified in relation to the specified learning outcomes ('learning gap'), the students can carry out the appro-

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[1] Formative assessments, also known as self-assessments or assessments for learning, are procedures that allow students to assume responsibility for their own learning. This emancipatory method consists of assisting in the learning process by providing information. On the other hand, summative assessments consist of items to determine the students learning progress at the end of a limited period. Summative assessments include measuring the level achieved by the students using tests and exams after completing the programme of study or a specific academic period (Firmino Torres and Leite 2014).