Chapter 82

Translation Learning Environments for the Future: Online Collaborative Practices

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how recent years have seen a growing interest in so-called collaborative translation. This is the subject of an open debate in translation studies, where matters such as translator training in social translation or the motivation of volunteer translators are all widely discussed. This chapter recounts a teaching experience performed at a key stage of a localization course. It describes the social constructivist methodology used and the findings obtained from a qualitative analysis to bring collaborative translation into the classroom and to introduce students into new translation models and practices.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Dr Minako O’Hagan published her book The Coming Industry of Teletranslation. Under this suggestive title, she painted a new horizon of communication for translators and language service providers, underpinned by new telecommunications systems. Changes in society and the arrival of new technologies were bringing in a new panorama for the world of translation. The coming of the Internet and the subsequent appearance of social networks represented a new starting point, not only in communications between clients and providers of translation services, but also in exchanges of information per se. In the words of Perrino (2009):

Teletranslation will exploit the global networking capabilities of telecommunications technology to bring language service providers (using both human and computer resources) and their customers together. In doing so, it will help overcome many otherwise insolvable language problems. (pp. 61-62)

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Almost a decade later, O’Hagan (2013) delved into the role even newer technologies play in translation studies. This author (2013, p. 27) refers to a “technological turn” at the heart of translation studies (Cronin, 2013; Fernández Costales, 2012), where technology as part of the world of work has led to undeniable changes in translators’ daily lives and, therefore, likewise in the teaching of translation (Bowker, 2015). These changes, which have affected both the means of communication and the translation process, have led to new translation models and practices (Jiménez Crespo, 2015, p. 33).

The Internet has made it possible for the number of texts being translated to expand into new realms. Due to this undeniable expansion, new translation scenarios come into play, for example collaborative translation or website localization. As highlighted by Fernández Costales (2012), crowdsourcing and online collaborative translation are important features in the current translation landscape. The same author is also quite categorical when he states that these new practices are in no way passing trends, asserting that “we have to consider the possibility that community translation is here to stay” (p. 22).

This new technological panorama gives rise not only to new translation tools, new text genres and new translation models, but also to a change in the actual players involved in the translation process. With the evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 – the latter term coined by O’Reilly (2005) – the user, previously passive, became an active user capable of controlling and sharing information with other users in a way that would have been unimaginable not so many years before (Cronin, 2010). In the same vein, these users work voluntarily most of the time without pay and for nonprofit organizations.

The growing influence of technology has also led to changes in the way we access information. Translation has made us a multilingual society where almost everything can be translated, not least digital products in all shapes and forms: software, websites, video games and so forth. The origins of the localization industry – an activity defined by Schäler as “the linguistic and cultural adaptation of digital content to the requirements and locale of a foreign market, and the provision of services and technologies for the management of multilingualism across the digital global information flow” (Schäler, 2011, p. 157) – trace back to the United States in the 1980s. Due to the wide success of their products in said country, companies like Oracle and Microsoft set their sights on foreign markets such as Japan, France, Italy, Germany and Spain. And the localization industry is now unquestionably one of the most promising fields for translation graduates. Academic institutions are aware of the localization demand the industry market is shaping. As a result, many institutions offer learning programs focusing on the processes, tools and development of strategies involved in localization (Folaron, 2006). Nevertheless, full support to include localization into the translation curriculum is an extremely challenging task due to the specific constraints it poses, such as the heterogeneous profile of students or the specialization that trainers should have.

Collaborative translation and crowdsourcing, other activities emerging on the scene even more recently, are playing an increasingly important role in the world of translation and in the localization industry. Translators from around the globe are gathered into communities who – for a variety of motives – help to generate multilingual content, which ranges from literature to software. This form of voluntary translation is particularly important for humanitarian work and emergency situations, with thousands of users enabling certain people, for example indigenous communities, to access vital information1. For organizations such as Permondo (Spain), The Rosetta Foundation (Ireland) and Kiva and the Mozilla Foundation (USA), granting volunteers a key role in their translation and localization processes is an established objective. These are examples of institutions working to “relieve poverty, support healthcare, develop education and promote justice through access to information and knowledge across the languages of the world” (The Rosetta Foundation). Collaborative translation and crowdsourcing are therefore areas that