

FACILITATING THE PROCESS OF TEACHING/LEARNING WRITING IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE: TRAINING TRANSLATION STUDENTS TO FACE A GLOBAL IMPERATIVE

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RESUMEN

Este artículo propone una metodología para enseñar a escribir en la segunda lengua dentro de un programa de formación de traductores. Se basa sobre todo en un proceso interactivo diseñado para guiar a los estudiantes hacia una mayor autonomía de modo gradual. Se intentará que, al escribir, tengan en cuenta tres perspectivas esenciales: la de la escritura, la de la lectura y la del texto, puesto que escribir siempre conlleva la toma de decisiones en función de contextos sociales determinados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: escritura, inglés como lengua extranjera, traducción.

ABSTRACT

This paper will address the teaching of writing in the second language within a translator training programme. The major focus is on an interactive process approach designed to gradually guide the learners towards autonomy by encouraging them to consider three essential components when writing: the writer, the reader, and the text, as writing always involves writers making choices in determined social contexts.

KEY WORDS: writing, English as a foreign language, translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is now the dominant language of publication and translation in almost every academic and non-academic field, and pressure is increasing on many scholars and translators around the world to publish and translate in the medium of English, whether English is their mother tongue or not. As a teacher of English as a foreign language in a Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, I have frequently observed that students have very little confidence when writing in English. Since teaching methods started giving more importance to oral skills, writing seems to have been pushed into the background, teaching writing very often consisting in giving a topic question to be developed at home. Nevertheless, writing in the L2

should be central to a translator training programme since it serves as the foundation of another core subject: Translation into the foreign language. Whether we question the acceptability, or even desirability, of translating into the foreign language or not, the pragmatic, market-oriented stance of employers generally takes for granted that employees with language-related qualifications will be able to function competently in two or three languages and will have no difficulty in translating into and out of any combination of them.

This paper will present an account of a writing project that took place in the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) during the academic year 2004/05 with second year students from the subject *Lengua B II – Inglés* (English as a Second Language in the second year of their degree). We will show how the project was set up with a series of classroom tasks and the way in which these highlighted important aspects of the writing process in general. We will also show how we focused on the complexities of writing in the second language in particular, and how the classroom activities we designed guided the preparation of the end product that could be made available to the public domain. In doing so, we will also address the rationale that lies behind both the design of writing tasks and the use of real-life projects in the classroom, and put forward arguments for the motivational impact of such an undertaking: writing to be read.

2. WRITING TO BE READ: IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH FEEDBACK

Writing to be read is based on the idea that students will improve most if they understand the aim of their writing, where they are in relation to this aim and how they can achieve the aim. It should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning, the objective of the teacher's planning being to provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied in reading and assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned.

Indeed, feedback—in our case, through reading and replying—is recognised as an essential element in helping students improve. Teachers need to move away from giving work marks out of 10 and move towards giving feedback to help students improve in this specific activity. This means that if students write to be read, they also write for a reply and not only for a mark. Corrections can then be made indirectly through the reply with no need to underline every single mistake in the original piece of writing.

Students can also benefit from opportunities for formal feedback through group and plenary sessions. Where this works well, there is a shift from teachers telling students what they have done wrong to students seeing for themselves what they need to do to improve and discussing it with other students or, if need be, the



teacher himself/herself. Research has shown that students will achieve more if they are fully engaged in their own learning process. This means that if students know what they need to learn or improve and why, they will achieve more than if they sit passively in a classroom working through writing tasks with no real comprehension either of the learning intention of the exercise, of its relevance or of why it might be important.

In brief, giving feedback involves making time to talk to students and teaching them to be reflective about the learning objectives and about their work and responses. We should never forget that feedback is more effective if it focuses on the learning intention and on the relevance of the task.

Writing to be read, however, does not mean that the teacher will constantly have to read and reply to every single student's piece of writing. Writing to be read only by your teacher is not always motivating, which is why we consider peer reading to be effective too. Through peer reading—and, indirectly, peer assessment—students might be able to clarify their own ideas and understanding of both the learning intention and the aim of the writing task while reading—and, indirectly, marking—other students' work. Asking students to look at examples of other students' work that does and does not meet the set objectives can help them to understand what was required from a task. Looking at different responses can also help students understand the different approaches they could have taken to the task. Writing will then be entirely purposeful.

3. WRITING IN TRANSLATOR EDUCATION AND AUTHENTIC WRITING

In most foreign language classes the conventional teacher-centred classroom has generally given way to a new student-centred approach, but the traditional teaching style continues to call for a major change in translator education. The market and, above all, our students want our Faculties of Translation to supplement conventional instruction with authentic, practice-oriented work through which our future translators can gain autonomy and gradually become skilled professionals.

Indeed, although many translation experts and translators carry on asserting that one can only translate and write correctly into the first language (L1), the market regularly shows that employees with language-related qualifications will be able to function competently in two or three languages and will have no difficulty in writing and translating into and out of any combination of them. Moreover, those students who wish to embark on post-graduate studies will have to invest much time and effort in writing in English, pressure being indeed increasing on many scholars to publish in the medium of English.

English has become the dominant language of publishing in almost every academic field. For example, of the 40, 770 scholarly periodicals indexed by Ulrich's Periodical Directory in 2003, 74% were published in English. Scholars around the



world are coming under mounting pressure to publish in English, often because publication is a major criterion for promotion and financial support for research. (Curry & Lillis, 2004: 8-9)

The learners described in the writing project we are presenting hereafter are 2nd Year students who all have English as their first foreign language. However, the level of language competence and performance varies greatly among individual students. English as a Second Language is an annual core subject worth a total of twelve credits. It is taught for four hours a week throughout the second year of the degree course with these hours generally being timetabled into two two-hour sessions. This class supports another core subject, *Introducción a la Traducción Especializada A/B (inglés)* – translation from Spanish (L1) into English (SL), taught for three hours a week throughout the academic year and designed to help the students apply their existing knowledge of English to translation.

In a traditional teaching context, the teacher is in possession of knowledge which can be transmitted to the students through lectures, explanation and illustration. He/she stands at the front of the class, facing rows of generally passive students who try to ingest or note down every word he/she says. In a language class, whether at primary, secondary or university level, this could mean relatively passive learning and useless ingestion of theoretical knowledge the students will have forgotten in the very few weeks following their exams. Students are thus accustomed to teacher-centred transmission in the classroom and individual product-oriented study outside it. In our second year course we attempt to focus on the process of learning rather than on what they learn in order to provide students with multiple strategies and tools for coping with real work in the outside world.

In providing a rationale for a process approach, students are no longer mere attendants who will eventually be assessed on one, or a couple of assignments, at the teacher's will and whose learning is defined by the teacher's marking criteria. This alternative to the teacher-centred approach—in other words, a learner-centred approach—completely changes the classroom atmosphere, requiring the students to work cooperatively and focusing on how each individual brings different knowledge and experience to the classroom. With this interactive approach, learners identify difficulties, discuss solutions, and also research their own work, with the teacher as a guide or facilitator in the process, the sole aim of this approach being to progress towards autonomy.

The aim of all the writing activities undertaken with the students is to encourage them to consider writing for reading by describing three perspectives: that of the writer, that of the reader, and that of the text. Focusing on each of these components will hopefully make the writing process a more manageable task.

Current theory in both L2 reading and writing emphasizes the interrelationship between the reader, the writer, and the text (Carrell, 1985; Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Carson & Leki, 1993; Grabe, 1991; Zamel, 1992). They all maintain that written communication involves these three essential components and that, in writing for publication, it is all the more important for authors to consider the role that all three of these components play in the writing process.



The first step in writing in order to be read is for writers—in this case, students—to focus on themselves as writers and consider their purpose in writing. They have to begin by considering an issue that is important to them, to reflect on the issue and to feel strongly that their ideas are worth sharing with other students in similar circumstances.

The next step is to focus on their readers and consider what their readers know or do not know about the topic they have chosen. In focusing on the reader, writers need to reflect on why their reader might be interested in reading about their particular topic and what they know about it.

Finally, they need to consider how to develop their text so that it meets their readers' expectations. This has to do with genre. Writers need to clarify for themselves what type of genre is most appropriate for the topic they are writing about. Once writers clarify what type of text they are writing, the next step is to examine a variety of other topic-related texts—in other words, parallel texts—that exemplify this genre, looking for typical moves of the genre as well as stylistic characteristics.

The final step before submitting a manuscript is to get feedback from interested readers. Then, students can ask their classmates to read their papers, raising questions they think any interested reader would want answered. Additional feedback on a manuscript will come during the review process by the teacher.

4. EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITY

As we believe the effective learning of writing must relate both to students' previous knowledge and to targeted professional behaviour, we have designed an activity the aim of which is to express authenticity in the classroom, with real constraints and deadlines, but at the same time guided and supervised by the teacher. The project is inherently collaborative and leads to a great deal of discussion and criticism, both essential elements in the process of writing to be read.

The first step in the process was for the teacher to meet and design a project outline that set up the scaffolding for the task; a framework in which the students could organise themselves autonomously but with a certain uniformity of criteria and roles. Students were asked to take part as speakers in the following conference.

After discussing the topic in class (see warm up activities), the group was divided in teams of three or four students sharing the same ideas. The pedagogical interest of such a division comes within the scope of the process approach defined before:

- Learners support each other – each brings different knowledge and experience to the classroom.
- Interactive – learners identify language and publication difficulties and discuss their solutions, or research their own work, with the teacher as guide/facilitator.
- Progress towards autonomy – the teacher provides scaffolding at the beginning of the activity, with clear instructions. Students work in small groups and



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL STUDIES:
STEREOTYPES AND THE PERCEPTION OF 'OTHERNESS'

This international conference, hosted by the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria will bring together students and teachers working in fields related to one of the following issues:

- Cultural backgrounds, socio-political, ideological and religious frameworks
- Images reaching beyond standardised mental pictures of individuals
- Misunderstandings and misconceptions of ethnic, racial, religious and national groupings
- Stereotypes in translation

Practitioners, trainers, researchers and students interested in participating are kindly asked to send a 200-word abstract before November 30, 2007 by e-mail to: rclouet@dfm.ulpgc.es. The abstract must be sent together with the pre-registration sheet below or downloaded at: <http://www.ulpgc.es>

The host's selection decision will be communicated to the proposer by December 10, 2007, together with information on registration procedure, accommodation and publication guidelines.

Proposers whose papers are approved will have to submit the whole paper text by 20 January 2008 in order to be included in the proceedings.



PRE-REGISTRATION FORM AND EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Please complete the details below and return to the Conference Office by e-mail at the address below.

Title:
Given name:
Surname:
Organization:
Address:
State:
Country:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Fax:
E-Mail:

I am interested in:

- a) attending the Conference
- b) presenting at the Conference
- c) exhibiting at the Conference

Richard Clouet: rclouet@dfm.ulpgc.es



Figura 1.

WORKSHEET - STEREOTYPES: OTHER PEOPLE

Stereotypes are impressions or generalizations that people have about different cultures or groups. There are usually good and bad stereotypes in any culture. Although they may be based in truth, they generally don't reflect the reality of a diverse group of people.

PART 1 STEREOTYPES: NATIONALITIES

Below is a list of nationalities. Write down any impressions or stereotypes you have of the country or its people.

- a. USA/Americans
- b. UK/British
- c. Germany/Germans
- d. India/Indians
- e. China/Chinese
- f. _____ / _____:

Where do you get these impressions from? TV? Movies? Books? ____? Have you ever travelled to these countries?

PART 2 STEREOTYPES: ABOUT SPAIN

People also have stereotypical views of Spain. How do you think non-Spanish people see Spain? Fill in the blanks in the list below with at least one example for each category.
(ex. Food: Spanish people eat paella everyday.)

Culture/Customs:

Sport:

Technology:

Food

Character/Personality:

Homes:

Cities/Countryside:

Education/School:

Work:

Figura 2.

all members of the group work on the same topic at the same pace. There is occasional teacher-centred focus for consolidation of the aims of the task. The teacher gradually withdraws over the course of the project as the learners become more familiar with drawing on their own resources.

After discussing the topic in groups, each team was asked to fill in the following worksheet, simply to help students brainstorm and share more ideas.

Before starting writing their abstracts, students were required to find parallel texts, in other words, a variety of abstracts and articles to exemplify their task. Once all such documents were collected, they had to fill in the following worksheet which would be of considerable help to them when writing their own abstract.

WORKSHEET FOR DRAFTING AN ABSTRACT

The worksheet will be useful for writing an early abstract, before you write the whole paper, and then drafting a final abstract after the paper is completed.

Write two or three sentences for each section to create an overview/summary of your research project. It is often most useful to write without looking at the paper.

PROJECT TITLE

.....
.....

INTRODUCTION/GENERAL PURPOSE

(what is the research about? Why is important or interesting and to whom?)

.....
.....

RESEARCH QUESTION/HYPOTHESIS

(What exactly were you trying to find out?)

.....
.....

METHODS/MATERIALS

(What did you do? How did you do it?)

.....
.....
.....

RESULTS/FINDINGS

(What did you find out?)

.....
.....
.....

DISCUSSION

(How do the findings relate to your original question/hypothesis?)

.....
.....

CONCLUSION

(What do you think it means? Why is this important / interesting?)

.....
.....

You now have the essential elements of an abstract. Use the sentences above to write a SINGLE, COHESIVE PARAGRAPH in as few words as possible (no more than 200 words). The goal of an abstract is to summarize your paper quickly and completely.



Figura 3.

The next step before submitting the abstract to the organizing committee of the conference was to get feedback from other interested readers working on the same topic. Students were then asked to revise and proofread their classmates' work, thus encouraging inter-group interaction and collaboration.

The abstracts could then be submitted to the organizing committee by e-mail for the review process. For L2 learners, the challenge of composing e-mails to authority figures can be great, due not only to possible linguistic problems, but also to their unfamiliarity with the target culture's norms. Thus, the following worksheet was handed out as a guideline to what they were expected to write. In this respect, Chen's article on the development of e-mail literacy is of great help and value (Chen, 2006: 35-55).

Students now had to wait for the notification of acceptance (obviously sent by their teacher by e-mail) or, in the worst case, critical feedback on their abstract. At this stage, it was important for authors to regard reviews not as criticism but as suggestions made by an interested reader. After making the revisions suggested, abstracts could then be sent again to the organizing committee for publication.

The activity can be seen as authentic practice in a collaborative learning environment including interaction among students and the involvement of each student in the teaching/learning process. This proved to be a most rewarding experience, both educationally and socially, as it cannot be stressed enough how positively the fact of working on a real project impacts on group dynamics. It was felt by all those involved that working on the project had been an enriching and fulfilling experience, and well-worth the time and effort involved. The students' motivation levels remained high throughout the process, driven by the circumstance of writing for a real readership and the recognition that the text would be published and made available to a wide audience.

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