RESEARCH ARTICLE

ACQUISITION OF TRANSLATION COMPETENCE IN A CLASSROOM SETTING

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ABSTRACT

Translation has been used as an integral part of language classrooms throughout the world. Thus, many people believe that the translation profession requires only knowledge of the two working languages. However, in order to produce an acceptable work of translation, non-linguistic skills and knowledge, such as computer skills and teamwork,are involved (Pym, 2003). This study sets out to do a preliminary investigation on the acquisition of such skills and knowledge, or competence, in a classroom situation.

INTRODUCTION

In foreign language classes throughout the world, translation has long been incorporated in the curriculum as a way for students to learn. Many teachers treat translation solely as a means to learning a foreign language. Moreover, many people view translation view translation as a task that canbe performed by anyone with the knowledge of two languages. They do not consider being a translator requires professional training as any specialist of a particular field can translate a text from one language to another. This is simply untrue. Many researchers have come to the conclusion that translation is more than just a linguistic process and that it requires knowledge beyond bilingualism. (Schäffner and Adab, 2000; PACTE, 2000, 2017; Pym, 2013). There are many competing theories regarding what translation competence actually is(Acioly-Régnier et al., 2015), but it is clear that it involves skills and knowledge beyond those of language. In his "minimalist" definition to describe translation competence as being able to produce several translated text and choosing one of the several as the viable product, Pym (2003) described the ability to generate translated text to include "grammar, rhetoric, terminology, computer skills, Internet savvy, world knowledge, teamwork cooperation." This is similar to the six interconnected sub-competence that the PACTE group (2000, 2017) believes translators employ:

1. Communicative competence, such as the knowledge to produce texts in two languages;
2. Extralinguistic competence, such as knowledge of the world and of the two language cultures;
3. Instrumental-Professional competence, such as the knowledge, including that of technology and professional conduct;
4. Psycho-physiological competence, such as skills in memory, creativity, and logical reasoning;
5. Transfer competence refers to the skill and knowledge to utilize and integrate different sets of competence to complete a project;
6. Strategic competence is the ability to combine all different procedures to solve problems encountered in the translation process.

Thus, it takes a lot more than just being able to speak two languages to be able to translate. Problems in translation must be solved using skills and knowledge that may not be directly related to language at all. Especially in a project situation, linguistic competence may not be as important as other skills or competence. Teamwork and cooperation would prove to be more useful. The PACTE group (2017) further indicates that translation competence not only influences the process of the translation but also the acceptability or quality of the translated work, which is ultimately the most important.

For most students of translation studies, they believe that linguistic competence is of the utmost importance to them. Fraser (2000) believes that students should be taught to view translation holistically and treat it as other "language-learning activities in a communicative curriculum." Moreover, according to evidence from professional translators, She also believes that a translator has translator competence when he or she is able to

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successfully satisfy the needs of the clients and the intended readers, i.e. an acceptable translated work.Presas (2000) said that, based on the PACTE model, in the development of translation competence, one must acquire "previously non-existent competences"; then restructure existing ones to "facilitate transfer competence"; and finally acquire "strategic competence".

In the classroom setting, would students consider translation as a mere exercise to learn a foreign language in a communicative approach? Would students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to acquire the competence to produce a successful and acceptable translated product? How would students proceed to translate what they consider to be an acceptable product of translation?

RESEARCH

The subjects of the study consist of 44 students in the fourth year of the undergraduate translation program in Chang Jung Christian University. The students are all in the upper quartile of their class. The students are divided into six groups. Each group is expected to translate an English language book into Chinese. The students will find out whether a book has been translated into Chinese and seek permission from the publisher to translate it. This book cannot have a prior Chinese translation. This is their graduation project. Students discuss among themselves in each group to decide which book to translate. Each student translates at least 4000 words. After students finished their translation, they proof read each other's work before submitting it to the teacher for the final correction. Four of the groups chose novels while the remaining two groups chose books on food and travel.

Although their command of English may be sufficient for most modern day situations, the subject matters of the books they translate may pose a bigger problem than they had anticipated. The topics of their books range from 19th century Japanese culture to modern day Japan to American romance to cheeses of the world.As the book on 19th century Japan was written at the turn of the 20th century, the language used in the book is unfamiliar to the students.The students translating the book on travel in Taiwan and modern-day American romance story shouldhave a relatively easier time.

At least two students, one of whom is the team leader, from each group took part in the think-aloud study.They recall the translation process, such as editorial decisions and problem solving. The aim of the study is to determine whether the students have acquired the abilities to deliver a viable or acceptable product to their intended readers.

RESULTS

In the group translating a travel book to Taiwan, though the topic and content of the book are familiar, the biggest problem the students encountered was of the linguistic kind. Students reported unfamiliar usage of descriptions about familiar subject matters, and they must figure out a way to convey equivalent description in Chinese. As they report that one of the references they use the most is the tourism websites in Taiwan, they often had to reconcile the discrepancies between what they found in the source text and what they found in the websites and what they learn in school and make editorial decisions.

For students translating a book written by a teenage English girl at the end of the 19th century traveling in Japan. The team members reported the most difficulty in the cultural aspect and the use of language. Students indicated that the English used at the end of 19th century was a problem they had foreseen. The real problem they encountered was the Japanese names and terminologies mentioned in the book. As the book was written before the Romanization was standardized, it was difficult for students to search on the Internet and come to a consensus on how the names should be translated. Although most people in Taiwan are quite familiar with Japanese culture, many of the customs and rituals mentioned are unknown even to their Japanese classmates, to whom they turned to for help.

The two teams translating romance novels shared similar problems. Colloquialism in English is what most students find troubling. The students would search online or ask native English speakers and vote to reach consensus on the translation for informal speech. Members of the teams also express difficulties in making the style of the translated text consistent and coherent. They all think that communication was another issue to work through.Whether it is a feature of typical Chinese students, most students do not like to express their opinions in public, thus making many decision making process unduly protracted. This complaint is actually quite prevalent in all groups.

The team translating the book about cheese was fully prepared to deal with the unfamiliar field. They had different references to help them translated the terminologies they would encounter. However, what they did not foresee was that the author, a Frenchman, wrote the book in English and that the awkwardness of the phrasing and diction made it hard to decipher the meaning.

DISCUSSION

While it is important to be accurate and faithful to the source text, the students were also generally concerned about the readability of the translated text. Not wanting the resulting work sound unnatural, most students reported to spend a great deal of time revising.Another issue students struggled with was that of editorial decisions. They spent a great deal of time discussing how to translate unfamiliar terminologies and places. Because of the nature of the project, they all must express opinions and help reach the final decisions, which is unnatural for many students in Taiwan. According to Pym's definition of translation competence mentioned above, it seems that the students to some degree have acquired translation competence as they have all produced a translation product with whichthey are satisfied. Furthermore, the students have used their computer and Internet knowhow and their knowledge of English and of the world to produce their works. They have also utilized all the PACTE defined sub-competences listed above to create acceptable works.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the project, all students firmly believe that translation is a profession and not just a learning exercise as they all must deal with publishers, teamwork, and editorial

decisions. It appears that despitethe classroom settings, students are able acquired some degree of translation competence to produce an acceptable translation product.However, because the students were studied in a group setting, it is difficult to gauge the competence of each student. Teachers of translation must help students develop the different aspects of extralinguistic competence.

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