



Assessing the MA Course “Translation Workshop” at Islamic Azad University: Theory and Practice in Translation

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Abstract

The present study aimed at dealing with MA translation workshop context and translation theories in practice. Moreover, it investigated MA translation students' expectations in the matter. To do so, the MA translation students of Islamic Azad University accepted in 2011-2012 academic year were selected as the population of the study. Then, as a convenience sampling, the participants were selected from Islamic Azad University of Khorasan and Islamic Azad University of Shahreza. In order to gather the required data, a 5-point Likert-scale structured questionnaire containing 44 items based on four domains was developed. The 63 participants' answers were analyzed and the findings of the study revealed that the reality of workshop context is far from students' expectations and their future needs. It seems that MA translation students did not get enough satisfaction from translation practices in workshop context at Islamic Azad University. Furthermore, MA translation workshop does not appear to have achieved its purposes in either theoretical or practical aspects of the program in translation education.

Keywords: MA translation students, syllabus, translation theories, translation workshop, translation teachers.

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Introduction

Translation students need to develop skills to solve new translation problems in new situations and to obtain a certain degree of expert knowledge in the face of the shortest deadlines (Rodriguez-Ines, 2009). As Ulrych (2005) believes, the task of translation education is not to shape a finished product but to provide graduate students with transferable skills within any situation at any time. Moreover, they should be able to discuss their performance with other translators and clients.

Applying translation theories in practice leads translation students to know that there are a lot of sources apart from teacher's knowledge, and the main concern of education is more than linguistic knowledge. Theory helps in systematizing translation problems. It is certainly no substitute for proper thinking but it can help students to think productively, to make decisions, and to do better in workplace. Gonzales-Davies (2004) indicates that there is a need to build bridges to fill the communication gap between translation theorists, researchers, and teachers. Teachers should design course programs with specific aims and sequence the materials based on the results of research that reveals students' future needs.

The aim of the present study is to find out if MA translation teachers include translation theories in workshop practices and investigate the MA translation students' expectations of applying theories in the context. However, before dealing with the issue, more details have been provided in the next section about different views on applying translation theories in translation practices. The study attempts to investigate answers to the following questions:

- 1) Do teachers of MA translation workshop course include translation theories in their syllabus design?
- 2) What are MA translation students' expectations of applying theories in the workshop context?

Literature Review

As translation students move to higher levels of education, they need some skills and competences which are not acquired by simple and repeated practices of translation in the workshop context. Applying theories in practices, being familiar with translation technologies, acquiring cultural and intercultural competence, working in a team, getting broad subject area knowledge, and being socialized as a professional translator are high level skills that translation students need in real-work situations and which are advised by most of the translation experts.

It seems that education program after more than one decade has not achieved its purposes in translators' education. Yarmohamadi (1994, p. 47) points out that "translation is one of most aimless courses" and Khazaiefar (1998) believes that there is a gap between graduated students' abilities and

real-world translation; the students should be able to use their academic knowledge out of university. Calzada Pérez (2005) claims that theory is necessary for practical tasks as revision and criticism of translation. Moreover, teachers may use translation theories in order to facilitate students' developing self-confidence. Teachers should provide students with as many approaches and views as possible to make them flexible in decision-making processes in a real-life professional career. The best way of doing this is to introduce a large number of theories and the preferred views on translation to students by using theories and making them visible in the classroom.

Translation theories help to raise awareness amongst the students, to encourage them to make conscious decisions, and to explain these decisions to other students participating in the translating process. Robinson (2003) aims for effective, rapid and accurate translations which meet the market needs to harmonize translation theory and professional practice and to provide a learner-centered classroom. As Pym (2010) believes, during translation, practical theorizing is turning into explicit theories. For example, in translation of a cultural term one argues that translation should explain the source culture, another believes in considering the target culture, and a third one wants to resituate everything in the target culture. Pym states that the arguments guide translators towards a larger theory. Translators who are untrained have fewer doubts and do not waste time on the obvious, but theories foster the awareness and help translators when they confront problems and provide them with valuable tools to defend their positions. Translators work more consciously and creatively with theories.

Bartrina (2005) suggests that the knowledge of translation theory can motivate specific practical decisions. Moreover, translators are asked to justify their decisions to publishers and editors, and they need a theoretical background in order to have the appropriate language skills to do so. Translators need theories that help them to be articulate in evaluating all the relevant questions concerning the translating process and the final product, from the ideological consequences of their work to the linguistic choices.

Translation Competence and Translators' Competence

Presas (2000) believes that competence-based training is a pedagogical model called for an integrated model in teaching, learning and assessment. Presas continues that *translation competence* is the knowledge of the two languages, knowledge of the real-world and of the material, the ability to use tools such as dictionaries and other sources of documentation, cognitive qualities such as creativity and attention, or the capacity to resolve specific problems. Adab (2000) also argues that translation competence includes the entire list of competences and adopts theoretical aspects of translation studies and combines translation competence with the aims of professional translation training program.

Gradually theorists made a distinction between translation competence and translators' competence. Although they concluded that translators need both competences in their professional life, today translator's competence is a crucial factor especially in high levels of translation education. As Pym (2011) states *translator's competence*, which is the aim of translator education program, is a wide range of interpersonal skills, attitudes, and technical skills, and translation theories foster both competences which a translator needs in real-world translation.

Syllabus Design and Course Content

According to Kiraly (1995) translation pedagogy, based on Stern's (1983) model of second-language learning theories, in practice level relates to classroom and its activities through specific curricula, syllabi, evaluation schemes, text selections, and other teaching practices. Richards and Renandya (2002) indicate that since a syllabus reflects a view of a course and its learning, it has received a great deal of attention in teaching. Syllabus design involves assessing the needs of students, developing objectives, selecting teaching materials, and deciding on assessment. Mirza Ebrahim Tehrani (2003) offers some guidelines for the translation course content. In her idea the teachers should consider theories and attach them to practice and do not involve students in problems aimlessly. She adds that workshop sessions can be divided into two parts of theory and practice. Gabr (2001) argues that translators should know different kinds of styles and both source and target cultures. Moreover, they need to know social-cultural differences and semiotics of source text and target text. Bartrina (2005) indicates that the translation workshop syllabus can cover areas such as the consideration of translation as text, cohesion and coherence in translation, speech acts and textual acts, and the concept of relevance; furthermore, different text typologies can be discussed and analyzed. The application of a particular theoretical concept may be determined by the linguistic, cultural, social and ideological factors that exert their influence on the practice of translation.

Methodology

The strategy of choosing the sample in the present study was based on the purpose of the research, the time constraints, the methods of data collection, and the methodology of the research. Members of the target population were selected for the purposes of the study because of certain practical criteria: geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, some key characteristics and easy accessibility. Therefore, the participants of the study were selected through convenience or opportunity sampling, in which relative ease of accessibility is the key factor.

Participants

The target population of the study was MA translation students accepted in universities in Iran the academic year of 2011-2012. Then, a particular section of the wider population was deliberately selected to include in the study. Among the population of the six Islamic Azad University branches, translation students of the Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan and Islamic Azad University of Shahreza were selected as the sample of the study. This population was more than 20% of the target population of Islamic Azad Universities. The total number of the students who received the questionnaire was 70. After receiving the questionnaires those who were not complete were omitted and the total number of 63 remained for further study. The participants of the study had passed the translation workshop course.

Instruments

In order to select appropriate sampling of the content, a pilot questionnaire consisting of six open questions was generated. The first question asked about course syllabus and its contents; applying theories was asked in another question. Then, based on the pilot questionnaire, a well-designed 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) with 44 simple, short, meaningful items was prepared in Persian together with English equivalents for technical words (see Appendix). Syllabus design including theories and course objectives, translation and translator's competence, teaching strategies, and text types were the four main themes of the whole items. Both the actual and the ideal items proposed by the respondents through the pilot study were considered in each category. Furthermore, the internal consistency reliability was measured by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and it turned out to be .77 which is high enough for the questionnaire to be reliable.

Procedure

In order to assess the translation workshop context, first a pilot questionnaire with open questions was prepared. Next each person's response to each item was taken as the qualitative data. Then, the ideas and concepts were highlighted to decide on the categories. After that the researcher compared responses and finally the related concepts were coded into distinct categories. Finally, the obtained categories and points were used to generate a 5-point Likert-scale structured questionnaire. The first domain of the structured questionnaire was syllabus design and applying translation theories with 18 items (9 items for actual and 9 items for ideal). These items were distributed among the 44 statements of the questionnaire (see Table 1). The actual items

asked some questions about the reality of translation workshop course and the ideal items asked about the MA translation students' expectations.

In order to analyze the participants' responses, the questionnaires which were incomplete were omitted, and the remaining 63 questionnaires were submitted to statistical procedures. The items of the structured questionnaire aimed to analyze the actual and the ideal concepts of the translation workshop course.

Results

The aim of the syllabus design domain items was to answer the research questions. The data presented in Table 1 reveals the percentages of the participants' reply for each point of the Likert-scale. It can be seen that the majority of the participants marked only one side of the Likert-scale for more than half of the items; most of the responses have been gathered on one side of the scale. So, there is a general consensus among the participants of the study in the items.

The items on actual domain ask some questions about the reality of the MA translation workshop course. According to Table 1, the responses to items 36 and 27 reveal that about half of the participants believed that the cause of using shifts and applying neologisms were stated during translation practices, and enough time was devoted to practice of Persian to English translation. Item 2 shows that the majority of the translation students believed that translation theories were not being applied during activities and the same can almost be said about Item 9 and 22. They disagreed that the crucial points were recapitulated at the end of each sessions (question 9), and that each class session followed special objectives. The responses to item 12, which is about cultural issues, scatters all over different responses, that is, disagreements, neutral, and agreements. Regarding item 11, more than half of the respondents believed that the translation teachers explained the translation workshop syllabus at the beginning of the semester. Considering item 6, it can be seen that most participants marked the right side of the Likert-scale and they agreed that MA translation workshop was the context of translation practice and repetition, while more than half of them disagreed with Item 43, referring to new translation techniques during translation in the context.

The items on Ideal domain of the questionnaire refer to the participants' expectations. As shown in the Table 1, the respondents support the ideas of applying theory in syllabus design domain. For example, almost all of the respondents agree with Item 41 and 24. Besides, for other items of the ideal domain, just some of the participants disagree with statements or they have no idea. Graphical representations of the percentages of the participants' answers to the items of actual and ideal domains have been displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively.

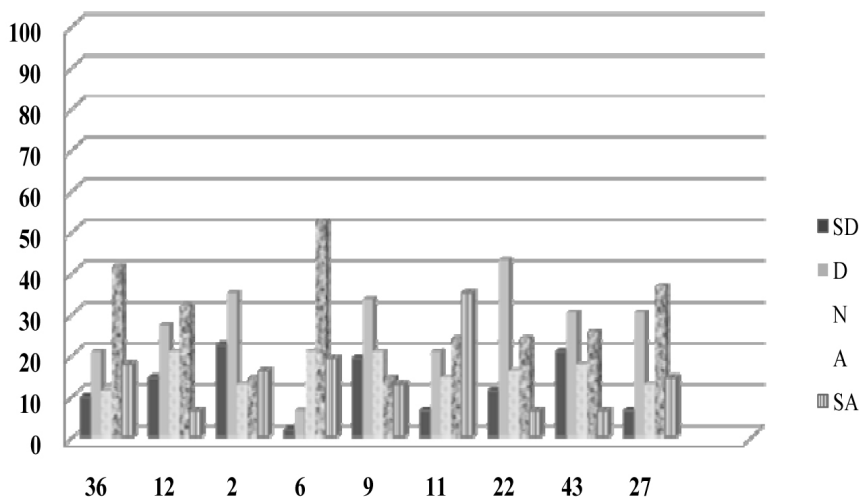


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the percentages of the participants' answers to the actual domain items of the syllabus design.

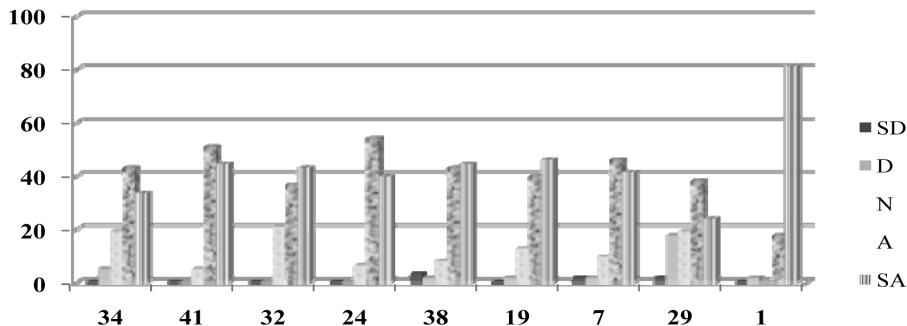


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the percentages of the participants' answers to the ideal domain items of the syllabus design.

The findings clearly lead to answering the research questions, which are concerned with including in workshop practices translation theories and the MA translation students' expectations of applying theory. The results of the items of the actual domain show that translation practices are not based on theories, just 30% of the participants believe that translation theories and models have been included in translation workshop syllabus, but the results of the workshop activities do not satisfy the students. The interpretation of the findings for the ideal items addresses the second research question. The respondents strongly believe that the syllabus of translation workshop course

should be handed to students, translation problems should be solved based on translation theories, and translation of different styles and registers should be considered as translation workshop activities. The findings of the MA translation expectations are in line with Chesterman and Wagner's (2002) claim which maintains that translators need to be able to choose between several alternatives, and translation theories help them to select the appropriate one. Most of the participants expect issues such as adaptation (situational equivalence), translation of neologisms and intersemiotic translation, contrastive analysis, politeness consideration and translation of taboos, and distinction of shifts during translation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The assessment of translation education in MA translation workshop course at Islamic Azad University located the problematic areas of syllabus domain (applying theories and course objectives) of translation education in the context. It seems that lack of clear objectives, appropriate materials, and teaching methods are the reasons for pedagogical gap in translation practice. It also would appear that translation education has not achieved its objectives in both theoretical and practical aspects of the program in translation workshop course. The findings of the syllabus domain showed that MA translation students expect to apply related theories in translation workshop practices, the finding which is in line with previous studies (Gabr, 2001; Pym, 2010).

The findings of the study revealed that syllabus can be designed with specific aims and the materials should be sequenced accordingly. Syllabus design involves the needs of students, and its contents lead students to achieve the goal gradually. Thus, the contents should be based on translation students' needs. It seems that discussions in translation workshop should be based on translation theories. The main domain of the syllabus may include translation theories, the fact that the findings of the study indicated through the ideal items. It is desirable to divide the sessions into two parts of theory and practice and ask students to take part actively in translation practice and to defend their positions based on the related theories.

A syllabus definitely suggests a more varied and creative course, and, as the participants of this study believe, designing the syllabus for the MA translation workshop needs theoretical as well as practical components. The best use of theory is actually in active discussions and solving translation problems. Translators need theories when they have to decide between available alternatives (Pym, 2010). Moreover, theories help them in translation of various text types and genre which should be practiced in the context. Analyzing texts, dealing with other cultures, rewriting texts for other audiences, summarizing or abstracting long texts, and converting nonverbal text elements into verbal texts and vice versa are examples of theory-based

activities which can be used in order to improve translation competence and translators' competence in real-life translation.

Chesterman and Wagner (2002) believe that translation theory can offer a set of conceptual tools. It can be thought as aids for mental problem-solving, for the development of the translator's self-image, or even for the enhancement of job satisfaction. What translators need is a theory rooted in best practice, directed at improved practice, and attentive to practitioners throughout the profession. Translation students can formulate the prescriptive statements as explicit hypotheses and test them through practices. Then, they might even be able to find new hypotheses of cause and effect that had not been thought of before.

The purpose of translation education is to encourage students to think critically and solve new problems; it is not limited to training goals and translation of texts. Therefore, translation teachers are suggested to try to achieve a proper balance between translation practice in training and applying translation theories and research in education. Peer editing, translating with the help of parallel texts, analyzing several translations of the same source text, analyzing and comparing texts belonged to various text types or genres, identifying text-type conventions, spotting text defects, revising faulty or unfunctional texts, and revising translated texts are also effective activities teachers can consider in theory-based activities of translation workshop. They also should consider a specific theory-based-criterion in assessing students' translation.

Applying theories and the results of related research in translation practices gradually lead students from translation competence towards translators' competence. The results of the related research can help translators to predict which structure or strategy will have a better effect on readers. It is, therefore, advisable that those creative teachers be selected as translation workshop instructors who know their learners, their concerns and expectations, their learning methods, and are familiar with translation theories, practice and research.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Percentages of the Answers to the Syllabus Design Domain Items

Item	Strongly Disagree(1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree(5)
Actual					
2	22.2	34.9	12.7	14.3	15.9
6	1.6	6.3	20.6	52.4	19.0
9	19.0	33.3	20.6	14.3	12.7
11	6.3	20.6	14.3	23.8	34.9
12	14.3	27.0	20.6	31.7	6.3
22	11.1	42.9	15.9	23.8	6.3
27	6.3	30.2	12.7	36.5	14.3
36	9.5	20.6	11.1	41.3	17.5
43	20.6	30.2	17.5	25.4	6.3
Ideal					
1	0	1.6	0	17.5	81.0
7	1.6	1.6	9.5	46.0	41.3
19	0	1.6	12.7	39.7	46.0
24	0	0	6.3	54.0	39.7
29	1.6	17.5	19.0	38.1	23.8
32	0	0	20.6	36.5	42.9
34	0	4.8	19.0	42.9	33.3
38	3.2	1.6	7.9	42.9	44.4
41	0	0	4.8	50.8	44.4