

Exploring MA students' perspectives on the link between theory and practice within translation courses

دراسة استكشافية حول مدى ربط النظرية بالتطبيق في دروس الترجمة من وجهة نظر

الطلبة

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Abstract:

There are many opposing voices in translation studies that advocate one view and try to discard the other, consequently generating polarized concepts such as "process vs. product, "literal vs. free" etc ... , that according to many scholars contributed little, if any, to the development of the field as a whole. Theory vs. practice is considered to be amongst these polarized views that manifests itself in translators training as well,

The present article endeavors to deal with this issue by exploring the perspectives of the students towards the link between theory and practice within the training program. We concentrated on the course "Translation theories" as a case study.

Keywords: Theory and practice; Translation theories; Translation training; Students' perspectives; Teaching methods.

ملخص

شهدت الترجمة كباقي المجالات الأخرى ظهور ثنائيات عديدة خلقت أقطابا متنافرة نذكر على سبيل المثال الا الحصر قطبي الترجمة الحرفية والترجمة الحرة، الناتج والعملية إلخ. وفي هذا السياق تعتبر النظرية والتطبيق من بين تلك الأقطاب التي طبعت تكوين المترجمين إلا أنها لم تغني الترجمة بل زادت شرحا كبيرا بين هذه الأقطاب المتنافرة ومنه فقد حاولنا في هذا المقال التطرق إلى هذا الإشكال من خلال دراسة مدى تكييف مقياس "نظريات الترجمة" مع التطبيق واحتياجاتهم من وجهة نظر الطلبة، بالإضافة إلى دراسة مدى ملائمة أساليب تدريس هذا المقياس النظري للتطبيق.

كما اعتمدنا في هذه الدراسة التطبيقية اسلوب الاستبيان في جمع المعلومات وتحليلها كميًا وكيفيًا لتتوصل إلى مدى استفادة الطلبة من مفاهيم هذه المادة النظرية في التطبيق.

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كلمات مفتاحية: النظرية والتطبيق، نظريات الترجمة، تكوين المترجمين، وجهة نظر الطلبة، أساليب التدريس.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as a very ancient human activity is said to have an arduous decades-long voyage to gain its respective status amongst other sciences, thanks to researchers and practitioners who looked into it from different perspectives and attempted to systematize it by the use of data collected from both practice and reflective thinking. Translation as an ongoing subject of study now enters an era of interdisciplinary research in which various domains are integrated into the well understanding of translation, consequently opening new ways and possibilities in systematizing the practice of translation and enhancing its training practices.

Many students of translation courses even teachers and scholars can easily sense an awareness towards the polarized nature of translation, which finds its expression in the long-held dichotomy between theory and practice. This dichotomy appears quite often in both teaching and researching, thus Hatim (2014) calls for an urgent reconsideration of this polarized view, which is in fact evidence of misleading lines usually drawn between theoreticians and practitioners in many disciplines.

Bringing students closer to practice is the ultimate aim of any training program because according to Hutchings (1990) "What's at stake is the capacity to perform, to put what one knows into practice"(p.1), however, Students struggle quite often to apply what they learn during theoretical courses in actual practices such as assignments or internships or work settings after graduation. This inability to transition from theory to practice and reflect back on theoretical components with effectiveness and confidence stems perhaps, in part, from a failure of training programs to integrate both theory and practice into the same course in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the students.

2. Statement of the problem

Our interest in conducting this study about theory and practice in the translation training focusing on one course "translation theories", stems from the widespread false assumptions that tend to draw a line of demarcation between theory and practice, which seem to impede progress in the field of translation studies, as well as within translation training. Moreover, some may go even further to underscore the relevance of theory to practice by assuming that translation is a "know-how" discipline, which is rooted in practice to the extent that it only finds its sole

meaning when daily practiced in real situations. This view is abundant in the literature and by reflecting on the following comment by Hurtado Albir (1996) we can see how wide the gap between practice and theory in translation is actually perceived, according to him translation is "an operative knowledge and, as with any kind of operative knowledge, this is acquired mainly through practice. The translator need not be a theoretician: he is not necessarily a scholar nor a linguist" (As cited in Peraz, 2005 p.151).

The relevance of theory to translation training is most needed, notably when we consider translation as an academic discipline, which has to be learned and negotiated both cognitively and normatively (Hermans, 2002). Almost all instructors want to make classroom experience an irreplaceable opportunity for students to touch as effectively as possible on theoretical aspects, which might be very difficult to check again once integrated into the profession, hence the role of theory syllabus design should primarily be to adapt the concepts to the practical future needs of the students. The concept of adaptation will be thoroughly investigated in the following lines and through the study as well.

In particular, the content of the curriculum of the Institute of translation and interpreting, University of Algiers 02, reflects the desire of the institute to prepare a would-be translator equipped with the necessary competences that can allow him to easily integrate work after his graduation. The objectives of the content curriculum are not necessary to be found in the teaching practices, as didactical orientations can differ according to instructors and the types of the subject; thus to be effective in teaching translation the instructors should be capable of combining the teaching methodologies they may consider the most useful with those specific to the course. Besides, in parallel with the rich and lengthy theories in the literature of translation studies, the limited duration of the training can pose a problem especially when considering which elements to be selected for training and those that can be disposed of given their irrelevance to the training but not their unimportance.

3. Research Questions

1. How can we benefit from bridging the gap between theory and practice in translation training courses?
2. What are the students' perspectives towards both the content of the theoretical course and its teaching methods?
3. What are the teachings methods that can reinforce the use of translation theories in practice at the institute of translation Algiers 02 university?

4. The significance of the study

The debate around the usefulness of training in translation seems to affect peoples' views about what translation is, a skill to be acquired through exposure to practice, an activity carried out by bilinguals, or a solid science founded on research and training. This question circulated translation milieus for quite some time, though both scholars and practitioners evidently provide the answer as they all agree that translation should not be trapped within simplistic views; instead, they try to look beyond and bring all factors that influence it to draw a picture of it.

Holmes / Toury's map (from Toury 1995, p.10) of translation studies is a perfect example of how deep understandings of translation can yield satisfying answers about what translation should look like. Translation is considered a separate research subject by excellence, we can find within this map two main branches: pure and applied under which also we find a multitude of sub-categories. The two branches do not mean that they are separate from one other, but they are linked within a web of connections that attempt to promote the field as a whole.

The current study aims at addressing a wide known issue not particular to translation training but also present in other disciplines as well, which is bridging the gap between theory and practice.

In the light of some heard and unheard voices calling for a neat separation between practice and theory, it is essential to direct the attention to the fact that each is dependent on the other; in so much that according to Hermans (2002) "we necessarily translate according to our concept of translation and into our concept of translation" (p.16). Thus warning against the separation between the object of the study (i.e translation) and translation studies at the meta-level (that is our descriptions of translation) (Peraz, 2005). This crucial idea leads us to investigate the problem from a didactical standpoint by attempting to uncover the students' perspectives towards the adaptation of theoretical components to practice within the course of "translation theories" taught at the institute of translation and interpreting university Algiers 2, during the ongoing academic year 2018/2019.

We will end with some observations and suggestions that can enhance the learning outcomes of the course.

5. Sample of the study

The aim of this study, as mentioned above, is primarily to investigate the issue of theoretical and practical aspects within one course of translation " transla-

tion theories" from the perspective of the students of second master majoring in English/Arabic translation, taking the course during the current academic year 2018/2019 at the institute of translation University of Algiers 2. The students will constitute the sample of the study and since the overall population taking the course was not present during the distribution of the questionnaires so the total thirty-eight students present will be all included as sample of the study.

There are many rationales behind choosing the students in particular to be the main sample of this study. First, there are many studies but few of them really paid great attention to the students' voices, in the same way as Hanna (2009) goes by saying that "the students as being the main stakeholders in translation training are barely heard in studies looking into their attitudes towards a particular issue". That is why we want them to be sources of our data given that they are quite often aware of what they actually need from the course of translation theories.

Secondly, there are two factors that conditioned our sample selection, firstly the limited time available for doing this research in terms of sample selection, which although it represents the overall number of students present during the distribution of the questionnaires. However, it figures to be a small sample compared to other researches on similar subjects, nonetheless, we wanted the findings to be as representative as possible. By this, we mean that the selectee students are the same ones that are taking the course; these students may come from different backgrounds and have different understandings of what translation theory and practice are, as well as the relationship they hold within the training of translators.

6. Research procedures

The study aims at investigating empirically the problem of balancing between theory and practice in the translation teaching and training environment, thus the study will be conducted according to a systematic method of collecting and analyzing data.

The data will be processed and analyzed then classified on the bases of the frequency of each statement rating them in a three to four point's scale, in addition to a multiple choices of answers in order to measure accurately the extent to which each statement reflects the students' perspectives. Besides we left room for the students to express their personal views if not found enlisted within the proposed choices.

In the final stage, findings and discussions will make use of some analytical insights based on the results of the study and the analysis drawn from previous studies conducted in the same subject.

7. Data collection

It is mainly agreed that empirical studies should make use of several sources of data using a number of investigative data collecting tools so as to reflect as precisely as possible the real situation at hand. Also the tools should be designed to be a reliable source of data by avoiding all attempts of bias and subjective interpretations. Therefore, in this study, due to the time available and the narrowed scope of this study, we will use one of the significant data collecting tools, which is the questionnaire method as the only tool to investigate the students' perspectives about some issues relating to the problematic of the study.

The questionnaire is both structured and semi-structured, these two types allow responses to be tabulated easily, while open-ended questionnaire require more elaborate coding schemes to encompass most of possible responses.

The questionnaire contains 5 questions in total, divided into two sections first exploring students' attitudes and ways of conceptualizing theoretical concepts, while the second section contains two questions one about teaching methods and another question about professional backups to the course.

8. Data analysis

8.1 Responses to the questionnaire

8.1.1 Section 01: student's attitudes

Table 1:

Shows the frequency of the students' attitudes towards the course of "translation theories"

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Negative | 2 | 5,26% |
| Normal | 22 | 57,89% |
| Positive | 14 | 36,84% |
| Total | 38 | 100% |

The descriptive analysis given in the table (01) shows the highest frequency of the answer "Normal" which describes the students' attitude to the course of

"translation theories". We can notice that amongst 38 participants, fifty-seven percent of them expressed a medium attitude in a three points scale from negative to positive. Despite the fact that the majority whose attitudes are placed between the two extremes Negative / Positive, however it reflects some lack of interest in studying the course. The positive attitude to the course was expressed by thirty-six percent of the students, which remains small compared to the overall number of the participants, while the remaining five percent shows a complete lack of interest in studying the course.

Table 2:

Shows the frequency of the students' use of the theoretical concepts when faced with a translation problem

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Many | 2 | 5.26% |
| Few | 9 | 23.68% |
| Never | 6 | 15.79% |
| May be unconsciously | 21 | 55.26% |
| Total | 38 | 100% |

We put this question to explore if the students are actually using the theoretical components to find solutions to translation problems. The descriptive data analysis shown in the table 03 above shows that only five percent of the students said that they use them many times when faced with a translation problem. fifteen percent of the students said that they never use them, and the other twenty-three percent of students said that they use them few times, while the majority fifty-five percent chose the answer "May be unconsciously". In the this last choice we intended two things first "may be" means the possibility of using them but being uncertain, second the adverb "unconsciously" suggests total unawareness.

The result shows the extent to which theory is not referred to by most students when faced with a translation problem.

Table 3:

Shows the frequency of the main practical aim of translation theories course

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Understand all translation theories better | 12 | 22.22% |
| Problem solving | 26 | 48.14% |
| Wider view about translation | 16 | 29.63% |
| total | 54 | 100% |

This question was set to explore the students' needs from the course, and the data analysis shown in the table (03) shows that forty-eight percent of the students suggested that the course of "translation theories" should help them to solve translation problems. A lower percentage consisting of twenty-two also urged that the course should cover as broadly as possible all translation theories in order to understand them better; even without the need to know their practicality in relation to their practice. The remaining twenty-nine percent suggested that translation theories course should provide a wider view about translation regardless of whether or not it covers all theories or only the most essential ones.

8.1.2 Section 02: Teaching methods of the course

Table 4:

Shows the frequency of the teachers' method of dealing with students' answers

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 5 | 13.16% |
| A little | 23 | 60.53% |
| No | 10 | 26.31% |
| Total | 38 | 100% |

This question is set to explore the method followed in teaching the course of "translation theories" focusing on the relationship between teachers and stu-

dents when dealing with answers, by which we want to know if the students think that the answers the teachers provide have an authority over theirs.

The descriptive data analysis shows that the majority of the students which is sixty-percent agree that there is little authority exercised, while twenty-six percent denied completely any authority. However a small number of students consisting of thirteen- percent only from the overall number of participants agree that there is an authority exercised over their answers by the teachers by choosing the answer “Yes”. Despite the fact that this last percentage is considered very small but it is included as being representative of students' views.

Table 5:

Shows the frequency of the presence of professional translators in the course of "translation theories"

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Many | 0 | 0 |
| Few | 10 | 27.78% |
| never | 26 | 72.22% |
| total | 36 | 100% |

The final question explores if professional translators are invited to take part in the course in order to share their experience. Seventy-two percent totally denied the presence of professional translators in the class choosing the answer "Never", while only twenty-seven percent said that there are few occasions when professional translators are invited into the class. Two students only made the following comment: “can we refer to our teacher as a professional translator?” to refer to the fact that they actually know their teacher to be a professional translator. This is to show that teachers who work as translators are seldom referring to their work outside the class which makes their students unaware of the fact that the teacher is himself a professional translator.

9. Results and discussion

All training centers and institutes view translation theories as an important component of the translation and interpreting MA training programs. The course aims at helping students to standardize their own translation practice and take

well-informed decisions in their own carriers as professional translators. Moreover, it is meant to encourage students to engage with the latest research in the field of translation studies and be able to hopefully continue their studies in postgraduate degree. The primary objective of this study is to highlight several issues that have an impact on the teaching and learning processes of the students within the course of "translation theories".

The analysis of data revealed many findings which can be fully discussed in the following lines.

First, the objectives of the curriculum regarding translation theory are primarily set to have a positive impact on the students' attitudes. Therefore, we think that it is very important in our study to inquire about the students' attitudes because many studies available in translation studies literature voice the views of the translation scholars, teachers, and curriculum designers, while paying little attention to students' views and perspectives about translation theory and practice (Hanna, 2009). The data revealed that a high percentage of students expressed a medium attitude in a three-point scale from positive to negative, thus we can say that the students are somehow motivated to attend the course, yet the aims should be to render these attitudes as positive as possible. One of the factors that we figured out to have profound hindrance impact on students' attitudes to attend the course can be a lack of a clear definition of what can be expected from the course. For instance many students are unaware of the implications of a phenomenon they address, like the conflicting interests between clients and authors within let us say functional theories notably Skopos theory. One way of sensitizing them towards that particular issue is by making them involved in real situations to experience this tension first hand. Gile (2009) calls for an implementation rule in which theoretical concepts should preferably be taught after students' sensitization, this in turn "should increase the students' receptiveness by showing that the theoretical components taught to them are relevant to their daily experience and can help them understand and act in the best way"(p.19).

To see the extent to which theory can be beneficial to the actual practices, students were asked to rate in a four-point scale their answers to a question about the use of theoretical components when faced with a translation problem. The majority as shown in table (03) opted for "may be unconsciously" which revealed a deep unawareness of what they are doing during the process of translating. However, the main aim of a theoretical component tend to encourage students to "reflect on what they do, how they do it, and why they do it in one way rather than

another" (Baker,1992 pp.1-2). Thus the inclusion of a process-oriented approach to teaching translation can remedy this by allowing teachers to " verify that the student has indeed followed certain principles, or an approach, and comments on problems which may have arisen along the student's course of action " (Gile, 2009 p. 15). But in the other hand, they must not insist that specific words or phrases are the only correct solution or the best solution to a given translation problem.

Brookfield (1995) observed that: "images, models and conceptions about teaching are derived from our own experience as learners" (p.49). Thus in reflecting back on our years as students of both translation theory and practice, we can find that this same polarization informed our learning experience, during which we might express some negative attitudes towards theoretical courses, by reinforcing our thinking that these courses do not hold any promise to enhance our expertise as would-be translators, and as the old saying goes "No smoke without fire" the practices of the teachers and the assumptions they implicitly held about theory and practice, as well as in-class activities employed must have largely contributed to this too.

In many universities students are still influenced by the old fashioned method of learning in which the teacher has ultimate authoritative capacity to dictate what he perceives to be correct regardless of the ways students think. In this same approach, teachers dominate the class discourse thus stifling any attempt from students to produce better answers or alternative solutions to a problem. The data revealed that the high percentage of students answered (in three-scale points scale from No to Yes) that there is little authority exercised from the teachers over their answers, this led us to believe that the teachings methods are evolving steadily nonetheless, there is much to be done to shift from the old method of teaching.

There is much to gain from integrating theory and practice in the classroom through increasing students' engagement; this is particularly right in MA programs where most students are interested above all to gain theoretical concepts in translation without being parted from their objectives to be in touch with the marketplace to which they aim to secure a job upon graduation. This fact is best described in Kiraly's terms (2014) when saying that the old method of teaching tend to:

... Draw a solid line around the classroom activities, which reflects the way the teacher and the students come into the classroom and close the door behind them leaving the real world outside, they pro-

duce sample translation in a social vacuum, translations that they have no intended audience than the teacher (p.28).

Students always fail to express their opinions and views in an authoritative environment, thus hindering the enrichment of discussions within the class. Discussions are very useful ingredients within translation in-class activities. This concept when applied to theoretical courses will lead us to consider what Pym and Torres-Simon (2016) termed as a move from theory to theorizing, instead of a theory being considered a static knowledge consisting in a set of irrelevant abstract concepts which have to be imparted, it becomes under the concept of theorizing a way of enabling discussions.

The proper time to use this concept according to the authors is whenever the students misunderstood a concept or even noticed a kind of conflict, then it is most needed to introduce new concepts or clear principles that summarize the opposed positions. The teachers must generate collective discussions to theorize for these problems and attain together new solutions or insights (Pym & Torres-Simon, 2016). In such classes students are made aware that the problems they are trying to solve have already faced translators before them and what is provided in translation theories literature was, in fact, their attempt to find reasonable solutions in the light of their context and translation situation, some students may even notice having encountered the same problems before. Lastly the aim of theorization should be to “spark off a process of discovery [...] which will congeal into skills”(Pym & Torres-Simon, 2016, p.16)

The data revealed that professional translators are seldom invited to address practical issues during the course. However, some answers suggested that their teacher is actually a professional translator while surprisingly others ignored this fact or have no idea about it. It is paramount to know that theory and practice occupy different spaces, thus remaining skeptical to one another. This skeptical view can only be overcome if they have been brought together, and for this to take place, the institutions should make all kinds of ways in which this aim can be achieved on a highly practical level.

10. Conclusion

Balancing theory and practice within the translation training in the classroom is an interesting challenge and that we partially addressed within the scope of this study, in which we focused on some aspects concerning the teaching methods and students' needs regarding the course of translation theories integrated within the curriculum.

We arrive at some interesting findings that in part reflect the institute desire to evolve in terms of teaching methods aiming at rendering the training a meaningful experience and tend to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the translation training. In the other part, there is much to be done to perfectly integrate theory in the training to serve practice, in which we made some suggestions summarized in the following points to remedy what we think needs corrections:

- 1- Setting clear objectives is most needed in translation training courses. These objectives include what is expected from the course “translation theories”, and the practical implications on their translation performances. The objectives are to be reminded constantly at the beginning of the training or during the training and preferably at the beginning of each lesson. We believe this will significantly improve the students’ attitudes to attend the course, only because they know well enough about the outcomes of the course on their translation performance.
- 2- Translation theories course should be mostly oriented to raise awareness. Students should be encouraged to reflect on what they do and find justifications in the light of translation theories.
- 3- Teaching practices should be modernized and adapted to the students’ needs. The old-fashioned method of “do this, don’t do that” will only widen the gap between theory and practice.
- 4- Students should be given equal opportunity to build the course, teachers are no long seen as the ultimate holder of knowledge, but rather they are facilitators of learning.

Lastly it is paramount to change the pre- assumption about translation theories as being a block of knowledge to be exposed to students, regardless of whether it is useful or not; and instead move towards what is called theorizing.

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12. Appendices

The questionnaire

First section : Student's attitudes

1. How do you describe your attitude to the course of "translation theory"?

Negative Normal positive

2. How many times have you actually made use of a theoretical concept when faced with a translation problem?

Many few never may be unconsciously

3. What do you think the course "translation theory" should help you?:

- To understand all the theoretical translation concepts.
- To be able to establish relationship between theoretical concepts learned and techniques to solving problems encountered.
- To have a wider view about the domain of translation

Others:

Second section: Teaching methods

1. Do you think blindly that the answer provided by the teacher carries ultimate authority?

Yes a little No

2. How many times does the course invite professionals into the classroom to discuss their problems?

Many Few Never

Others :