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"Welcome to my side of town" – Teaching and learning by means of service learning in translator education

A B S T R A C T This article investigates Service Learning (SL) as pedagogy for educating translator students in higher education. Situating translator education within new theories of knowledge, this article provides a description of a first-year module presented in translation practice. It makes use of Bringle and Hatcher's conceptualisation of SL, with a focus on the application thereof at the UFS. The aim of the article is to argue for more attention to the curriculum in translator education, rather than mere pedagogy, as well as for attention to philosophical and ideological issues in designing the curriculum of translator education. It also focuses on the transforming role that SL could play in translator education in particular and higher education in general by exposing students to various cultural and ideological spaces.

Keywords: service learning, translator education, teaching, learning, philosophical and ideological issues

1. Introduction

Translation studies have experienced a number of 'turns' over the past two or three decades. After the linguistic turn, we had the cultural turn, and after that, we had the power turn or ideological[1] turn (Duarte, Rosa & Seruya, 2006:2). The interest of translation studies moved from language to language in context, from grammar to pragmatics, from words to culture, from

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[1] I use ideology in its stronger meaning as relating to issues of power. In the way used in this article, ideology does not merely refer to world view, but to the inherent power struggle in all use of language (cf. Baker 2006).

texts to ideology. These days it is common sense for translation studies to be rooted in the core business of the humanities with close inter- or multidisciplinary ties to sociology, anthropology, philosophy, hermeneutics, et cetera (Duarte, Rosa & Seruya, 2006; Pym, 2006:1-5).

At the same time, over the past decade or more, translator education has become a branch of translation studies that receives a great deal of interest. Not only has the number of publications increased dramatically, but translator education now has its own journal, at least one summer school, and slots at most large conferences. One can also obtain postgraduate qualifications in translator education.

However, to my mind, translator education has not kept up with developments in the field of translation studies. Translation studies are moving towards being an interdisciplinary field of study in the humanities with the focus on the mediating and agency role of translators. In contrast to this, translator education (mostly known as translator training – which is already a technocratist reduction of the notion of translation as a field of study in the humanities) is mostly focussing on pedagogy (Kelly, 2005), classroom strategy (Gonzáles Davies, 2004), and teaching and learning strategies such as project learning (Kiraly, 2005).

The idea is not to criticise this development, because it is needed and it adds value to translator education. However, the focus of the abovementioned discussions is to get students to manage linguistic transfer skills, cultural competence, and professional negotiating skills. Philosophies of learning in general receive scant attention (Kiraly, 2005), while issues pertaining to the social, agential role of translators receive no theoretical attention in translator education. We are asking: How should I train a translator to operate in two languages, to be competent in negotiating between two cultures, to develop professional skills for the workplace? What we do not ask is: How do we infuse values such as community engagement, social responsibility and ideological sensitivity into students? How do we create the maturity in students to judge the ideological import of translation situations and make wise decisions at a cultural and ideological level? How do we develop in students the type of values our society needs rather than mere interest in making as much money as quickly as possible (see for instance Colby, Ehrlich, *et al.*, 2000:xxii-xvii)?

Now while I am in full support of the development of a pedagogy for translator education, I do contend that translator education should entail more than mere technical training. I have argued elsewhere that translator training should prepare student translators for dealing with the unstructured problems of translation (Marais, 2008a), helping them develop the ability to judge competing (ideological) solutions in a wise way (Marais, 2008, 2009). What I am suggesting, is that translator education should not only prepare students to be adept at working between two languages, culturally sensitive and knowledgeable about handling a translation project, but also ensure that they sociologically and ideologically astute. The students should be aware of power issues in the community in which they work. They should know the community. They should be exposed to real people and real communication situations. To this end, the curriculum of translation education has to be transformed.

In this article I wish to present service learning in translator education as one possible way of achieving this goal in translator education. The focus will be on the opportunities that service learning (SL) affords translator education as far as teaching and learning is concerned.

I shall present data gained from relevant literature on SL and translator education and foster a dialogue between the empirical data and this theoretical frame of reference. I shall also present qualitative data, case-study data if you will, from interacting with students in class and in SL excursions. Furthermore, I shall present data from reflection sessions with students. In addition to this, I shall present qualitative data from interaction with the service provider and the community members we visited.

2. The philosophy behind service learning

Service learning is a relatively recent development in higher education that originated in the USA (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:49). It has its roots in a number of philosophical positions that will be elucidated below. In South Africa, it is an even more recent development, concurring with the democratisation and restructuring of higher education after the fall of Apartheid.

Service learning has some of its roots in John Dewey's pragmatism. It takes up Dewey's notion that experience and learning go hand in hand and that education should fulfil a social function (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:51). The first implication is that learning without experience is not learning or is shallow learning. Secondly, learning should be related to society. In other words, education should have as its outcome "humane conditions, habits of mind that transmit cultural values from one generation to the next and contribute to a stable society..." (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:52). Especially in developmental contexts, education places a burden on students to take up responsibility for their societies (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:52). SL offers higher education the possibility of experiences that enrich curricular learning.

SL also has some roots in the movement that is concerned with the public good of higher education (Bawa, 2003:51; Ehrlich, 2000; Kezar, Chambers, Burkhardt, et al., 2005). Countering new-liberal economic policies, globalisation and the influence of the market economy on higher education (O'Sullivan, Morrell & O'Connor, 2002), this movement proposes a type of higher education that is not only experientially related to its community, but that also fosters social values and social responsibility. In the South African situation, it coincides with rethinking education transformation within the New South Africa (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:50).

Thirdly, SL is aimed at breaking down the barriers between the proverbial ivory tower and society (Erasmus, 2007). As the world, read "Western academic world", moves away from modernism and rationalism, the changes in philosophy of science are forever altering the landscape of tertiary teaching. The ivory tower is no longer a desirable hide-out, its inhabitants are no longer revered as the only creators of knowledge; the ivory tower no longer exists, some would say. One of the many changes in higher education is service learning. One could negatively view service learning as the battering ram seeking to destroy the ivory tower, or one could positively view it as the bridge between the ivory tower and the "real world out there". The nature of knowledge itself and the ways in which knowledge is being created, are being challenged, and some scholars advocate that they have irrevocably changed. These processes are related to the real, complex issues communities face, new perceptions on society and new thoughts on knowledge itself (Bawa, 2003:54). Bawa (2003) situates service learning within the newest developments in tertiary education. He indicates how the communities within which universities operate are changing (Bawa, 2003:4). The scepticism of the possibilities

that rational thought alone may save the world, has resulted in a renewed valuation of other forms of knowledge, namely technical knowledge (Bawa, 2003:50). Both the community and the university have to learn, and service learning allows for the voice of the community to be heard in this learning process, whether it is the indigenous knowledge community or the technological or industrial community.

Lastly, I would argue that SL, in line with the previous point, pertains to recognition of the fact that a purely disciplinary approach to knowledge does not suffice because real-life problems are much more ill-structured than acknowledged in disciplinary science (Schön, 1987). SL allows students the opportunity to have to negotiate life in all its ill-structuredness, something that requires more than mere rational skill.

Both Fourie (2003) and Hay (2003) refer to these philosophical changes in arguing in favour of service learning, the former with the intent of advancing sustainable community development and the latter with more practical matters of curriculum design as focus. Fourie (2003:31) argues that teaching, research and service have always been part of the Western university, but adds that service learning offers the opportunity of integrating these facets into one integrated approach.

One question remains: how to put into practice the philosophy and the policies concerning SL? For these practical purposes, the University of the Free State (UFS) defines service learning as (CS Policy, 2006):

> an educational approach involving curriculum-based, credit-bearing learning experiences in which students (a) participate in contextualised, well-structured and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and (b) reflect on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility.

> It requires a collaborative partnership context that enhances mutual, reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership (lecturers and students, members of the communities and representatives of the service sector (see also Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

The main addition in the UFS's definition, compared to that of Bringle and Hatcher, is the emphasis on collaborative partnerships. Without going into too much detail on this notion, it reflects the developmental context in South Africa (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008:50). In South Africa, a triadic relationship between university, service provider and community is needed whereas the USA, with its strong tradition of NGOs, has a dyadic, more direct relationship between university and community. Relationships with service providers play an important role in organising SL and in preventing the re-invention of the wheel on every occasion.

The important points are that service learning should be part of credit-bearing modules and that the process should be phased in at institutions with proper attention to a variety of details, for example logistics, funding, sustainability and person power. Furthermore, service learning should be a well-planned function relating to the core of the university. Preparations should at least be done at university, faculty and student level.

3. Opportunities for teaching and learning

The title for this article was taken from a comment made by a black first-year student towards a white classmate as we entered the township (where white people seldom go) for a SL visit early in the first semester of their first year. The comment led to an animated discussion about the differences in background, living conditions, environment, et cetera between the students. Also, it was continued on our way back to the university by discussions on the differences between Afrikaans and Sesotho, the translation of political posters (a few weeks before a general election), and the translation of sub-titles in their favourite soaps. All seemingly small talk – until one looks at it from a teaching and learning perspective. This section of the paper looks at a module in practical translation work, by means of CSL, as a case study for a dialogue between translation studies and translator pedagogy.

I offer translator education at both undergraduate and graduate level. This paper will deal with undergraduate studies only, and particularly with the first-year group. The students in BA Language Practice, which caters for general language practitioners after three years of study, are usually young people who have just completed their high school education, with little life experience and naïve notions concerning translation. There are, however, sometimes more experienced students from other fields of study, such as drama or communication science, who attend these modules. The first years have theoretical and practical modules running concurrently in the first semester of their first year. Classes are usually on the same day, with the theoretical class first, followed by the practical class. This arrangement allows for an integration of theory and practice. Seeing that these modules are each worth eight credits, lecturers have ten lectures of 50 minutes for each module. In the practical module, students are expected to complete ten annotated translations (at first-year level of difficulty) during the module. One of these translations is a service-learning project.

3.1 First excursion

In the modules I teach, I would allow about a month to pass between the start of the semester and the first excursion. This allows time to introduce students to basic theory of translation, as well as basic notions in doing translation work. As a pedagogy, students are exposed to Christiane Nord's (1997) functional approach to translation, introducing them to the notion that the client's requirements concerning the function of a translation guide the translation choices. A week before the excursion, students would be exposed to a class on the theory and practice of service learning. By that time, even first-year students will have picked up basic notions such as client, source text, target text, and target readers. They are then prepared for a meeting with, first, the service provider and, second, the community members who will use the translation.

The department in which I work has an agreement with Age-in-Action, a NGO working amongst the aged in all the different language communities throughout South Africa. As most of their written documents are generated in English, they experience major communication and developmental problems because the communities they serve are not well-versed in English. In fact, a significant number of elderly people with whom they work are semi-literate and even illiterate. They typically expect the elderly to form support groups, which can then, if duly

constituted, apply for funding from the Department of Social Services. Age-in-Action renders support, information and development services in these groups.

A typical meeting with the provincial head of Age-in-Action and a social worker would involve them telling the students about their work and about the text the students are about to translate. This would be followed by the students asking questions such as: How old are the people in the groups? What is the gender ratio? What is the level of education of members? Where are your groups located? This meeting usually takes about 15 minutes, pertains to aspects of the brief, and is quite predictable. However, as a teacher, one sometimes strikes gold. During the 2009 meeting, we were discussing a *PowerPoint* presentation on the aging process that had to be translated. Students were worried beforehand that the semi-literate people would not understand some of the technical terminology, such as arteriosclerosis, but they were also aware of the fact that, being a *PowerPoint* presentation, they do not have much space for expanding the text with explanations. When raising this with the client, they were informed that the client actually does not want the *PowerPoint* presentation translated as a *PowerPoint* presentation. She wants to distribute it as an information brochure to the elderly. In class the next week, this led to a heated debate as to whether clients can expect translators to rewrite, do research, and fill in gaps in a text, that is to alter the original. These questions became a realistic background against which to discuss matters such as negotiating with clients, deciding on rates, and the parameters of professional translation work, but – importantly in terms of my argument – it also led to discussions on rendering service to a community who will not understand the target text if it is translated merely linguistically. The class discussed the notions of adding and taking away when translating and judging when to do what, that is the agency role of translators and their stance towards ideological issues that may arise in the process.

After meeting with the service provider, the students travel to meet two groups of elderly, one Afrikaans speaking and one Sesotho speaking – using the students to interpret consecutively with the Sesotho group and also giving them valuable experience in mediating communicative situations. In these discussions, the questions pertain to what the elderly are doing in the group (in order to understand the function of the translation for that group), what type of language they prefer (to gauge their reader expectations and the required register), and general views on translation. During this first visit, we usually have to take time to explain what the students will be doing, and the students are more often than not beseeched to help with other – for them – unrelated problems such as getting government to raise subsidies, reporting problems with service delivery, and health matters. This gives the students a sense of the problems the clients face and the important role the students play in their lives – providing them with communication they can understand. It also provides evidence to students that translation is not only about swopping language, but about solving social problems by means of being agents of intercultural communication.

During both visits, but especially with the elderly, students face the problem of communicating about their field of specialisation with people who do not share the meta-language. Questions such as, "So, what is the function of the text?" or "What register do you need?" are met with frowns and uncomfortable silences. This forces the students to reformulate their questions to,

for example, "So, what do you want to do with this text?" or "What type of language do you prefer?" One student even came up with the plan of asking the elderly what they generally read, what newspapers they receive, and what soaps they watch on TV in order to appropriate the register they will be comfortable with. The development of these types of negotiation skill in contexts foreign to your own is a crucial learning experience aligned to critical cross-field outcomes (see Addendum A).

The week after the visits, we discussed in class the brief by Age-in-Action and the visit to the elderly. In some cases, students would already have translated the relevant text individually. In such cases, we would use this discussion to review what they have done. In other cases, we would use the class discussion as a translation planning session. It is not yet clear which of the approaches works best – and maybe there is no best in this regard. Students who have met the elderly would come up with suggestions such as, "In our culture, we are not allowed to use certain words in front of old people". They then enter into a discussion about how to solve this problem. In the most recent module, the one in which Age-in-Action wanted the PowerPoint presentation translated into a brochure, the discussion focussed on reworking the text, how much information to add, et cetera. At this stage, students are usually asked to divide into groups, according to language, and to plan a collaborative translation of the source text – if they have already translated it, they work out a plan on how to rework it. This sparks intense negotiations regarding time, place and method – once again a crucial cross-field outcome, that is negotiation skills.

3.2 Second excursion

The students then go back to the community with their versions of the translated text, that is unedited. We make copies for each member of the group, ask them to read it, and then comment on the translation. Typically, they would point out issues such as the following:
• Words of too high register (*"Nee man, jou Afrikaans is te ryk!"* – "No man, your Afrikaans is too rich")
• Words that are misspelt
• Sentences that read awkwardly ("We do not say this in Sesotho.")
• Translations that do not make sense ("What do you mean by this?")

In all cases, this is a real levelling experience for the students. The fact that these elderly, from communities that they often regard as less developed and semi-literate, are able to pinpoint their mistakes does not go down well. And then they have a lecturer who tells them, "I have warned you about ..." One often has the impression that when you tell them, for instance, not to use nominalisations[2] if they want to simplify language, they do not really believe you or, at least, it is part of a whole lot of other stuff that lecturers are telling them. However, invariably the elderly point out the same things and then it hits home. All that is left, is the hated, "I told you so".

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[2] Nominalisation is a grammatical strategy of turning a verb into a noun. This is done for various reasons, amongst others to defer the subject of the verb in bureaucratic texts. This type of grammatical structure usually takes more cognitive effort to process and is to be avoided in simplified translations (see for instance Martin & Rose, 2007:106-108).

Figure 1: A first-year student discussing a translation with a group of elderly.

A last comment on the visits: With the first visit, students are usually apprehensive, sometimes mixed with excitement. They are going to a "different" place (see Figure 1). When getting out of the vehicle at the first group of elderly, they are usually quiet, waiting for one another to enter, and on the whole apprehensive about the surroundings. Even more invariably, they leave with hugs from the elderly, chatty, and full of confidence. These are small steps in the translator's ability to cross boundaries, negotiate differences and mediate culture, something they would not have learned inside computer lab D on campus.

The second visit functions as quality control. After this, the students go back into their groups, rework the text and edit it. In between the visits, the drives from and to campus are used for on the spot discussions of the students' experiences, their impressions and the implications thereof for their translations.

3.3 Third excursion

Once they have completed their collaborative translations, these are assessed, also taking into account the group's assessment of each member's contribution, and then edited professionally in order to deliver a professional product. In typical South African SL fashion, we close the project with a celebration in which we take eats to the groups, hand over the final project and reconfirm the bonds of friendship.

3.4 Reflection

Lastly, I wish to comment on reflection in the SL process, a topic which has been dealt with in detail elsewhere (Marais, 2008). Reflection is the link between experience and learning (Eyler, 2002:517-519). Students construct knowledge and understanding by reflecting on experience, whether this experience is a real-life experience in the "real world" or whether it is a contrived

experiment in "unnatural circumstances" or the experience of reading about a theory in a book. Deep learning does not occur without reflection (Eyler, 2002:520), that is thinking about what you are doing and learning, why you are doing and learning it, and how to go about doing and learning it. This is especially true for education as a translator. The interplay between knowledge and process, knowledge and skill, theory and practice is what makes for good translation. Any teaching and learning strategy in translator training should therefore allow students the maximum time and opportunity for reflection.

The pedagogical philosophy used in these modules is social constructivism (Kiraly, 2000). It assumes that students will construct their own knowledge based on their experience in society. The courses are therefore offered as a SL module to allow students the opportunity to gain "real-life" experience. It is also assumed that translation, as a skill, presupposes the ability to view problems as complex and ill-structured. Students should thus be prepared to engage in post-formal reasoning to solve the translation problems that will inevitably crop up and that can never be fully systematised.

It is clear from the above that the focus in the module is on the process of translation about which little is known today. This is a known fact in translation training and is ascribed to the fact that it is virtually impossible to gain access to translators' mental processes while they are translating (Kiraly, 2000:1-5). At most, the product is a trace of the process. However, the fact that the process is not readily available does not render it irrelevant. Most scholars in translator education agree that it is exactly the process that is of interest. Students are taught what we know about the process, the strategies to follow, *et cetera*. The way in which to enhance this learning and to connect the unconscious processes with conscious processes is reflection.

Reflection, in the course referred to above, is an on-going process. Students submit weekly assignments to a total of 10 for the module. Within each translation, there will be reflective assignments that students will have to complete individually. As indicated above, three field-work sessions are proposed in which students meet the communities they work with and plan and evaluate with them the relevant projects. The SL project will be done in groups, which will also allow for interaction and reflection. All group discussions (every second week) will contain a reflective element. The last lecture of the module will in total be assigned to a critical reflection on the work done in the module.

For individual assignments, reflection entails questions on particular translation choices and processes. These questions will be both short (sentence length) and longer (paragraph and essay length). Examples are:
• Write an essay of 200 words on how you simplified the text.
• Explain very briefly (one sentence) what the translation problems are with the phrases marked 1-10. Indicate equally briefly which translation strategies you would use to translate these phrases.

Apart from these, students will be asked for open-ended reflection, such as:
• Write an essay (300 words) in which you reflect on the translation you have submitted last week.

Or, students will be required to reflect on a particular theory, for example:
Write an essay (300 words) in which you reflect on the way in which the translations you have done up to now in this module relate to Nord's functionalist theory of translation.

Reflection with the community will be done in verbal discussion form. Students may wish to make use of structured interviews with the community. In the final class, reflection will be done in a structured as well as an unstructured way. First, students will be asked to write, anonymously if preferred, their reflection on their experience in translating, especially the process. This will be followed by a discussion. It must be stressed that the whole module is offered in a reflective way. The lectures alternate between a focus on theory and the practice of that theory in groups, which leaves room for reflection. Also, classes are not lectures, but working sessions in computer labs where the focus is on deep learning by means of continuous reflection.

The following are quotes from students' notes during the reflection session at the end of the module:

About service learning:
• Enjoyed the community service – actually putting it into practice by going out or phoning your clients directly.
• From the visits to the community, I personally learned that translation is far more than a literary/linguistic science – it is a socially-influential activity.
• Going to real people and seeing that they urgently need translations opened my eyes.

About the module in general:
• This module changed my views on how such a mundane activity can be used to such an extent, to change or influence the ideology of people connected to a text.

I suspect that not all students are as positive, but I have not received openly negative feedback. I propose to ask specifically about negative experiences or perceptions in future, because South African students from various backgrounds are not always comfortable with giving negative feedback, amongst others for cultural reasons and a fear of retaliation from lecturers.

Furthermore, I do not intend giving the impression that SL is a problem-free pedagogy. Organising a class of 20 students to attend a particular occasion is no joke. Seeing that students from various fields take part in the class, the time-table clashes offer nearly insurmountable problems.

4. Conclusion

To my mind, the data that have been presented allow me to argue in favour of SL as a pedagogy in translator education. Its main advantage is that it allows students to connect their translation work to real-life ideological, cultural, and social issues. It immediately sensitises them to the fact that translation is much more than a linguistic or even textual endeavour. As a pedagogy, SL adds the dimension of confronting students with the ideological and socio-cultural implications of their translation work and translation choices in a vivid manner. It confronts students with the possibility of making choices, of which neither is necessarily wrong, in their translation. This brings into play wisdom, the ability to judge a complex situation and make a choice that will have a positive outcome. The data I have presented allow me to argue that translator education should and can prepare students for the requirements that translation studies show they need to have. SL is a pedagogy which makes it possible to have translator education informed by translation studies.

Obviously, I have touched on only a small number of issues one can research in SL. The research presented in this article represents the initial work done to establish such a module

and some preliminary qualitative observations of an auto-ethnographic nature. In the specific field, I suggest further research be done on students' ideological points of view before and after visits to the community, for example on race, social status, level of education. One could also research cultural competence before and after modules. One can do research on the quality of translations and its sensitivity to cultural, social and ideological issues before and after SL. In the second section of this article, I presented data from research done amongst the community. To my mind, SL opens up many possibilities for participatory and action research concerning community translation.

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ADDENDUM A: CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES

Critical cross-field outcomes include the following:
• identifying and solving problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;
• working effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community;
• organising and managing oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively;
• collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information;
• communicating effectively using visual, mathematical, and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion;
• using science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others;
• demonstrating an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.
• contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and
• economic development of the society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual aware of the importance of:
  ~ reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
  ~ participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities;
  ~ being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts;
  ~ exploring education and career opportunities; and
  ~ developing entrepreneurial opportunities (SAQA, NSB Regulations. 1995).

ADDENDUM B: EXIT LEVEL OUTCOMES FOR THE PROGRAMME

The exit level outcomes for this course expect the learner to be able to demonstrate the capability to:
• identify and explain the major fields within the language industry in South Africa
• do more advanced general-administrative translation from and into English and one other South-African language
• do dialogue and short consecutive interpreting from and into English and one other South African language
• do editing of general-administrative texts in English and one other South African language.
• write copy in English and one other South African language.
• develop and manage an elementary language plan.

ADDENDUM C: MODULE OUTCOMES

On finishing this module, students will be able to:
• do basic translation work in genres of language for general purposes, for example newspaper reports, magazine articles, websites, email;
• critically reflect on their own translation work and communicate their reflection;
• explain their concept of the process of translation;
• conduct themselves as budding professional translators;
• function within a social setting of translators; and
• prove that they are able, under supervision, to function effectively in a language practice.