

Teaching Business Translation—A Project-based Approach

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Abstract. The student-centered project-based (PBL) learning pedagogy fits in well with the objectives of translation training and education, leading to its popularity in China's prosperous translation studies community. However, PBL's requirement of use of authentic translation projects in teaching makes it difficult to be carried out in the Chinese translation classroom. This paper discusses a PBL activity in business translation teaching with already completed authentic translation projects that are provided by off-campus translation training bases (registered specialist translation companies in China). The reports of students' perceptions of PBL learning prove that use of completed authentic projects can be an effective alternative of introducing PBL to translation teaching in the Chinese context and serve as an easy reference for teachers who are interested in trying this methodology but have difficulties in finding a real-world project for students.

Introduction

The language services field is a burgeoning industry with a bright future both in China and abroad. Most surveys estimate the global language services industry as being worth around \$33 billion annually. And the *2016 Report on China's Language Services Industry* published by Translators Association of China reports China's translation output to be about 282.2 billion Yuan in 2015. Along with the prosperity of the language services industry, there comes the attention to translator education. In China, nearly 200 colleges and universities offer Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI) and Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI) programs to students in an attempt to meet the market demand for qualified translators and interpreters.

Business and technical translation accounts for the biggest proportion of translation work currently being commissioned by the industry (Kingscott 1995, Venuti 1995). The importance of business translation teaching has been recognized by the translation education community. However, research shows that, while students consider business translation courses very useful in terms of employability and career development, many don't feel sufficiently prepared to enter the market at their completion of the course (Li 1999a, 2000). Students' lack of confidence may most probably result from the inadequate cultivation of translation competence in their learning of business translation. In fact, what to teach and how to teach it have been the fundamental issues for translator education research (Kelly, 2005). In order to better help students develop translation competences, it is imperative for educators to innovate their way of teaching. This paper adopts a social constructivist approach to inform suggested curricular changes and proposes a project-based method on a practical level to further aid business translation teaching.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered pedagogy evolving from the idea of "learning by doing" in which students gain knowledge and skills by working in small collaborative groups for an extended period of time to explore real-world problems and challenges. Unlike the traditional paper-based, rote memorization or teacher-led instruction in which students are passive recipients of knowledge, PBL is filled with active and engaged learning, enabling students to acquire a deeper knowledge of what they are studying. As Thomas Markham (2011) argues "PBL integrates knowing and doing. Students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter. PBL students take advantage of

digital tools to produce high quality, collaborative products. PBL refocuses education on the student, not the curriculum—a shift mandated by the global world, which rewards intangible assets such as drive, passion, creativity, empathy, and resiliency. These cannot be taught out of a textbook, but must be activated through experience.”

Project-based learning is based on the idea that real-world problems capture students’ interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. Motivated by interests in the translation project and the strong desire to prove themselves, students in PBL learning take up the responsibility of learning instead of fully relying on the teacher. The teacher’s role is facilitating, working with students to make a plan of the project, structuring the project management process, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience.

Meanwhile the appeal of PBL for engaging diverse learners can be explained by insights in many fields. Cognitive science has advanced people’s understanding of how learning happens, how expertise develops, and how a higher level thinking appears. Fields ranging from neuroscience to social psychology have contributed to people’s understanding of what conditions create the best environment for learning. Culture, context, and the social nature of learning all have a role in shaping the learner’s experience. Kiraly (2012) elucidates the inter-disciplinary sources of inspiration for project-based translation pedagogy which include social-constructivist epistemology, post modernism, enactive cognitive science, complexity theory, and transformational educational theory.

Research also indicates that students are more likely to retain the knowledge gained through PBL far more readily than through traditional textbook-centered learning. In addition, students develop confidence and self-direction in the process of project implementation. In the process of completing their projects, students also acquire and improve their organizational and research skills, develop better communication with their peers and adults. Because students are evaluated on the basis of their projects, rather than on exams, essays, and written reports, assessment of project-based work is often more meaningful to them because they quickly see how academic work can connect to real-life issues. Project learning is also an effective way to integrate technology into the curriculum. A typical project can easily accommodate computers and the Internet, as well as other professional technical devices and equipment.

In a word, adopting a project-learning approach in the classroom can invigorate students’ learning environment, energizing the curriculum with real-world relevance and sparking students’ desire to explore, investigate, and understand their world.

Feasibility and Problems of Project-Based Teaching in Business Translation

When Don Kiraly published his study *A Social Constructivist Approach to translator Education*, project-based learning was quite new to translation pedagogy. However, over a decade later, there appeared a distinctive movement in professional translator education programs away from an almost exclusive focus on contrived, teacher-centered, transmissionist teaching towards experiential, collaborative learning (Kiraly, 2012). In China, teachers and researchers in recent years have been reflecting on the problems of the traditional objectivist way of translation teaching and struggling to find innovative theories to guide translator education, which leads to the popularity of social constructivism in translation teaching in China. With “social constructivism” and “translation teaching” as subject terms, 346 papers can be found on CNKI.NET, an influential online publishing platform with over 50 million end-users from universities, research institutes, government think-tanks, enterprises and so on.

It makes sense to apply PBL to business translation teaching. A translator’s work is non-rule-based, self-similar and recursive (Kiraly, 2012). Mechanical application of rules can rarely solve the problems a translator constantly faces in his process of translation (Kiraly, 1995). New words, concepts, messages, clients and other infinite variables all challenge the translator’s ability of problem-solving. If all the problems and challenges to a translator cannot be included and transmitted in the traditional chalk-and-talk classroom, it is necessary to adopt heuristics such as

PBL to find answers to questions from experience. Meanwhile, business translation covers a diffuse range of topics. No courses so far can possibly cover all the text-types subsumed under business translation, making it urgent to help students develop ability to learn by themselves.

On the other hand, real-world translation projects tend to share categories of features. That means if students are exposed to a large number of projects, they will know that terminology and knowledge research management, translation norms and professional etiquette are part of the translator's job--and they will know how to deal with them heuristically by analogy with previously completed projects. When they come across a new problem, they may recall their previous experience of solving one or several similar problems and work out a feasible solution to this one.

It is now generally agreed that the aim of translation teaching is to develop and/or improve student's translation competence through more effective and efficient teaching and learning (Lee-Jahnke, 2011). The well-known model of translation competence proposed by the PACTE (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) group consists of six interrelated sub-competencies, namely bilingual, extra-linguistic, knowledge about translation, instrumental, strategic sub-competence and psycho-physiological components (PACTE 2003, 2008, 2011a, 2011b). It's obvious that all these competences cannot be addressed in the "presentation-practice-production" model (Tomlinson, 1998) in which a teacher presents the translation techniques first, then give students sentences or passages to practice their translation skills and finally concludes the session by giving out home assignments and asking the students to produce a translation. In PBL students work not only as translators, but also as communicators, team members, information seekers, managers, and users of computers and translation technologies. Working on real-world translation projects enables students to gain an insight into the translation profession and hone their required competences as future qualified translators.

Despite the great interests of researchers in introduction of PBL to translation teaching, PBL practices seem to be rare in China's translation classrooms. The huge gap between theoretical studies and teaching practices can be explained by the difficulties in implementing PBL in reality. First, authentic translation projects, the key educational events, required by the PBL pedagogical approach are difficult to be obtained. Big cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen boast prosperous economy and huge demand for language service. However, competition in the industry is also incredibly harsh. College students don't have any advantages when competing with professional translation companies for translation projects. In less-developed regions, demand for translation service is quite small, making it even harder for colleges and universities to attract real-world projects for students. Second, it is hard to find a proper project to serve the learning objectives of a certain learning stage due to the few choices of authentic projects. Some project may be too difficult for the students. Some may request students to turn in the translation in a very short period of time, conflicting with the term-long teaching schedule. Last but not least, PBL is highly demanding for teachers. Teachers must be a professional or free translator, a member of the professional community. However, most teachers in China may even not have the opportunity to engage in real-world translation practices. Meanwhile, PBL results in too much work and pressure on the part of teachers to guarantee the quality of translation.

In a word, teachers and students are really inspired by PBL; however, it is necessary to adapt it to the Chinese context.

Application of Project-Based Teaching in Business Translation

Our solution to the difficulties in applying PBL in the Chinese translation classroom is to use completed authentic projects from off-campus translation training bases which are registered specialist translation companies in China. In China, it is a must for colleges and universities offering MTI degree to establish cooperative relationship with translation companies so as to provide internship to students. Because of our cooperative relationship with those companies, we can get some non-confidential business translation projects that are already translated and submitted to clients on the condition that these projects are used for educational purpose only. We classify those projects and make careful selection to serve our purpose of teaching.

A PBL Activity in Business Translation Teaching

Duffy (2009) proposes that it is the students' perceived need for new knowledge that is key to acquiring (or constructing) it and not some set of requirements imposed by the teacher. We also believe that the best way to motivate students to take up their responsibilities of learning is to make them realize the needs to learn something. Therefore, at the very beginning of a business translation course, we'll use an authentic project of moderate difficulty to arouse students' interests in translating business texts as well as show them their lack of some knowledge and skills of business translation. The example in this paper is a report on elderly care in China made by China-Britain Business Council to enable business opportunities for UK companies. The aim of this project is to improve students' translation competence and familiarize them with real-world translation dynamics. The whole project lasts for two weeks followed by lectures on theories, principles and techniques of business translation.

In the implementation of the project, we first work together to decide the group structure and work out the management process of the project. Students form groups of 4-5 people and divide the translation work within the group. Each student will play the role of translator, proofreader, manager and client in turn in the implementation of the project. As students begin to work on the project, problems will arise, making students realize their need for skills and competences that they don't yet possess. In the process of translation, we'll meet two or three times to discuss the possible ways to solve the problems and exchange useful resources to facilitate each other's further work. When the translation is submitted to the teacher at last, the teacher will circulate it to each group and ask them to write a comment on other groups' translation. At the final stage, everyone is a client and has the right to decide whether he/she will accept the translation service provided. Meanwhile, students are required to write reflective journals to record their experience of translation, what problems they've come across and how they solved them, what they've learnt about translation of business texts and what areas they think they may need to further improve themselves.

As mentioned above, the project we use in class is actually an authentic project which has already been completed by professional translators. That means, as teachers, we've already known what major problems have arisen from the implementation of the project. With such a privilege, teachers, even those who don't have professional experience of working as a translator, can transmit the real-world feedback from the client to students, which make students learn more from professionals' experience.

Students' Perceptions of PBL-Based Learning of Business Translation

Students may at first feel at a loss at the beginning of the project when they have no real-world experience of translation and are expecting detailed instructions from teachers. But when they are forced by the tight project schedule to work on the project and go through each procedure, they'll find it challenging and interesting to do something on their own. We find that after the project, when we start to give some lectures on business translation theories and strategies, students are apt to understand them more easily by associating the factual knowledge to their personal learning experience. Students also report growth in the following areas in their final project report.

First, translation skills and strategies. Most students reported in their summary of the project that they were wrong to think that English to Chinese translation of such a business report on a topic that is not very professional would be easy as long as they could understand the source text. They met a lot of words and sentences that they did understand but failed to find a proper Chinese translation for them. As a result, they have to refer to textbooks or other academic sources for techniques of translation and work out a solution.

Second, teamwork spirit and collaborative skills. Students reported that group meetings, coordination with peers for producing the quality translation on time and offering support to others in need greatly enhance their team work spirit and collaborative skills.

Third, communication skills. Improvement of communication skills results not only from group cooperation and coordination but also from contacts with related business people. For example, many companies mentioned in the business report are small private companies which even don't

have official websites. With quite limited sources of information, students have to contact the related business people by the phone or email included in the business report to confirm certain information.

Fourth, research skills. All the unknown or uncertain information in the report needs to be clarified by the students themselves. During the research process, students reported that they found many useful sources of information online and learnt a lot of searching techniques. Meanwhile, their mastery of translation technologies was improved along with the constant research for information.

At last, critical thinking. Another area of growth mentioned repeatedly by the students was their ability to think critically. Students reported that the project enhanced their critical thinking as they had to learn to select the relevant information to support and defend their translation. When they didn't agree with a group member's translation of some words or sentences, they had to find supportive information to argue with the translator. To think critically instead of accepting passively is reported as one of the students' most important gains from participating in the project.

Conclusion

PBL fits in very well with the objectives of China's translation education and business translation teaching in particular. PBL can effectively enhance many skills beyond translation-specific competencies. These skills are considered essential for students to succeed as professional translators, but unfortunately are often inadequately developed in traditional translation classroom.

However, the stress on authentic projects by PBL makes it difficult to carry out in the context of China's translation education environment. It is sensible to adopt completed real-world project in the classroom as an alternative. PBL can be used in combination with traditional method of translation teaching to help students acquire the required theoretical knowledge and specific skills and competences of a professional translator.

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