Supporting Learner Reflection in the Language Translation Class

Eva Lindgren, Umeå University, Sweden
Kirk P. H. Sullivan, Umeå University, Sweden
Mats Deutschmann, Mid Sweden University, Sweden
Anders Steinvall, Umeå University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In a case study a University class undertook a translation from Swedish to English in a keystroke logging environment and then replayed their translations in pairs while discussing their thought processes when undertaking the translations, and why they made particular choices and changes to their translations. Computer keystroke logging coupled with peer-based intervention assisted the students in discussing how they worked with their translations, and enabled them to see how their ideas relating to the translation developed as they worked with the text. The process showed that Computer Keystroke logging coupled with peer-based intervention has potential to (1) support student reflection and discussion around their translation tasks, and (2) enhance student motivation and enthusiasm for translation. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

Keywords: Awareness; Keystroke Logging; Observational Learning; Peer-Based Intervention; Readiness; Reflection; Translation

INTRODUCTION

Many language teachers use translation exercises as part of their teaching repertoire. Historically, translation has played a central role in language teaching and examination as part of the Grammar-Translation Method. Although widely
criticized over the past 20 years or so
on the grounds that it places the focus
on language as a formal system of rules
rather than on language for communi-
cation (see, for example, Levefere &
Bassnett, 1998), translation is still an
integral part of many language courses
in school and university. For example,
in a survey of the 22 universities in
Swedish teaching English as a Foreign
Language, only 5 made no explicit men-
tion of translation in their course syllabi
(Deutschmann, Lindgren, Steinvall, &
Sullivan, 2005).

In many departments, the traditional
translation class in a language course has
changed little, if at all, over the years.
Typically, the students are given the text
they are to translate into, or out of, the
foreign language prior to the class. The
students then translate the text with the
help of dictionaries and grammar books
before the class. During the class the
teacher discusses the translation, often
sentence-by-sentence and student-by-
student. The translations are compared
and in some classes an ideal translation
is presented to the class.

Translation as a language teaching
method focuses on the end result rather
than the process involved getting there.
However, the ability to focus not only
on the ‘what’ but also the ‘how’ and the
‘why’ is seen by many as an essential skill
for life long learning in the current socio-
economic climate (Pickering, 2005). In
the traditional translation classroom the
correct answer is rewarded rather than
the process leading up to it. Further,
there is rarely any discussion beyond
how to correct the errors the student
presenting their part of the translation
has made. The underlying reasons for a
correct or incorrect sentence are never
accessed. The problems associated with
the method and the need for alternative
approaches have been pointed out by
several authors (e.g. Kussmaul, 1995;
Nott, 2005; Hubscherr-Davidson, 2007)
and is further illustrated in the follow-
ing quote:

As a classroom exercise, or when re-
turning students’ written translations,
it gave ample opportunity for teachers
to demonstrate their superiority, and
for students to be convinced of their
inferiority, as translators. This double
deception was made possible by main-
taining the illusion that there was ‘out
there’ a single, complete, ideal version,
which they had struggled unsuccessfully
to achieve. (Nott, 2005 ¶1)

The traditional translation method
is teacher, rather than learner, focused.
It is the teacher who chooses the text,
who holds the correct answers and
who directs the classroom activity. The
agenda for the lesson is set by the text
chosen, which may be far from optimal
for the individual learner, and thus
results in a lack of individualisation of
feedback. Different students have dif-
ferent problems; some students may find
the problems addressed trivial, whereas
others may struggle to understand the
concepts discussed. Few translation
classes are able to individualise the
class so that the passages for translation
Related Content

Government and Mobile: Examining the Role of SMS
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/government-and-mobile/156994?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/government-and-mobile/156994?camid=4v1a)

Trust and Technology in Inter-Organizational Business Relations
[www.igi-global.com/article/trust-technology-inter-organizational-business/37543?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/trust-technology-inter-organizational-business/37543?camid=4v1a)
Essential E Learning Tools, Techniques and Open CourseWare for E Learners and Trainers
www.igi-global.com/chapter/essential-e-learning-tools-techniques-and-open-courseware-for-e-learners-and-trainers/157805?camid=4v1a

The Disposition-Based Fraud Cycle
www.igi-global.com/article/disposition-based-fraud-cycle/77646?camid=4v1a