From hermeneutics to the translation classroom: a social constructivist approach to effective learning

Jennifer Varney
Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona
varney@sslmit.unibo.it

Abstract. This article compares the social constructivist approach to effective learning with several other trends currently popular in the education community and seeks to evaluate these in the context of translator training. After a discussion of transmissionist concepts of learning which tend to view knowledge as a rule-based static entity existing independently of the mind and which can be transmitted to the passive learner, we survey the relevance of various contemporary theoretical and practical approaches to learning which seek to emphasise learner autonomy and empowerment – including social constructivism, enactivism, collaborative learning and situatedness. We then measure the viability of the social constructivist approach against the specific requirements of the translation classroom via a case study of a 'live' translation class. The article then concludes with several tentative suggestions towards an educational philosophy for the translation classroom.

Keywords: translator training; social constructivism; enactivism; learner autonomy; collaborative learning; situatedness

Introduction

This article aims to investigate the value of social constructivism as a viable approach to translator training, initially through a theoretical consideration of several different approaches to teaching and learning, and subsequently via a specific case study that examines the application of social constructivist principles to the translation classroom. It then proposes, by way of a conclusion, several key points in what might be considered an initial step towards shaping an educational philosophy for translator training.

Part one: Theoretical considerations

Hermeneutic phenomenology of the sort proposed by Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1976) shattered once and for all the notion that meaning can be viably expressed in terms of a static objective truth which the bountiful text reveals to the discerning reader. Gadamer claims that all interpretation is situational and is both formed and constrained by the historically relative criteria characterising a particular culture at a specific moment in time. He argues that the reading activity is not a matter of recovering pre-existing meanings but rather involves the reader entering into a dynamic relationship with the text:

> To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue. This contention is confirmed by the fact that the concrete dealing with a text yields understanding only when what is said in the text begins to find expression in the interpreter's own language (Gadamer, 1976, p.57).

In the translation community, views concerning the non-static, non-given nature of meaning and thus interpretation have been circulating for several decades and have for the most part been broadly accepted. Arrojo (2005), for example, tests the climate of contemporary approaches to translation and voices the contention held by many theorists and practitioners that the clichés surrounding the work of translators and the translation process are the result of an essentialist ideology which "relies on the possibility of forever stable meanings safely kept in language and texts which could transcend history and

ideology" (Arrojo, 2005, p.23). Given this shift towards the conviction that meaning is created by readers and not imposed by authors, it is all the more surprising that teaching methods in translator education may still reflect an essentialist agenda. Such an agenda is underpinned by the implicit idea (implicit because few educators would actually admit to holding such a belief, though teaching methods might imply otherwise) that educators are somehow endowed with truth-seeing capabilities which are put to the service of passive learners in the classroom situation with a view to transmitting objectified and quantifiable knowledge.

Given the importance of hermeneutics to the translator's activity, a coherent approach to translator education would reflect at every level the instructor's own ideological position vis-à-vis the nature of interpretation and meaning. A belief in the subjective nature of meaning and interpretation finds no expression in what Arrojo (2005) calls essentialist teaching methods or what Kiraly (2000) describes as an objectivist standpoint. Advocating a social constructivist approach to translator education, Kiraly shows how constructivism is a theory of learning which investigates the ways in which learners generate knowledge and meaning from experience. Constructivism rests on the notions that the learner is a unique individual who can be effectively encouraged to take responsibility for their own motivation and learning, and posits that learning is an active social process triggered by the dynamic interaction between instructor, learners and task. Social constructivism also encompasses the notion that authentic or situated learning facilitates the creation of the learning context, vital for effective learning, where the student takes part in activities which are directly relevant to the application of learning and which take place within a culture similar to the applied setting. Constructivists from Dewey (1910), Piaget (1971) and Vygotsky (1994) through to Kiraly (2000) challenge the view that knowledge is essentially static and can be transmitted to learners; in a constructivist view of education, personal meaning-making replaces the acquisition of static knowledge while learners are seen to reflect on and interpret experience according to their own mental structures. This assimilation of meaning is then represented as concepts which can be expressed and transferred to new situations. From this perspective, learning is a question of adjusting the mental models we have created of the world when we realise that they do not correspond to a new situation.

> 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. (Bednar *et al.*, 1992, p.21)

On knowing

An emphasis on the subjective meaning-making process of learning and knowledge construction radically challenges transmissionist thinking and situates the learner at the centre of the web of interpretation. However, for some, this departure does not go far enough. The social constructivist approach has been criticised for its tendency to reify knowledge and rational control (Fenwick, 2000; Begg, 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991; and Michelson, 1996), which in turn would imply that the learner is a stable, unitary self consciously regulating the individual construction of cognitive models. Michelson (1996) criticises the constructivist notion that learning depends on the rational mind drawing that which is consciously deemed useful from experience in order to create knowledge. Aiming her criticism from a different angle, Fenwick (2000) suggests that constructivists do not

engage fully with psychoanalytic insights into the workings of the subconscious; despite the constructivist focus on the importance of individual subjective interpretation in the meaning-making process, issues such as intention, desire and what Begg (2000) calls 'non-cognitive knowing' (emotion, intuition, etc) are not adequately accounted for.

Kiraly's (2000) application of the social constructivist approach to translator education displays a clear engagement with such criticism. In referring to the non-static nature of knowledge and the dynamic, interactive process of learning, he distances his approach from the knowledge-as-product perspective to locate it once and for all in the inter-subjective interaction taking place between learners in a social setting: "My current belief [is] that the development of true expertise can only be developed on the basis of authentic situated action, the collaborative construction of knowledge, and personal experience" (Kiraly, 2000, p.3). Yet, despite the dynamic, interactive nature of Kiraly's constructivist approach, the lexis he uses to describe the learning experience is occasionally reminiscent of the debunked transmissionist discourse. Terms such as 'mental models', 'construction' and 'knowledge' may fail to commit fully to the fluid, ever-changing and somewhat elusive process characterising learning. Terry Eagleton states in *Critical Theory* that "words not only denote objects but imply attitudes to them" (Eagleton, 1983, p.122), a view reflected by writers analysing educational techniques from an enactivist perspective (Fenwick, 2000; Begg, 2000) who recognise the importance of acknowledging on the level of lexis the durational and non-finite aspect of the learning process and thus, for example, replace terms like 'knowledge' with 'knowing'.

Returning to the psychoanalytic critique of social constructivist perspectives, Kiraly himself questions the validity of purely cognitivist approaches which fail to take into account the "non-strategic, relatively uncontrolled, and virtually untraceable mental processes" (Kiraly, 2000, p.3) involved in learning. He claims an important role for intuition in the learning activity, which he describes as having a feel for accuracy, appropriateness and correctness, and acknowledges that intuition cannot be consciously accounted for precisely because it resides for the most part in the sub-conscious. This non-cognitive impulse is the result of "dynamically constructed impressions distilled from countless occurrences of action and interaction with the world and from the myriad dialogues that we engage in as we go about life in the various communities of which we are members" (Kiraly, 2000, p.4).

Begg (2000) lists a number of non-cognitive instances of knowing which do not seem to sit well with social constructivism. Citing Hargreves, he suggests that "emotions are at the heart of teaching", and calls for emotion and other forms of unformulated knowledge to be seen not as distinct impulses distinguishable from cognitive knowing, but as fundamental to our way-of-being and as such to our learning process (Hargreves, cited by Begg, 2000). Kiraly's emphasis on learner empowerment to some extent absorbs this argument. Emotion and other non-cognitive instances of knowing are fully recognised and respected as inherent characteristics of Kiraly's individual empowered learner, responsible for his or her own learning experience. Empowerment here stimulates and liberates the creative capabilities of individual learners, a creativity which is nourished by non-cognitive knowing. Empowering the learner can also be seen as an explicit commitment to the Hermeneutic conviction that meaning cannot be seen as some unchanging, absolute entity. Empowered learners are autonomous thinking individuals whose capacity for meaning-making is no less valuable than that of the instructor, thus the traditional hierarchies of power which

place an undue and unaccountable degree of authority in the hands of the instructor are subverted. Learners in this environment gain autonomy and non-cognitive knowing is recognised as inherent to the identity of each individual and is negotiated through the collaborative learning techniques favoured by social constructivist educators.

Social collaborative learning

Curzon claims that "the student should be viewed as a purposive individual in continuous interaction with his social and psychological environment" (Curzon, 1976, p.31). Collaborative learning as described by social constructivist thinking takes for granted the fact that learners are purposive individuals and describes the construction of knowledge as being a significantly social experience. Not only does the notion of collaborative learning fully subscribe to the empowerment of individual learners, it also marks a clear departure from the idea that learning occurs exclusively inside the brain of the learner and locates the process more specifically in the inter-subjective interaction which takes place between participants (instructors and learners) in the learning event.

> I believe that [autonomous learning] skills must be grounded in collaborative social experiences in the construction of meaning. I thus place considerable emphasis on group learning, on shifting the focus of attention in the classroom away from the one-way distribution of knowledge in the traditional classroom, towards multi-faceted, multi-directional interaction between the various participants in the classroom situation. Autonomy from this viewpoint is both a group phenomenon as well as an individual one (Kiraly, 2000, p.20).

By emphasising the importance of collaborative learning, social constructivist perspectives reinforce the conviction that learning should be seen as a predominantly social activity. Indeed, much of the recent research undertaken in the field of learning has located the social at the centre of the learning experience (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Coren, 1997; Fenwick, 2000 and Begg, 2000). Yet ideas regarding the importance of collaborative learning date back to the 1960s; Wilfred Bion, for example, was arguing in as early as 1967 in favour of the social character of the learning experience. Substantiating his thesis that we learn in relation to the Other, he presents an interesting argument on the nature of thinking and claims that whilst thoughts are an individual-based, internal phenomena, thinking (or to think) is a structured discourse which organises the flux of thoughts into superior structures which are communicable to and to a certain degree shared by the Other (Bion, 1967 cited in Coren, 1997).

Learning clearly does not take place in a void and to situate the learning experience in an overtly social environment is to recreate for the learner an environment which parallels the world outside the classroom. The social constructivist approach to translator education converts the Social into practical situated action: learners work together in small groups consulting the instructor who in turn takes on the role of guide, facilitator, assistant or mentor. Group work seen from this perspective involves collaborative meaning-negotiation on the part of all members of the group and the appropriation of cultural and professional knowledge on the part of each individual group member. Such an approach allows for collaboration not only between learners but also between learners and the instructor. If we admit that both instructors and learners can reciprocally influence each other and can all participate meaningfully in and gain from the learning process, then we go some way to liberating the instructor-learner relationship from a sense

of oppression. This in itself is an important step, and one which carries many consequences. Where the learning environment is free from oppression, participants are more likely to exploit to the full their autonomy and empowerment. At the same time, important psychological responses which favour the learning process, such as curiosity and creativity, will be released.

One of the goals of primary, secondary and tertiary education is to provide individuals with those qualities and skills deemed necessary by the social world (Coren, 1997). Anna Freud has argued that education therefore tends to diminish curiosity, yet curiosity on the part of the learner is fundamental to the learning process. Learners whose curiosity is stimulated are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning process will become more meaningful as the learner develops a personal interest in and response to the material under study. Curiosity springs from difference; institutions which seek to homogenise learners and instructors whose teaching methods are underpinned by the twin evils of Right and Wrong value sameness over difference, conformity over experimentation. Yet both instructors and learners should be encouraged to value difference as a means of continually stimulating curiosity and encouraging creativity. Indeed, the most fruitful learning experiences might be said to take place when learners learn something different from that which is overtly being 'taught' (Coren, 1997). Instructors can facilitate this by encouraging learners to critically question all perspectives, opinions and ideas (including those of the instructor him/herself). Moreover, curiosity is fundamental to creativity and creative learners will be prepared to experiment with different modes of expression.

Situated learning

The constructivist approach has also been criticised for what has been perceived as a duality underpinning particularly Vygotskian constructivism. In Fenwick's words:

> In constructivism, context is considered important but separate, as if it were a space in which an autonomous learner moves rather than a web of activity, subjectivities and language constituting categories such as 'learner'. […] In the constructivist view, the learner is still viewed as fundamentally autonomous from his or her surroundings. (Fenwick, 2000, p.246)

In emphasising the social element in constructivism, Kiraly, for his part, rejects the self-world duality, affirming that thought processes and social processes are mutually dependent. The social, inter-subjective nature of meaning, thought and the mind provides the framework for his specific social constructivist approach to translator education; indeed, Kiraly clearly states that learning is mutually constructive between the individual, the social, and the cultural and physical environment and asserts that learning is thus a function of situation. For enactivists, however, this might not go far enough. Enactivism is a philosophy based on two important premises: cognition and environment are inseparable, and systems enact with one another and learn from each other. Whilst Kiraly, for example, states that learners learn through experience (Kiraly 2000, p.16), Fenwick, writing on enactivist approaches to education, says that we do not learn *through* experience, but *in* experience (Fenwick, 2000, p.248). In the final analysis, the apparent contention between enactivism and Kiraly's social constructivism may be more a question of lexical choice than a fundamental difference in belief systems. However, for the sake of argument, Fenwick's basic criticism is as follows:

[According to many conceptions of working knowledge]… the individual discerns objects of knowing or judgment from the environment in an ongoing process of meaning-making, which becomes more acute, resilient, self-reflexive and generalisable as knowledge 'grows'. This orientation sidesteps individuals' formulation of experience within particular discourses, and downplays the extent to which experience is an embodied and elusive phenomenon. (Fenwick, 2001, p.245)

The key idea is, of course, the fact that learning is an experience that takes place *within* particular discourses, not through them. Moreover, Fenwick's claim that we exist *in* knowledge and that understanding is firmly rooted in conduct (Fenwick, 2001) is persuasive. This 'situated' approach presents a seamless link between cognition and interaction in a specific community of practice (COP). Examining situatedness from a Translation Studies perspective, Risku states that:

Situated cognition does not only examine individuals and their previous knowledge and skills, it also examines their interaction with artefacts, language, and the social environment. (Risku 2002, p.528)

In their discussion of situatedness and legitimate peripheral participation, Lave and Wenger (1991) show how the 'whole person' is implicated in the learning process. Basing their discussion on the notion that agent, activity and world mutually constitute each other, they expound a theory of social practice which is grounded in the idea that meaning is socially negotiated. Learners are referred to as persons-in-activity whose thought and action are informed by and performed in specific COPs (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.50). Such a perspective values social practices over cognitive practices and sees learning as integral to participation in COPs.

COPs and viability

The emphasis on situatedness in learning reflects a more general move in linguistic and cultural studies which argues that identity is formed by participation in particular discourse communities. Applied to the context of learning, the argument is problematic. Taken to the extreme, the philosophy of situatedness undermines autonomy and can prove oppressive. Autonomy is to a certain extent a question of rule breaking, of subversive activity which leads to difference and possible innovation. If we say that COPs are responsible for identity formation and that individuals cannot thus exist outside COPs, we construct a world in which autonomy is a fleeting utopia. In *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Calvino dramatises the absurd logic of belonging to/being trapped inside social systems and the impossibility of escape: "If you unbutton one uniform there's always another uniform underneath," says the Reader (Calvino, 1979/1981, p.218). The consequences of pushing to the extreme one's belief in situated learning and the fact of action only being possible within communities of practice is no less oppressive for learners than being exposed to institutionalised transmissionist practices. Individual expression and the possibility of autonomy are values which must be protected, at least in the classroom. Fish tells us that "meanings are the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretative communities that are responsible both for the shape of a reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (Fish, 1980, p.1). Such a view ultimately renders originality, autonomy and independence impossible. Fish presents an undeniably convincing argument regarding the non-autonomy of individuals,

though we might approach the problem from a different angle and ask whether this is a *useful* theory for learning.

Viability

Kiraly discusses Rorty's notion of viability (Kiraly, 2000, p.44) with regard to skill development and we might adapt the notion of viability to the present discussion. It is simply not useful to implement an educational practice which undermines or does not allow for the autonomy (real or merely perceived) of the individual learner. For Kiraly, learner-autonomy is of fundamental importance and is informed by learner-empowerment, which in turn is "a corner-stone of [his social constructivist] method, guiding approach and design as well as procedures" (Kiraly, 2000, p.19).

Building on Rorty's argument, Kiraly suggests that learning in the translation environment should not be a question of getting closer to the 'truth' but about developing those skills which would enable us to function most efficiently in a specific situation at a specific moment in time (Kiraly, 2000, p.44). This perspective on learning in translator education sits well with the norm-based nature of the translator's activity; it also acknowledges the fact that norms change and that what is acceptable practice today may be replaced by an alternative set of norms tomorrow. The viability approach to skill development is also a coherent response to the Hermeneutic rejection of fixed, stable meanings and encourages learners to adopt a flexible attitude towards knowledge and skill implementation.

Whilst we can make the claim that subjects do indeed create meaning and that meaning does not inhere in the form of truth in texts, it is nevertheless a short and painfully logical Heideggerian step from these ideas to the notion that the individual is not responsible for his or her own readings. If it is the community of practice that assigns meaning, the individual must relinquish all designs on autonomy and must content him/herself with reading through and within a particular COP. Heidegger (1962) talks of being-in-the-world and posits that we are human subjects only insofar as we are bound up with others and the material world. He claims that knowledge emerges from a context of practical social interests and that we know the world not through contemplation, but as a system of interrelated things. So to what extent is Fish's premise that COPs form 'individual' responses useful for translator education? It is undoubtedly useful to emphasise the norm-based character of the translation activity, as the translation community already does, and to give importance to the fact that translational decisions (including interpretation) are informed by norms and COPs. Yet it could hardly be deemed useful or viable to implement a teaching method based on the conviction that individuals are imprisoned within the discourse communities to which they belong, with no hope of effecting autonomous interpretation or action. Thus Rorty's notion of viability can be seen to work not only on the level of skill development and implementation, but also on the level of approach. In the final analysis, Kiraly's premise that empowered, autonomous learners construct meaning may come under fire from critics requiring a more convincingly situated approach, but in terms of translator education, it is currently the most *viable* approach.

Part Two: Case Study

In this section of the article, I seek to examine the ways in which a social constructivist approach to effective learning might be adapted to the specific context of translator training. To this end, I aim to discuss an action research case study involving a course type which is often used in translation education, the translation exercise class. The specific course analysed here

was held at Bologna University's Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori (*advanced school for interpreters and translators*) in 2005. The research method used follows McTaggart's (1991) elucidation of the action research process, which progresses from the stages of planning, to action and observation, and finally on to reflection.

Action research is an interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving actions implemented in a collaborative context with data-driven collaborative analysis or research to understand underlying causes enabling future predictions about personal and organisational change (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). It is the systematic, reflective study of a researcher's actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context. In the research context, researchers are effective stakeholders and work with others in a collaborative project to propose new courses of action to help their specific community improve its working practices.

Given its inherent situadedness and emphasis on collaborative input, the action research project was deemed the most suitable method to undertake in the assessment of a social constructuivist approach to translator training. In following the process outlined above, I will first describe the setting of the class in question. I will then describe the course structure and outline the observations made. Finally, I will offer a discussion of the implications of those findings.

Planning the Case Study class

Objectives

The goals of the project were to improve translator training practice and increase competency through continual learning and progressive problem solving, to gain a deeper understanding of translator training practice, to develop a proposal for future action and to bring about an improvement in the translator training community through participatory research. Specifically, the aim was to find out how best to design and implement a translation class inspired by social constructivist principles that would involve students in a collaborative learning project which would recreate, as far as possible, the social environment (with all its attendant pressures and satisfactions) in which professional translators habitually work. The guiding principle was to seek to create a learning situation which allowed the students to 'feel and act' like professional translators, thus giving them the opportunity to gain and develop an array of skills, from the technical to the psychological, which might not be put into practice in more traditionally-designed translation classes (where a teacher might ask students simply to translate a series of photocopied texts). I was interested therefore not only in seeking to give students the opportunity to develop adjunct translation skills (i.e., not language skills per se, but skills such as time management, client-mediation, revision/editing, etc) and to improve their overall competence as translators, but also in trying to create a working environment in which the students felt individually responsible for the successful completion of the translation task. In other words, I wanted the translation process and the finished product to 'matter' to the trainee translators in the same way that a translation project would 'matter' to a professional translator. This evidently called for the creation of a situation where students felt to some extent emotionally involved both in the process and the outcome of the task. It was not therefore my aim to test a social constructivist approach against, say, a transmissionist one in order to evaluate the relative success of the two approaches, but rather to find out how I could best apply a social constructivist approach to translator training in order to increase the overall effectiveness of translator competency at degree level.

The setting

The Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori (SSLMIT) distinguishes itself from the more traditionally-focused Modern Languages faculty of Bologna University in that it offers specific vocational courses for translators and interpreters and prides itself on employing professional translators and interpreters to teach translation and interpreting exercise classes. In the first three years of the degree course, students study two and sometimes three (foreign) languages. In addition to the translation and interpreting classes which they follow each term, students also attend specific language classes in their chosen languages. They also attend compulsory classes in the literature and culture of each language and follow a core curriculum which comprises courses in Italian Literature, Italian Linguistics, History, Law and Economics. At the end of each course students sit an exam, the grades for which are collated to form the students' academic average. The overall degree grade (expressed in a mark out of 110) comprises the students' academic average and a grade (out of ten) obtained from the final dissertation.

Attendance is compulsory for all courses and students are generally in the classroom from 09.00 to 19.00 with few free periods. This means that to some extent students are not given individual responsibility for their learning and know that they will be penalised if they do not attend at least 70% of lessons in all courses. Translation classes are run on a semester-basis and comprise 56 academic hours of classroom time (three 90-minute sessions per week).

The students

The class studied included 33 students in total – 6 males and 27 females – and met for three 90-minute sessions per week for ten weeks between October and December 2005. The SSLMIT students were all in their third year and had already attended two years' worth of active and passive translation classes between Italian and each of their chosen languages. The class also included several Erasmus students from other European universities – eight students from British universities, two from French universities and two from Belgian universities. The students were asked on the first day of the course whether they would be prepared to participate in the action research project and all agreed.

The 'live' translation project

As a freelance translator, I am regularly approached by existing and new clients requiring journalistic, academic, literary and multimedia translations from Italian into English. Some months prior to the beginning of the course in question, I was asked to translate the website of a non-governmental organisation. Based in Milan, the NGO works in situations of conflict or natural disaster around the world, providing aid not to governments but to local communities and working closely with these local communities to find practicable and sustainable long-term solutions to situations which threaten their livelihood. Organised thematically, the website comprised an introductory home page, six further thematic sections (corresponding to the NGO's specific projects) and the organisation's financial reports. Speaking about the project with my contact at the NGO, I mentioned the possibility of my working on the translations collaboratively with my third-year translation class. My contact agreed to the proposal, on the condition that I act as general editor of the work and would be responsible for the quality of the texts produced. Given that the NGO was a non-profit organisation, we (the students and I) wanted to work without payment.

Data collection

As I wanted to limit my own invasiveness as researcher, in order that the classes run as naturally as possible, I decided to ask the students to complete a questionnaire at the end of the course. The questionnaire comprised the following questions: i) to what extent was the project design appropriate for the project undertaken; ii) what translator skills were you able to acquire or develop during this course; iii) what translator skills didn't you get a chance to develop; iv) please comment on the role of the instructor; v) please summarise your reaction to or thoughts on the course; vi) how might the course be improved? The first question sought to assess the appropriateness of the planning stages and the overall organisation of the course, the second and third sought to address the specific problem of designing a course that would successfully raise levels of translator competency, while the fourth sought to investigate the appropriateness of my role/behaviour as instructor. The fifth question was deliberately open-ended and aimed to give students the opportunity to express their own, unguided reactions to and reflections on the course, whilst the sixth question aimed to elicit problems connected with the course and ways in which the course might be improved.

Collaborative project design

It was my intention, in keeping with the principles of social constructivism elucidated in the previous discussion, to adopt the position of consultant/editor within the class, to elicit suggestions, ideas and proposals and to seek to scaffold students' reasoning where necessary, rather than to impose any rigid direction. The learning process in translator training is probably most effective when learners participate in task-based activities scaffolded by made-to-measure input from the instructor (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Where learners work in groups, a social context is brought into being which in turn creates a forum for individual and collective expression, discussion and evaluation of ideas. In such a setting, the instructor acts as itinerant consultant, moving from group to group and taking part in the various discussions.

For scaffolding to be successful, instructors should seek to understand the learning profile of each individual learner by bringing into play a combination of sensitivity, experience, empathy and creativity. Dewey states that without the instructor's insight into the psychological structures and activities of the learner, the educative process is at best haphazard (Dewey, 1897, p.80). By trying to 'get inside the head of the learner', the instructor can more effectively help him or her to construct knowledge according to his or her *own* way of learning. As the learning progresses, the instructor's scaffolding decreases until learners are able to participate in tasks with the minimum of instructor-support.

Dewey claims that everything an instructor does in the classroom, as well as the manner in which he or she does it, incites the learner to respond in some way or another and each response tends to set his or her attitude in some way or another (Dewey,1991, p.47). Instructors can be symbolic figures for learners and their interaction is potentially influenced by the psychological nature of their relationship. Instructors who recognise progress made and resist forms of detrimental criticism can enhance learner motivation, whereas learners who are admonished for not 'getting the answer right' are likely to become despondent and their performance level will drop. Like a theatre director drawing actors into a communally constructed vision of the drama, an instructor can animate and motivate learners in the classroom. An instructor-learner relationship characterised by respect and trust sets the scene for motivated learning; indeed, it could be said that these

two qualities, respect and trust, are perhaps the most valuable in the instructor-learner relationship and certainly those that will help empower the translation trainee to become an autonomous thinking individual capable of collaborating effectively in the situated learning environment that is the translation classroom.

It was for these reasons that I wanted not to plan the course myself, independently of the students, but to share responsibility for this with them. The idea was that I present the job to the trainee translators, in much the same way that a client might explain a job to a freelance translator, and then to hand over responsibility for the job-planning to the students themselves, asking them to identify and account for all the various sub-tasks involved in the translation project. I showed the students the website and the various texts that we were being asked to translate and relayed to them the agreement reached with my contact at the NGO. The students then proceeded to research the client and to produce a client profile. I then explained how I envisaged my own role as editor/consultant within the group. The students made a list of resources needed to complete the task; these included parallel texts (retrieved from the internet), specific glossaries (which they would create themselves), dictionaries and English-language atlases.

It is customary for students to work in small groups in our Italian-English translation exercise classes, and once again, working in groups was deemed the most suitable way of structuring workloads and dividing tasks. We agreed that it would be useful to have at least one English mother-tongue Erasmus student per group whose role would include giving advice about specific language problems and proof-reading the translated texts before sending them to me for editing. The students formed themselves into six groups of five or six students each and set about dividing the website texts into six equal parts and then distributing each part among the various groups.

I then suggested that in order to avoid an unequal distribution of workloads we might structure each group into a series of roles, each student taking responsibility for a particular phase in the translation process. Students decided to divide the groups according to the following roles: i) group leader, whose tasks included making sure that weekly deadlines were met, that each group member was contributing their fair share of work; it was also their responsibility to oversee editor or client relations and to send the finished section of text to the editor (me) by 17.00 each Friday; ii) researcher, whose task was to find and collect parallel texts and find any other information deemed necessary in the completion of the translation; iii) parallel text analyst, whose job it was to analyse parallel texts in order to identify specific lexical items and stylistic qualities characterising non-translated 'original' texts; iv) glossary compiler, whose job it was to create a glossary for use in the translation process, using dictionaries, pre-existing glossaries and liaising with the parallel-text analyst and other glossary compilers from other groups to secure lexical uniformity across the whole spread of texts; v) text-reviser, who would revise the first draft; vi) proof-reader; the English mother-tongue speaker would proof-read the completed sections in the presence of the other group members so that any revisions or identified mistakes could be fully explained. Each member of the group would also take part in the actual translation of each section; some groups decided to work in pairs on producing translations of different paragraphs or sections of text, whilst other groups worked together on all sections of the text.

We also decided that in order to give me time to check and edit each translation, each group would send me a completed section of text by 17.00 each Friday. It was my responsibility to edit each section of text produced

and to report back to each group on the revisions made. At the end of the course I would then send the completed translation to the client.

Progression

The students responded well to both the responsibility and autonomy that the course structure allowed them. Having taught these and other students using resources other than the live project, I was able to note that these students were now far more enthusiastic in their approach to the task. The lessons were effectively structured by the students themselves who took complete responsibility for organising their own work schedules and meeting the weekly deadline. No group ever missed the deadline. My own task involved sitting for short stretches of time with each group and seeking to scaffold their thinking/problem solving, as well as reviewing and explaining revisions made on the drafts submitted to me. Given that the classroom in which lessons were held was equipped with only one computer, several group members would work in the faculty computer room. Again, students did not seem to be abusing this freedom and generally sought to prove this by explaining on their return the research they had undertaken and their subsequent findings. The class met three times a week for ten weeks and by the end of the course I was able to send the completed translations to the client. The students then anonymously filled out the questionnaire. A few months later, the translated texts were uploaded onto the NGO's website and the students had the satisfaction of seeing their work officially published.

Findings

Below is a summary of the answers proved by students to the questions appearing on the questionnaire.

Question i) To what extent was the project design appropriate for the project undertaken?

Several students commented on the fact that their being given the chance to plan the activities themselves and to 'problem-solve' independently of the teacher was highly useful. A few pointed out that in more traditional translation classes, teachers tended to give too much information (i.e., presenting lexical solutions, scaffolding too much) and this made students feel undervalued, less challenged and subsequently less motivated. All students said the design was appropriate though most also underlined the fact that the lack of classroom computers was a great hindrance and made the task feel less 'real'. Several students also said that while group-work proved stimulating and effective, the groups were too large and made proper discussion difficult.

Question ii) What translator skills were you able to acquire or develop during this course?

Students here tended to highlight what I have called adjunct translation skills as being those that they acquired during this particular course. The ability to work in teams, to plan and organise one's own working patterns, to discuss and test ideas, to practice good time management, to explore particular tasks to the full (such as parallel text analysis and glossary compilation), to work autonomously without direction from the teacher, to develop internet research skills, to effectively analyse texts, to revise drafts, to communicate effectively with other groups, the editor and even the client (where necessary) – these were all cited as skills developed or acquired during the course. Students also commented on the value of being able to work closely with mother-tongue students whose language advice (especially regarding lexis and fluency) was really useful.

Question iii) What translator skills didn't you get a chance to develop?

One student commented here that although they were exposed to the work of other group members, they didn't necessarily have the chance to fully develop the skills associated with roles fulfilled by other members of the group.

Question iv) Please comment on the role of the instructor.

Students were pleased with the instructor's activity and noted again how useful it was to be able to rely on the instructor for help when it was needed, but that otherwise they were autonomous and free to learn individually, on their own terms. From the answers given it would appear that the instructor's role was neither too invasive nor too distant and achieved a suitable balance. Several students commented on their feeling more motivated by this way of interacting with the instructor and felt more called upon to participate actively in the project.

Question v) Please summarise your reaction to or thoughts on the course.

All students stated that working on a live project proved far more interesting and useful than more traditional classes. They claimed that working on the live project gave them an opportunity to understand what it was like to work in a real-life translation situation and practice skills they don't usually have to develop in other translation exercise classes. Many also mentioned the satisfaction of being able to work for a charity organisation and how they were doubly motivated because they realised they were using their skills in such a way that was socially useful. One student mentioned the problem of exams and how it was a shame that having worked on a live project and having developed all these important competencies, the end of course exam was nevertheless going to revert to the standard format whereby students sit for three hours in an exam hall and translate an Italian text into English.

Question vi) How might the course be improved?

Here the large group size was mentioned again, and it was suggested that groups should be smaller; this would facilitate discussion and would enable students to take on more than one role and develop more skills to a greater depth. The problem of the shortage of classroom computers was also cited and it was suggested that future classes might be conducted in the faculty computer room; all groups needed to use the computer, either for research or simply for typing the various drafts, and the lack of adequate access held them back.

Observations

The live project course format does indeed seem successfully to put into practice the social constructivist principles discussed in the first part of this article. The project design seemed fully adequate in all areas except for the number of students participating in each group. Although I had initially foreseen the problem of the groups being too large, and usually prefer to work with groups comprising a maximum of four students and preferably three, I didn't want to force students to work in smaller groups if they didn't want to. It would seem appropriate therefore to suggest at the beginning of any future course that groups contain a maximum of four students, using the results of this study to explain why.

The problem of adequate assessment is a pressing one, and clearly a course of this kind cannot be followed by a 'traditional' exam of the sort described above. It is not the aim of this study however to research assessment methods, but to look at ways in which translator training (as opposed to testing) might best incorporate social constructivist principles.

The lack of adequate access to computers is another problem that needs to be addressed as the lack of access, as highlighted by the students in the

questionnaires, in some ways reduces the 'real life' situation. For indeed, few translators these days work without continual access to IT resources.

On the positive side, it seems that the course did indeed give students the opportunity to develop or acquire all or nearly all of the skills and competencies that a qualified translator in a real-life translation situation would need to employ. Students were clearly emotionally involved in the project and felt that the success of the project 'mattered' to them. Proof of this was the fact most groups met in their own free time to carry out extra research or to complete translations. Also, no deadline was ever missed by any of the groups. So motivation was high, aided probably by the fact that a structure was not imposed on them and each student had a stake in the decision-making process. Each student worked autonomously and was responsible not only for the production of the translated text, but also for their own learning. The collaborative learning format and our insistence on situating the learning in a tangible social environment that mirrored more closely the professional workplace than the classroom certainly facilitated the students' appropriation of cultural and professional knowledge and enabled them to begin reflecting on their own identity as translators.

Conclusion: towards an educational philosophy for the translation classroom

Arguably, the most valuable skill for a learner to develop is the skill of thinking itself. Learners who are motivated to learn and who know how best to develop and enhance their own thinking strategies will maximise their experience inside the classroom and will be better equipped for life outside the classroom. For learners at this (tertiary education) level to maximise their thinking strategies, they need to develop skills of critical analysis and creativity. Thus, regardless of the subject area, instructors should seek at all times to encourage learners to think critically and creatively, and to develop strong analytical skills. Curzon states that "the teacher must promote insightful learning so that the student might develop and extend the quality of their insights" (Curzon, 1976, p.31). Creative critical awareness liberates and allows for a greater degree of independence. Dewey reminds us that genuine freedom is intellectual and it rests in the trained power of thought, in the ability to turn ideas over (Dewey, 1910, p.67); thus creative flair and critical awareness are vital in today's society where individual autonomy is constantly being eroded by the political, social and economic demands of capitalist late modernity. In an age where 'application' and 'applied' are catchwords and driving ideals, vocational training and COP-specific skill acquisition are favoured in many learning establishments over the development of what are seen as traditional, purely academic, 'humanistic' skills. Whilst it is important to situate learning and to direct skill development towards a precise professional context, it is nevertheless vital that we relate our specific COP to the broader context (and teach learners to do the same). Failing to do so creates mono-faceted learners imbued with a sense of tunnel vision who are only capable of functioning efficiently within the boundaries of a significantly reduced sphere of activity. If it is our goal to help to develop autonomous, empowered thinking individuals, then we need to focus our efforts not only on COP-specific skill acquisition but also on developing those more general, transferable skills, such as critical awareness and analytical expertise, which underpin and anchor learning and which can be applied beyond the classroom.

Learners will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning if they are valued and respected by the instructor as autonomous thinking individuals with the capacity to meaningfully interact with the world. Instructors who fail to encourage the development of autonomy in the learner

risk stultifying the learning environment with transmissionist-type hierarchies which posit the instructor as infallible truth-giver and the learner as passive indiscriminating truth-receptor. Learners should feel confident enough to express their own ideas and opinions and it is the task of the instructor to create an environment where communal respect and trust mitigate the risk implied by creative, individual self-expression. Learners should be made aware of the value of individual subjective interpretation and meaning-making. Only in so doing can instructors help prepare learners to take their place in an ever changing society.

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