Teaching translation in a multilingual practicum

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Abstract: Understood as a course of instruction that aims to improve translation practice in a space where the instructor does not master all the languages, the multilingual practicum may save money but confronts serious challenges, especially with respect to the assessment of translation quality. Solutions to these problems can be found in a series of pedagogical principles: it is enough to set up task-based discovery activities to focus on cognitive processes and their interaction with technologies, privileging questions to which there are no consensual answers, and using peer assessment for evaluating product quality. This approach effectively brings research techniques into the teaching space. It might thus meet with resistance in institutional contexts where master-apprentice models place authority in the instructor's experience rather than in the learners' discoveries.

1. Introduction

One of the new demands on university-level translator training is the pressure to deliver courses where students in the one class group are working into several different languages in parallel, including languages that the instructor does not necessarily master. The call for such classes is often due to financial restrictions (cf. Berber and Kretschmann 2016), although it can also be attributed to the need to train translators to work into more than the major national languages, particularly in the various fields of public-service translation. The kind of course being considered here is not of the general "language neutral" kind (I take the term from Crezee 2015, 2016), as in courses on ethics, the profession, or translation theory. Here I am concerned with classes that directly aim to improve translation *practice*, with students actually translating into different languages, side by side. For want of a better term, I will call this a "multilingual translation practicum," although I suspect that the basic principles can be applied to courses with many different names.

The following account is based on a course I taught from 2008 to 2015 at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey, California. Although the format and content evolved over the years and there were adaptations to the preferences of each new cohort of students, here I will focus on the general principles that seemed to work year after year. I hope this focus will make the account useful to instructors and program designers who find themselves in similar contexts.

2. General guidelines

In the 2008-09 academic year at Monterey I gave a Spanish-English translation practicum course that had just two students. Much as I enjoyed the luxury of working with those two students, it came as no surprise to me that the institute was at that time losing money hand over fist. How could it be otherwise when individual instructors were working with fewer than five or so students? As a result of that experience (and with no insider knowledge of the institute's finances), I proposed a course that would achieve the aims of that language-specific translation class but working with students from *all* the language combinations on offer.

My motivation, I confess, was not particularly to save money for my employers. I was more interested in developing a Masters-level pedagogy that could focus on teaching translation skills, rather than languages, and that might at the same time help with what I perceived as my main role in the translation programs at Monterey at the time: to help introduce an academic research culture. That particular mission was always going to be a tall order, encountering massive resistance from expert instructors who were at the same time translators and interpreters at the very top of their profession. Yet I hoped that a certain kind of translation class might somehow make someone think a little differently about what translation research entails.

In curricular terms, my proposal was not highly original: it superficially set out to adapt to written translation the structure that was regularly in use the conference interpreting practicum at Monterey, where there seemed to be little doubt that performance could be enhanced over and above the features of each specific language pair (for a similar approach, see Berber and Kretschmann 2016). Given that precedent, my proposal was approved. Without that example to lean on, I would no doubt have had to confront the major reservation that should be expressed by any reasonable translator trainer: How can you possibly teach someone to translate to or from a language you don't know? I thought I could find ways.

The loose analogy with the precedent in conference interpreting actually brought in a first principle for the course, and indeed the main answer to the question of how to teach things you don't really know:

2.1. Focus on processes, not products.

Whether one likes it or not, the language-specific parts of a translation practicum tend to concern how to write well. They are the rules and guidelines that apply to the text the translator produces, that is, to a certain kind of *product*. It is less obvious that those rules and guidelines apply in specific ways to the cognitive processes that translators engage in, to their decision making, that is, to their *processes*. Of course, it is quite possible that all translators working from English into Japanese think differently from all translators working from English into French, but no one knows for sure and it is difficult to make assumptions for all possible levels of competence. At some degree of abstraction, all translators are solving problems, and if you can improve the *ways* they solve problems (rather than just consecrate correct solutions), then you can perhaps help them work as translators. This means looking at aspects like human-computer interfaces, new translation technologies, different workflows, efficiency, and risk management (further examples are below), where there is actually no shortage of language-neutral models to work from.

So if an instructor lacks the knowledge to assess translation products with any degree of confidence, that need not mean the instructor is of no real use with respect to translation processes. To that extent, instructors need not be teaching things they don't really know. Problem solved – confess your ignorance with respect to products and focus on the processes instead.

That said, I wanted to take the principle of overt ignorance just one step further:

2.2. Work on things we don't know.

If you are supposed to be instructing students who are working into a language you do not master, then you have to confess ignorance with respect to not just the products, but also all the language-specific aspects of translation processes. That can be hard at first, especially in classes where students are looking for an authority, but once you get used to saying “I don’t know” (even when you think you do know), many things become much simpler: students are made to look for their own solutions, instinctively enacting interactive and collaborative pedagogies that are news to no one. In the multilingual practicum, the virtue of ignorance can be taken just a little further: you can ask the class to work on questions to which *no one* knows the answer, or for which there seems to be no one univocal solution.

Here are some examples of questions without consensual answers: “Does postediting machine translation take longer than translating without machine translation?”; “Should you translate fast then revise slowly, or vice versa?”; “How can you translate faster without losing quality?”; “Should you revise a translation with or without looking at the start text?”; “When working with machine translation, does pre-editing give better results than post-editing?”, “How can you sell a translation to a client who does not understand the target language?”; and so on. These are questions on which we all have opinions, every translator has their preferences, but there is no general consensus. Given that general state of distributed ignorance (running parallel to the distributed cognition celebrated by many), these are the kinds of questions that can be dealt with quite nicely in a multilingual practicum.

The virtues of confessed ignorance can be assessed through comparison with proclaimed omnisapience. When, for example, the brochure *Translation: Getting it right* (Durban 2011) affirms that translators should work into their first language only, that they can and should give the client advice on what is to be translated, that they should work alone and do have an individual voice, the certainty of such statements has become rather fragile over the years. What seemed general knowledge and best practice at the beginning of the twenty-first century is no longer in tune with the workflows allowed by our contemporary technologies. Indeed, they now read like no more than wistful universalizations of one translator’s personal experience. Far better, I suggest, to admit that our professional contexts are changing so fast that what worked well for one generation need not be optimal for the next. Some humility is to be recommended, if not always overt confessions of ignorance.

So if no one knows, how can we learn? One answer is easy:

2.3. Encourage experimentation.

If we are going to work on things we don’t know, then some experimental method is required, preferably of a kind that can allow each individual student to discover their own truths. One of the easiest approaches here is simply to adopt a basic empirical approach. If you want to discover whether postediting machine translation is better than translating from scratch, divide the class into two (ideally with at least one student of each language direction in each group), then get each of the two groups to translate the same text in one of the two ways, ensuring that the students record how long their translation takes. You should quickly discover that postediting is faster for almost everyone. So what about the quality of the product? Simple empiricism may offer a kind of answer here too: get each student to use Track Changes when revising the translation done by a student working with the same language pair (so the student postediting into Japanese revises a student who translated from scratch into Japanese, and vice versa, bearing in mind that they have both just worked on the same text), then simply count the number of changes made (Track Changes can count automatically). The resulting numbers are admittedly very rough, but you should find that no clear pattern emerges. Then you ask students to comment on the *kinds* of things they have corrected. With luck, you and your students might discover that postediting opened the door to more syntactic interference but gave better terminology, I suggest. More important, each student is free to draw their own conclusions, on the basis of their own experience.

There are many possible variations on this basic empirical approach, and considerable trial-and-error may be necessary. One of the beneficial side effects of the approach is that students incidentally learn something about research methodology, which they can then use to confuse sterile debates about theory vs. practice: research is where practice tests and develops theory.

As can be seen, the activities can become quite complex, and not all the skills are strictly translation-specific (students have to measure, count, and compare things). To keep a class group on board through the activities, the tasks have to be made fun, in a spirit of collective discovery. The good news is that this particular spirit is not restricted to specific languages.

2.4. Form a multilingual community.

Over time, some of the benefits of the Monterey multilingual practicum became more sociological, in ways that were not obvious at first. After the first few weeks, it was clear that the students were not only talking with each other, but that they were also discovering things about their respective languages and translation cultures. True, there were a few other courses where they all came together as well (theory, translation technologies), but there were no other classes where they forcefully became aware that the problems of their own language pair were *not* those of all language pairs. This was patent in the case of Asian languages, where the European-language students benefitted from illustrations of how characters work (and are typed!) and how implicit, paratactic syntax can indeed make sense. Similarly, Asian-language students were occasionally surprised to discover that all European languages are not really the same as each other.

Over and above these processes of incidental discovery, the activity-based nature of the classes actually allowed for some fun, particularly in sessions based on the students' own writings or when they formed small translation companies in groups (see below). A sense of community could thus develop, perhaps even the basis of a professional community that is not bound by language. Idealizations are to be held in suspicion, but a certain sociological finality should not be discounted.

3. Pedagogical principles

Once those four guidelines somehow emerged, they congealed into a certain pedagogy, with principles that can be formalized:

3.1. The class is task-based, as far as possible.

Given the importance of experimentation, the vast majority of the class time should involve students carrying out a set of tasks. The instructor can explain the activity at the beginning, and there should be a collective discussion at the end of each class (or at key stages of the activities), but the students are mostly doing their own thing in small groups, usually translating, revising, analyzing, and peer-assessing.

Once the initial instructions are put in written form, this kind of course can easily go online. It may be necessary to cater for asynchronous teamwork and a written rather than spoken discussion activity, but the principle of task-based teaching remains more or less the same.

3.2. Students work in twos and threes.

In principle, no student should be working alone. There are several reasons for this.

First, since some of the instructions can be quite complicated and the technologies are occasionally sophisticated, the last thing you want is a student who gets stuck and sits there waiting for you, feeling ignorant. With a partner or two, students are more motivated to seek out solutions to problems. This is especially the case with new technologies, where the learning group very rarely shares the one skill level. If you arrange the twos and threes well, the technologically gifted will help those who are not, at least for the basics, for a while.

Second, since the instructor cannot assess the quality of all outputs, peer revision is usually the most convenient way of addressing issues of product quality (if and when revisers and translators can be taught to stay calm and agree to disagree – let the fine points be sorted out in the regular translation classes!).

Third, teamwork and cooperation are skills that students have to learn anyway, so they might as well develop them here. This particularly concerns the politics of revision, but more generally the ability to coordinate tasks and maintain cooperative working relationships.

Needless to say, the principle of group work should not be applied blindly. There are phases in most activities where individual translating and revising is required, and then there are some activities where it is advantageous for students to work with others whose languages they don't know. Creativity and common sense are both required.

An architectonic aside here: Any face-to-face task-based class is best done around one big table where students work on laptops side-by-side and the instructor walks around behind them, able to see what is happening on the screens and prepared to offer help when necessary. Fixed computers attract viruses; rows of them restrict access by the instructor and can cause damage to vital parts.

3.3. Use screen recording (and other cheap technologies).

Since the focus is on processes, students need to be able to see not just what they have produced, but also *how* they have produced it. The easiest way to do this is to use one of the free screen recorders (such as BBFlashback, Camtasia, Quick Time, and probably better things this week), ideally one that enables the students to play back their performance at about four times the actual speed. When students can see their processes in this way, they often quickly become aware of how much time they are wasting on excessive web searches, how many typographical corrections they are making, or how often they are unnecessarily looping back to previous passages. These are things that you cannot really lecture them about: they have to see it for themselves, then learn from inner embarrassment.

There are many other cheap technologies that can be experimented with or used in creative ways. Some are very simple, like track changes and on-screen timers for different tasks. Others are often waiting to be explored, like speech-recognition software or text-to-voice tools as an easy mode of self-revision.

3.4. Translation quality can be peer-assessed with rough numbers.

The use of peer-revision has been mentioned several times above as a way of measuring the quality of translation products. This practice actually places a major constraint on the class group (you need at least two students for each language pair), yet that needs to be accepted – no one likes to produce a text that will not be read. It can also become inconvenient when two or three students start arguing about what is correct in their language, at least when the discussions concern aspects to which students with other languages have little effective access. The suggested solution here is to make it clear that product quality is *not* the focus of the class. Do the peer-revisions, count the rough numbers, but then send the language debates out to the street or into another course – they cannot be allowed to get in the way here.

The initial appeal of the numbers, rather than simple subjective assessment, is that they minimize disputes over language-specific quality. Such discussions certainly have their place in the language-specific translation class, but not here. A second advantage is that the inadequacy of the numbers becomes immediately clear: students fast realize that language is an affair of qualities, not quantities, and that claims based on numbers alone are inherently not to be taken at face value. In other words, use the numbers, but don't trust them.

3.5. Process quality can be assessed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The quality of processes, of the other hand, should be the focus of the class and can be assessed in several different ways. Numbers can certainly be supplemented or contradicted by students talking about what their feelings were while translating, revising, or straight reading. But the move to qualitative assessment really kicks in when students write down their impressions and reason them through, in the form of assessable feedback.

To follow the above example through, after an activity involving postediting there may be all kinds of negative assessment of machine translation, reaching various degrees of outrage and chutzpah ("Machines will never translate like humans!", and so on). The question, however, is not how bad machine translation is but how effective postediting can be, and the focus of the evaluation has to be there. Further, one might like to point out that statistical machine translation algorithms are not translating (as supposed in "I can translate better than a machine!"); they are basically locating past human translations.

Whatever the case, personalized qualitative assessment is certainly to be encouraged, but it should also be informed.

3.6. Theoretical principles and research results are to be discovered, not given.

If the class can thus be modeled on empirical experimentation, then there should be a logical temptation to show students what actual empirical research has found. This can certainly be useful as a way of introducing students to research cultures (and once again as complicating the false divides between practice and theory), but I suggest it should not be allowed to pre-empt the students' own discovery procedures. That is, comparisons with formal research should come at the *end* of the class, not at the beginning.

For the same reasons, the hypothesizing of causal connections – which is where substantial theorization can emerge – should first be the object of a class discussion, following the activity, well prior to bringing in any assumptions from published translation theories. For example, when students find that translations into L2 tend *not* to take longer to produce than translations into L1 (probably counter to preconceptions), they should be able to conjecture why. Only then would you perhaps suggest that when fewer translation options come to mind, decision-making is more streamlined (among other possible reasons).

So much for the pedagogy.

4. Curricular content

Before proposing a list of things that can be done in the multilingual translation class, a caveat: first ask students what they would really like to discover, then attempt to address or extend their specific concerns (see Pym and Torres-Simón 2016 for the same logic applied to a translation theory course). This does not mean assuming students know everything that is worth doing. On the contrary, one of the functions of the course should be to broaden their interests. Yet it does mean offering them alternatives and getting them involved in the selection of content. The guiding principles have already been mentioned: focus on process, and privilege the unknown. In some cases a further principle might come in handy: tackle questions students want to know about but are not addressing in other courses. For some years I included subtitling activities, for instance, until those skills were dealt with in the regular translation courses.

In terms of research design, one might describe the content as a series of variables to be tested:

- Statistical machine translation (+/-)
- Translation memory segmentation (+/-, with a blank data base)
- Translation memory databases (literal vs. figurative)
- Directionality
- Time pressure
- Translator styles
- Revision (self vs. other; author vs. third party)
- Pre-editing vs. post-editing
- Translator-client relations
- Literary translation (with and without machine translation)

Any of these can be spread over as many hours as you like. There are also other variables that concern process analysis but are not well suited to the multilingual class. For example, Angelone (2013) describes using screen recording to compare a student translating with a professional translating the same text: the two can be put up on a screen side-by-side, and the student can then see how different their performance is from the professional's. That is a great activity, but if you have to locate a willing professional for each language in your class, it is probably not worth the candle.

The actual content of the course is then written up as a series of instructions, which can become quite complicated. Some examples of these instructions can be found in Pym 2009, which explains classes on machine translation vs. translating from scratch, translator styles (a newer version is given below), and time pressure, all with analysis of students' feedback. Pym and Torres-Simón (2015) explain an activity done in the same class on Chinese vs. European typologies of translation solutions.

All these activities were carried out as 100-minute face-to-face sessions in Monterey, although they tend to take longer with students in other contexts (the Monterey students are exceptionally brilliant).

4.1. Introduction to translator styles

This activity is done with a screen-recorder and a 200-word text to go into the student's A language. The activity follows a short introduction to four models of the way people translate, adapted from Chandler (1993), who was describing general writing, by Brian Mossop (2001/2014), who proposes different models of time-on-task while translating. Adapting Mossop, my students were invited to divide the translation process into the following phases: pre-draft planning (prior to writing the first word of the translation), post-draft revision (everything after the translation of the last word in the text), and drafting (the thing in between the planning and the revision), with the draft time spent looking at screens other than the ST and TT then being called "documentation." The four basic translator styles, working from Mossop, are then: architect (lots of planning, little revision), bricklayer (lots of planning, lots of revision), watercolorist (little planning, little revision), and oil-painter (little planning, lots of revision). There are several versions of these categories, but their truth-value is ultimately of less importance than their capacity to get students talking about how differently they use their time. The important thing is that the four activities (planning, drafting, documentation, revision) are defined in a very clear and simple way, so that all students are measuring the same things.

The actual activity is then relatively straightforward:

1. With a screen recorder on, translate the text into your favorite A language using Word, doing websearches and revising as necessary. Aim to complete the translation in about 20 minutes (we will allow you 25) - so be professional, not perfectionist.

2. Have a break.

3. Play back your screen recording. Keep a track of how many minutes you spent on the following tasks: a) pre-draft reading and comprehending, b) in-draft documentation (web searches, dictionaries), c) drafting, d) post-draft revising (not including the correction of typos as you type). Give the total number of minutes for each of these four activities.

4. Upload your translation and give the times (as percentages) for the following tasks: a) pre-draft reading, comprehending, b) in-draft documentation (any search outside of your base environment), c) drafting (translating) d) post-draft revising (not including the repairs you make as you draft).

5. Briefly answer the following questions:

- What is your translator style (bricklayer, oil-painter, etc.)? Do you plan first, then do the task, or do you do the task, then make changes?

- Do you think your style will be different when you use a TM?

- Did any aspect of your translating surprise you?

The first thing that surprises most students is how much time they spend on typos and documentation. And then they are surprised to learn, in the final class discussion, that not everyone works the way they do. And some occasionally decide, voluntarily, to try a different style in future tasks, just to see what happens. For more on the students' comments, see Pym 2009.

4.2. TM segmentation

Once students are able to use screen-recording analysis to describe their translator styles, it is possible to see how other variables interact with those translator styles, in particular with the student's initial or baseline style.

A simple test is to see if the use of a translation memory changes the way the task is approached. Translation memories actually comprise two main variables: one is the database, the quality of which depends on numerous factors, and the other is the automatic segmentation, which is a relatively fixed variable that can be explored for its possible cognitive consequences. Here we are testing the segmentation only, once again using a 200-word text to go into the student's A language, preferably of the same kind as the text used in the first activity on translator styles. The instructions are as follows:

1. Select your ST.

2. Start your screen recorder.

3. Translate the ST using your favorite translation memory tool, at a brisk professional pace.

4. Play back the translation and analyze the time-on-task, using the "translator style" categories.

5. Upload your translation and give the times (as percentages) for the following phases: a) pre-draft reading, comprehending, b) in-draft documentation (any search outside of your base environment), c) drafting, and d) post-draft revising (not including the repairs you make as you draft).

6. Briefly answer the following questions:

- What is your translator style (bricklayer, oil-painter, etc.)? Has it changed from the activity with Word? Did it meet your prediction?

- If there were changes, do you think it was due to the segmentation, the translation suggestions, or some other factor?

- If you used the TM for a year (or if you have done so), how do you think your translator style would change, if at all?

- Once you have had your two translations revised by a fellow student: Is there a difference in the number and type of changes proposed?

4.3. Directionality

This task also assumes basic screen-recording skills and the ability to identify translator styles from numbers. The task also requires similar start texts in many languages, preferably of a kind about which there is a similar degree of ignorance across all students. I confess that, for these two reasons, I use newspaper articles, in full knowledge that newspaper articles are rarely translated by professionals. I look for the main international headline news item on the day concerned (the last time I did this class, it was on the day following the discovery of Volkswagen's fraud on exhaust emissions, so that was one news event for that class; the other event was an election in Venezuela). I then find newspapers in all the languages I need; I locate the item concerning the same event; I copy the first 200 words. (If you are worried about counting how many Chinese, Japanese, or Korean characters you need, do an automatic translation of the article into English, find where word number 200 or so is, then chop the Asian text there – the task does not need exact quantities of text.) Here are the instructions:

Working in groups of two or three (where one person goes into A and another into B), And using your normal translation method (in Word or with a TM, as you prefer, but not feeding the bi-texts into a shared database),

And screen recording your performance:

1. Select two of the Volkswagen texts, one in your A language, the other in your B language.

2. One member of the group translates into their A language; another member translates into their B language; any third members can choose between these options.

Translate at a brisk professional pace.

3. Then play back your performance and keep a track of time spent on pre-drafting, drafting, documentation and post-drafting revision. (Discount the time spent on any technical problems.)

4. Then revise a partner's translation (you should be able to see infelicities, since you have just translated a parallel text). Indicate the revisions with Track Changes.

Provide rough numbers on these variables for the translation you are analyzing.

Discuss your findings with the authors of the translations.

Upload your translation and all the analytical numbers on it (percentage of time on each task, and modifications by reviewers). There is no need to upload the screen recording.

Then do the same thing, but in reverse directionality, for the Venezuela texts.

If you don't have a partner, then do one Volkswagen text into your A language and one Venezuela text into your B language.

You should upload the following:

1. Your two translations, with Track Changes showing.

2. Time-on-task analysis on the two performances (changes accepted, and percentages of pre-draft, draft, documentation, and post-draft).

3. Quick answers to the following questions:

- How does your time-on-task distribution differ according to directionality?

- Did you change translator styles (bricklayer, oil-painter, etc.)?

- Could a TM be useful to you when translating into your B language?

The students generally express some surprise when they find that their L2 translations are not much worse than their work into L1. They usually note a significant increase in the percentage of documentation activities, and often in revision as well (often they see that the use of a TM could cut down the time spent on these activities), although the drafting phase is in some cases shorter. The final discussion of these results can lead to many suppositions, including the already-mentioned idea that, since fewer options come to mind in L2, the selection process can be faster going in that direction.

4.4. Pre-editing vs. post-editing

This is a complex activity that includes a presentation of the basic principles of clear technical writing (there are many versions, but an accessible one is Muegge 2008). The principles are illustrated with reference to English, although they may apply to other languages as well. Here they are used as guidelines for the ways a text can be rewritten (i.e. pre-edited) so that it can be rendered by an MT system with relative success. The English text for this exercise is a 200-word abstract from a journal article in sociology, which had long sentences, many passives, and impressive noun stacks. Students had to look for similar abstracts in their other languages. Screen recording can be used to keep track of how long the pre-editing and post-editing take.

> 1. Working in pairs where possible, select 100 to 140 words from a sociology abstract in your A language (check that it has not been translated previously). This is your ST1.
>
> 2. Apply the pre-editing rules to the text, producing ST2. CHECK HOW LONG IT TAKES YOU TO DO THE PRE-EDITING. That time will be t(ST2)
>
> 3. Run both ST1 and ST2 through MT into your B language, producing TT1 and TT2.
>
> 4. When possible, get a fellow student to post-edit both TT1 and TT2, RECORDING THE TIME FOR BOTH. These times will be t(TT1) and t(TT2) respectively.
>
> 5. Calculate if pre-editing is worthwhile. That is, is $t(ST2) < (t(TT1) – t(TT2))$? If it is not worthwhile, will it be worthwhile if the ST has to go into five or ten languages or so?
>
> 6. Write a brief report on: 1) the time savings, if any, 2) what the impact might be on simultaneous translation into five or ten languages, and 3) looking at the mistakes in the MT, what additional pre-editing rules would you add for your language?

A lot of students have trouble with the mathematical notation, but they get there in the end. In the final discussion, the general consensus is that post-editing is more efficient than pre-editing, in the sense that the time it took to revise the two STs was not significantly different. In the secondary calculations, though, each group then has to envisage the one ST going into numerous target languages, such that even a minimal gain due to pre-editing can be multiplied for each new language. The general discovery is that, if your ST is going into more than three or four languages, you should invest time in pre-editing. There are, however, many differences that ensue from different target languages and different degrees of textual complexity. (Asian-language students tend to be less convinced about pre-editing than do the students working between European languages.)

4.5. Translator-client negotiations

This activity has evolved over the years. A complete analysis of the 2009 class can be found in Hui (2012). The activity requires two separate sessions, plus considerable work outside of the classroom.

Students are divided into groups of three or four. One set of groups are clients, the others are translation companies. The translators have to win contracts from the clients. The aim is to use role-playing in order to develop presentation skills and to place translation tasks in a professional marketing context. Here are the instructions for the 2015 activity, when about half the class worked with Chinese. The translation projects were selected by the students in a previous session. One of the projects was to market the Chinese restaurant chain Hai Di Lao in a series of countries; the other was to introduce the American restaurant chain Chipotle into China:

> 1. Three companies will be non-Chinese: France (3 members), Japan (4 members) and International (3 members), who will be the translation companies this week. The other three companies are Chinese (2 + 2 + 4 members), who will be the clients this week.
> 2. Each of these companies must complete a 100-word sample translation (probably with visual content as well) promoting the restaurant chain Hai Di Lao. It has so far opened one restaurant near San Francisco but is struggling to enter the US market. (You can find articles on their problems in *Forbes* and *The Huffington Post*.) They are seeking to expand their operations internationally, into Japan, France, Germany, and Korea. They

are looking for a translation/public relations company that is able to handle their website and written promotional materials in those countries. They don't yet know whether they want just one company for all these countries, or individual companies that specialize in each of these markets separately.

3. The translation companies should complete the presentation and materials prior to the class.
4. The translation companies should come to class with: 1) the sample translation, 2) a PowerPoint to convince the client that their company deserves the contract, and 3) an invoice for the sample translation (this can be included in the PowerPoint).
5. In class, the three translation companies will present their work to the three client companies (Chinese), and each client company will then decide which translation company wins the contract. Each presentation will last *ten minutes*, with a further ten minutes to answer questions posed by the clients.
6. The following week we will do the same thing, but we will be exporting Chipotle *to* greater China.

The activity is complicated by the need to use three different rooms, with three presentations going on at the same time. The instructor should move so that they see all three presentations and the feedback from all three translation companies (yes, it is possible).

The aim of the activity is not to see who translates the best, but who can explain and market translation decisions effectively in an interactive context. Perhaps not surprisingly, the best promoters are often not the best translators – some people are very good at selling things orally, while others do great work looking at a computer screen. Perhaps more surprisingly, the students who learn the most from the activity tend to be the *clients*, who start to appreciate the criteria that you might use when selecting a translator for work into a language you don't know. Perhaps for this reason, the presentations in the second leg, when the clients become the translators, tend to be much more creative and effective than those in the first leg. By seeing the profession from the client's perspective, the students intuitively learn how to present themselves.

As should be clear from these examples, there is a certain sequentiality involved in the early part of the course: certain techniques and concepts must be acquired before the more complicated activities can be tackled in any efficient way.

5. Results

So has this long experiment been a success? One measure would be the fact that I was allowed to repeat the multilingual practicum year after year. In Monterey, that depends very much on the students' anonymous evaluations of their courses, which is a rather more precarious form of assessment.

One of the norms of education research seems to be axiomatic success: I designed X; I tried it with my students; they loved it (why else would one report on it, after all?). In the case of this multilingual practicum I will conform to the norm: yes, the student evaluations were consistently high numerically, indeed higher than I expected from a course where we were all initially feeling our way.

The more interesting results are nevertheless in the students' qualitative assessments. Alongside the gushing enthusiasm that modesty prevents me from citing, there are a few much-hedged criticisms.

This first concerns the students' initial expectations. Much as one tries to write a clear syllabus, there were still assumptions that it might be more like the interpreting practicum:

> I wonder if we can get some practical experience of translation like the Interpretation Practicum Class.
>
> I had heard a lot about what the interpreting practicum involved, and I was expecting to have something similar where we did a lot of translations just to get practice. I am glad that the course did not turn out to be like that, and I feel like there were a lot of interesting topics discussed, and the class did give me a lot to think about, even though it was nothing like I expected.
>
> Great! I didn't know that I was going to learn this much when I first registered into this course. I will recommend it to any student interested in improving his translation skills.

Since this approaches the gushing, let me note a clear reaction *against* the experimental approach:

> Sometimes I felt too much like a guinea pig in an experiment and not like a student who had things to say.

Win a few, lose a few. One can only hope that students can also use data in order to have things to say.

There are also some possibly contradictory reactions to the extremely hands-on nature of the course:

> Perhaps Asian students require a bit more supervision, in that Asians are more accustomed to a passive learning experience (absorbing knowledge from Profs rather than exploring by themselves).
>
> He created a relaxed atmosphere where interaction and participation were made easy, even for the very shy in the class.

This actually touches on one of the deeper problems in a multilingual class: not only are there different languages in contact, but there are different educational cultures as well. One can only be aware of this, and give added attention where needed, as the student's comment suggests. Then again, the class format would seem to have been a little unexpected for students from all cultures, east and west.

The comments that intrigue me the most are odd phrases like "effortlessly," used to describe my own performance, occasionally with possibly negative connotations:

> With seemingly little direction in the planning or course objectives, he made available a host of short lessons that are crucial for any translator to succeed in the market.

Part of this repeats the problems of students' initial expectations; part of it is also no doubt due to the hands-on nature of the course; but the apparent surprise, I suspect, comes from the implicit pact with ignorance: if the course is based on things we don't know, then the instructor is not just feigning a certain ignorance, he is also genuinely seeking enlightenment, along with and next to the learners.

Many of these principles and problems concern pedagogical issues that extend well beyond the specifically multilingual course. Yet they become acute in that space, and can receive a certain justification there. Once the principles are dragged across to other kinds of courses, they easily run aground. For example, in one semester I was replacing a translation professor who is justly a world authority in her field, and who can thus enter into classroom dynamics that are essentially based on a master-apprentice relationship. Where I claim ignorance, she can correctly claim expertise. So when I used self-discovery mode of teaching in that context, it absolutely contradicted expectations and failed miserably. One of the students there remarked, "I think that most of the benefit I got from this class was due to my own hard work and collaboration with one of my equally diligent classmates"; that is, the benefits were not due to the instructor. What might be a positive comment in a hands-on discovery context becomes a clearly negative evaluation in a master-apprentice framework. Indeed, if one reads those negative evaluations closely, one suspects that the students genuinely did not believe that the instructor had worked on and translated the texts before coming to class (wrong: he had, and always does); they interpreted pedagogical ignorance as authentic lack of knowledge.

This failure to transfer discovery methods from one learning context to another belies a wider and more problematic failure. As mentioned, one of my initial purposes in Monterey was to introduce an academic research culture. Over the years, that mission became an abject failure: there was no official interest in setting up a doctoral program in Translation Studies; in 2015 the institute rejected my proposal for a research center in translation and interpreting; some of the best researchers in our field have actually left the institute; the various discussions of research were buried under anachronistic and occasionally insulting petty assumptions of a dichotomy between theory and practice, from which no one emerges happily. The more profound reason for that failure, though, is to be located in the master-apprentice model on which the Monterey program was built and to which it owes it deserved prestige. When translation instructors are top-flight professionals, they speak with an authority that requires no support from research. Worse, that authority stands to be contradicted by research, to the extent that a research culture can be seen as a threat.

From that perspective, my multilingual classes, along with all attempts to base training on hands-on discovery procedures involving questions of genuine doubt, were doomed to fail at the institutional level.

6. Conclusions

I have proposed that multilingual translation practicum classes can be organized in accordance with a basic set of pedagogical principles: students work in small groups and use cheap technologies to explore their cognitive processes through a series of task-based discovery activities. Translation product quality, which is the main bug-bear where the instructor does not master all the languages, can be peer-assessed using rough numbers, and can be compared with process variables such as time-on-task. Of course, these simple principles can be applied across the board, in any kind of translation class. In the multilingual class, though, they come to the fore as solutions to the most challenging organizational and pedagogical problems. They make multilingual practical training possible.

The multilingual practicum nevertheless faces a series of problems on the more institutional level. This can be seen in the students' expectations of the course, both at the level of course aims and with respect to the status of the instructor's knowledge, or lack of it. It can also be seen in resistance to the introduction of a research culture, especially in a context based on master-apprentice teaching. That resistance has to be understood and appreciated: traditional master-apprentice teaching has its place, necessarily in language-specific courses. But the world of translator training is now much wider, extending from the training of top professionals right across to the use of communicative translation activities in language-learning contexts. There is ample room for more than one model.

So let no one tell you that the practical training of translators cannot be carried out in a multilingual class! It can be done, if and when there is institutional support for it.

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