**QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE TRANSLATION TEACHER**

**From *“Perceptions of Teachers and Students on the Qualities of an Effective Translation Teacher*” by Zhi Huang**

Mercer (2000, p. 160) suggests that more effective teachers can be distinguished by three characteristics. First, they use questions not just to test knowledge, but also to guide the development of understanding. In a translation classroom, the teacher may use questions to discover students’ understanding of the content and their expectations in order to adjust teaching accordingly and encourage students to reflect on what they are learning. Second, they teach not just 'subject content', but also procedures for solving problems and making sense of experience. In translation teaching, this can include demonstrations of problem-solving strategies, explanations of classroom activities, and interactions with students to encourage them to make explicit their own thought processes. Third, they treat learning as a social and communicative process. This is usually revealed in a translation classroom as discussions of translation theories, skills, issues and problems, with the use of students’ contributions as a resource for building the ‘common knowledge’ of the class in order for them to take a more active role in classroom activities.

The personal qualities of a translation teacher, as Newmark (1991, p. 131) suggests, include those of any good teacher as well as of a translator: “energy, curiosity, enthusiasm, ability to work at speed against a deadline, meticulousness in the smallest details, punctuation,” to name just a few. Basically, in terms of personality, there are three areas: “personal qualities” that are attractive; “professional qualities and experience” that are reflected in course design and choice of materials; and “general knowledge of culture” (Newmark, 1991, p. 131).

According to Newmark (1991, pp. 129-130), the translation teacher should possess a “fortiori,” the four professional translator’s skills: (a) sensitivity; (b) a wide knowledge of the language and culture of habitual use, and as a teacher, the metalanguage derived from a grounding in linguistics to describe and categorize linguistic terms; (c) a good knowledge of the topics; (d) knowledge of two or three foreign languages and cultures. Therefore, translation teaching requires not only a good teacher personality, but also the adequate skills to encourage students to reach their full potential. One challenge could be to teach someone who is more gifted than you, since as a translation teacher, your personality is expressed in your attitude: “your job is to help a wide range of students, many brighter than you are.” In other words, “translation is for discussion” (Newmark, 1991, p. 132).

Translation teaching is “as complex, divided and sophisticated an activity as much translation itself” (Newmark, 1991, p. 139). It is a dynamic process, so the teachers are supposed to play different roles in it. Sim (2000, p. 172) gives essential components of translation teaching at both professional and practical level, including knowledge of two languages and cultures with implementation skills of P.A.L.M., known as “planning, administration, leadership and management”.

Newmark points out that “the success of any translation course must depend 65% on the personality of the teacher, 20% on the course design and 15% on the course materials” (1991, p. 130). As a university translation teacher, it is also his or her job to put students’ job prospects into consideration, motivating them to acquire translation skills as a professional qualification and teaching what is useful or valuable to them in their future professions (Klein-Braley, 1996).

In terms of classroom teaching, since Kiraly (1995, p. 9) suggests that translation students should be “active participants in their training, especially at the university,” effective translation teachers should adopt a student-centered approach in translation pedagogy. It is also essential that teachers should help students in classroom teaching strive towards “group endeavor to find the best solutions to certain given problems” (Côté, 1990, p. 441). Communicative approach, therefore, has important implications for translation training. In other words, communicative translation skills should be introduced starting from the undergraduate level (Peverati, 2009). Since translation is a professional rather than an academic exercise, teachers need to help students learn to apply the skills they acquired in real translation contexts. Various tasks can be used in such training to emphasize “the translation process, its function or the product” (Davies, 2005, p. 73). Furthermore, as translation is not simply dependent on language skills, the relevant pedagogies should not be identical to those applied to language teaching, they should have their unique characteristics instead. Kiraly (1995, p. 38) proposes a model for translation pedagogy, in which there are three levels − namely sources, foundations and principles, and practice. Level 1 focuses on translation processes and competences on the basis of various disciplines; level 2 comprises theory development, and level 3 stands for the practical methodology development.

It is necessary for translation teachers to draw on and apply in classroom teaching the skills translation students need, which, according to Critchley, Hartley and Salkie (1996, p. 104), apart from a good command of both the source and the target languages, are the abilities to “target the text,” “apply a coherent typology of texts in formulating a translation strategy,” “know enough about the relevant specialized field,” “be familiar with the special terminology,” and “be able to write good target language of the appropriate kind.” Sometimes there is also a dilemma whether to teach students translation only, or train them to be more active and proficient in translation markets. Kearns (2008) suggests that translation teachers should keep a balance of academic translation teaching and vocational training.

In a typical translator education classroom, the teacher is seen as an authoritative figure, passing their knowledge to a group of students (Kiraly, 2003). The students are usually passively receiving tuition without critical thinking and creativity. However, as Kiraly (2003) points out, if the teaching of translation was just transmission of knowledge and information, there would be no need to talk about how to improve teaching. The genuine translation teaching, based on the communicative approach, should be collaborative and authentic, with a focus on the interaction between students and teachers, as well as on the real translation contexts. In such a classroom, the translation teacher is a facilitator rather than a transmissionist, encouraging class interactions and discussions between the teacher and the students, and among students themselves. In other words, translation classes should “adapt to the students and encompass a variety of pedagogical approaches, laying the emphasis on pedagogical or on professional activities” (M. G. Davies, 2005, p. 69). Such student-centered classes will “provide a stimulus for learner autonomy,” in which even “the passive and silent translation student becomes an active participant where pair and group work are carried out” (M. G. Davies, 2005, p. 70).

Once basic pedagogy principles are set, translation teachers ought to design various classroomteaching techniques to help students develop their translation knowledge and skills. Sainz (1992, pp. 70-73) outlines several translation teaching techniques for carrying out classroom activities, which include: introduction passages, back-translation of students’ own work, comparing students’ translations with published versions, collaborative translation, reporting to a group or to the class, and transcribing and translating. Whatever techniques are used, the key is to promote discussions and interactions in the classroom with a student-centered orientation. Newmark (1991, p. 145) has a statement on this, which can be regarded as a conclusion on the teaching of translation:

*‘Teaching about translation’ means discussing translations, switching from examples to generalizations and back to examples, and in the course of the discussion, firing, inspiring students to continue, to collect examples and learn for themselves. It is a dynamic pragmatic activity, miles away from any academic study of translatology.”*