

The Media as an XL Medium in Translation Training

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Abstract

Nobody can deny the overwhelming presence of the media all around us in the 21st century. Due to their power and diversity, it is virtually impossible to avoid them. So why not harnessing all that powerful influence to profit from the variety they offer in favor of higher education? That was our question last year when we decided to devise a renewal proposal (Multimedia Approach to the Teaching of Journalistic Translation) for the university chair that I have recently become part of – Journalistic Translation at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina.

Compared to other courses of our Translation training program, such as Scientific, Commercial, and Legal Translation, Journalistic Translation is probably one of the most complex and kaleidoscopic as this area comprises a wide range of topics, which have been organized and developed in a number of different genres. The translator's background knowledge is paramount at this stage. A good translator formation requires "theoretical learning and practical training" (Alves 2001: 47). But that is just a small part of the picture. Nowadays, the role of translators as cultural mediators imposes new and formidable challenges. On this matter, Snell-Hornby (1988) observes: "Knowledge of the world is a prerequisite for translation, the profile of our envisaged professional translator becomes bolder: he or she is not only a bilingual but also a bicultural (if not multicultural) specialist".

However, in practice, the rest of the team and I found this was not an easy task. We realized that fifth-year students lacked two essential tools for their future professional development as translators: broad-enough background knowledge, and the know-how for using CAT tools and other technological elements that are very useful for translators. In the face of this, we decided to create a media-assisted class work environment in which students could broaden their background knowledge and get true-to-life translation experience that would otherwise take much longer to grow.

This work will develop a multimedia approach to teaching Journalistic Translation and how this approach can lead to fruitful results.

"Translation has a close relationship with the media, since the translator has the same objective as the journalist: to promote people's mutual understanding and communication; to document human civilization and culture; to record the progress and development of human society. Nowadays, considering the diversity of culture, the translator and the journalist face a task particularly full of daunting challenges and the opportunity for success as well."

Guo Xiaoyong, Vice President of China International Publishing Group and Vice Chairman of the Translation Association of China (TAC).

Sketching the profile of an ideal (though not utopian) translator may be necessary to use it as a parameter against which we can “measure” our actual translators-to-be.

Nowadays, the human race faces formidable challenges triggered by phenomena like mass media and globalization. The era of information and communication places the translator in a pedestal. Mind-boggling amounts of information are transmitted so rapidly that translators have acquired an increasingly important role as a cultural bridge between nations, making communication possible.

It takes a lot to be a good translator: apart from “theoretical learning and practical training” (Alves 2001:47), being bilingual or multilingual in itself is nowhere near being all. Most importantly, the translator has to be a culture-competent professional. On this matter, Snell-Hornby (1988) observes that “knowledge of the world is a prerequisite for translation, the profile of our envisaged professional translator becomes bolder: he or she is not only a bilingual but also a bicultural (if not multicultural) specialist”. Vermeer (1992) also highlights the fact that translation is a cultural product and translating is a culture-sensitive process. Therefore, the knowledge of the world is key to a successful understanding of the source text, which in turn is an essential step towards a high quality translation. Poor background knowledge, on the other hand, can be an important hindrance for the job of the translator, who in spite of knowing the meaning of all the words, may fail to interpret the author’s intention and perspective, instances of intertextuality, and so on.

The Media

The purpose of this section is to make clear what we mean when we talk about using media resources to train future translators. There is a whole universe of media and this listing does not intend to be exhaustive at all.

To this end, we have borrowed some of Austerlühl’s (2001) classifications as a reference. Let us explore that universe of media resources available for translators.

Almighty Internet. Nowadays, the Internet is no doubt the biggest and most powerful tool for translators. It offers us a source of both communication and information.

As regards **communication**, the Internet offers a wide range of possibilities for networked activities. E-mail services, Skype or instant messaging like Windows Live Messenger or Yahoo’s Messaging, forums, File Transfer Protocol (FTP), just to name a few. As for **information** services, there are various ways to get information on the Internet. Probably the most common of them is getting information through the worldwide web, which represents an endless source of valuable linguistic and reference material.

As translators, we have a never-ending need to find multidisciplinary information. Finding information on the Web may seem to be a very simple task; however, difficulties arise when it comes to reliable information. Future translators should know how to approach an Internet search from multiple levels in order to find the information they need from reliable sources without wasting their time. The Internet also offers priceless resources for translators such as terminology databases, online dictionaries and glossaries, online encyclopedias, and online access to real libraries, among many others.

CD-ROM. Although the Internet has undoubtedly gained ground, CD-ROMs are still a useful tool to get offline information, when the translator does not have access to an Internet connection. However, even though the data in CD-ROM encyclopedias, dictionaries, documents, and the like are easily transferred to documents or databases, printed, and accessed, they may frequently get out of date.

CAT Tools. This is no doubt one of the most important resources since they are specifically designed to help translators increase the workflow and quality, by providing glossaries and translation memories, among others. As “CAT-tool-era translators”, our students ought to be at least familiar with these tools since it is very likely that in their near future they will need them in order to work either as freelancers or as in-house translators.

Some of the different software programs that can be included within the umbrella term “CAT Tools” are the following:

- Translation memory software;
- terminology management software;
- alignment software;
- language search engine software;
- project management software;
- spell checkers.

TV. For many people around the world, television is considered the visual equivalent of junk food. For translators, on the other hand, it is another valuable media source where we can get all sorts of information. Watching TV may be more than an empty entertainment for translators since it can help us broaden our general knowledge of the world: there are TV programs about almost anything one can think of like fashion, gossip, natural sciences, cooking, crafts, religion, history, arts, health, tourism, and the list goes on and on. The DVD world also opens the horizon of a variety of even more diverse topics. In short, the variety of options TV products can offer to translators is extraordinary. However, this is similar to the case of the Internet when it comes to reliability.

Press. Newspapers and magazines may constitute another important media for the translator, especially for the journalistic translator. They may be a good source of information about current issues, parallel texts, among other useful tools. For future translators, reading newspapers and magazines periodically is vital in order to pick up clichés, set phrases, and journalistic jargon, and to broaden their background knowledge, which is an essential condition to produce quality translations.

A Multimedia Approach to the Teaching of Journalistic Translation

The idea of introducing a multimedia approach to our chair has a manifold purpose and our main interest lies in our certainty that it can help students broaden their background knowledge. It is a good way for them to have access to an endless source of reference material and parallel texts, which prepare them better for their future career.

Correcting home assignments along these years of work has given us the chance to see several types of errors students made. The lion's share of those errors could be avoided through an appropriate use of the resources available in the different media, namely, reference material, parallel texts, dictionaries, and so on. To our surprise, many of our students were not very much acquainted with some of those resources. Therefore, the introduction of media to the Journalistic Translation class would go beyond a motivation strategy; it is about need of future translators of being well acquainted with the different media. It's about making use of the advantages of as many available tools as possible in order to produce high quality translations.

The power and diversity of the media can be harnessed in favor of the formation of better-equipped professional translators. The School of Languages of the National University of Córdoba already has a number of media resources to offer. Its media lab is equipped with networked desktop computers connected to the Internet. The use of the media lab in a classroom environment is a key element to trigger the expansion of the students' repertoire of media resources to which they may draw on in a work environment. They could work on their assignments in teams and consult the professor when needed. The dynamics of the Journalistic Translation class would then emulate a real work environment.

But the media could also be used to develop students' "techknowledge"; i.e. the required know-how to use translation-related technology, like CAT tools, too. That would give students the chance to use at least some of these tools which are so important for their job placement (and which are also available in the lab).

Another fruitful experience would be to ask the students who own laptops to take them to the class, so we could propose activities in which they could profit from computer-assisted group-work in class.

We also propose the creation of an FTP page for the exclusive use of Journalistic Translation chair, which could be accessed by the students (using a username and password) every time they are required to download tutorials, assignments, suggested readings, and other materials. In the same fashion, they could upload documents, glossaries, home assignments, etc.

These activities would be accompanied by in-class discussions and reflection activities about the use of media resources at home. This would raise students' awareness of the techniques related to the efficient management of those media resources. Likewise, it would contribute to expand the students' background knowledge and consequently to improve their performance as translators.

Conclusion

Journalistic Translation is a very challenging field. The journalistic translator has to deal with a number of different areas and subject matters, which is simply represented in a newspaper, where virtually every field of life is covered in the different sections.

Also, journalistic translators have to deal with a number of genres and subgenres which require knowledge and skill as well. All this imposes great demands on translators. The broadening of background knowledge on a daily basis is one of them because this allows translators to keep on building knowledge in different areas, which is essential to solve translation problems and produce quality translations.

In our technological and information era, there is no doubt that we need to resort to the media to do our daily work as translators. Particularly, for journalistic translators the media are at the same time objects of translation and translation tools. Why neglecting that truth, then? The fact that the media offer a number of different ways to expand our knowledge of the world, and the impossibility to dissociate the media and the journalistic translator, seem to point to the same direction: the need to introduce a multimedia approach to our chair. Besides, the introduction of media has another very important rationale, that of helping students to gain valuable experience for their future development as professionals that would otherwise take them much longer to acquire.

For newly graduated translators, the process of learning how to use some media resources in an ordinary work situation means wasting precious translation time and, most likely, making mistakes that may jeopardize their jobs.

This approach intends to constitute a contribution to a better formation of professional translators-to-be so they are up to the challenge of our time—being good readers, good linguists, and learned bicultural professionals who translate with the due sensibility and responsibility.

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