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Awareness that translation can provide operational terms and methodological tools for understanding the processes shaping today’s changing cultural realities is generally very low, even for school textbooks’ authors, teachers and parents. Drawing from my experience as an academic teacher of translation and instructor for secondary school translation workshops I will discuss how translation could be used in school curricula. However, making translation and translators present at school will meet with systemic obstacles if there is not a wider presence of Translation Studies in teacher training programmes and university education in humanities. Paraphrasing Auden’s famous line, I claim that “translation makes something happen” and that one of the aims of university courses in translation is to help future educators understand this truth.

Key-words: translation, Translation Studies, secondary education, globalized world, Joseph Conrad

Education in the Humanities and the Change

Why the translator’s voice should be heard at school and why anybody should care about its audibility are particularly valid questions in an era when the position of humanities in education has become subject to debate. More than ever before we are aware today of the general shift in education from knowledge centred models towards skill-targeted ones where every element of the curriculum is checked for its practical application. This general tendency leads to reducing the syllabuses in the areas of literary and culture education to not much more that sets of basic tools useful in so called ‘real-life’ situations, turning any deeper
interest in those fields into a hobby or a pastime. This reductionist tendency may be seen as perilous: the role of reading and text interpretation is changing in a way that causes anxiety for teachers. The modifications introduced in the programmes for secondary schools in Poland indeed do testify to this.\textsuperscript{1} At the same time, the so called ‘real-life’ or cultural context in which students function has also been undergoing deep transformations in recent decades. These changes are perforce reflected in the construction of education programmes as well as in the ways of their implementation and reception.

One of the powerful factors in this context is the technological revolution which redefines the goals and methods of education by introducing a radical change in the environment students inhabit. Electronic equipment, software and the Internet rather than printed media have become the basic channels for communication, interaction, culture transmission and consumption, as well as education.\textsuperscript{2} The difference this introduces into the dynamics of teaching/learning processes is the fact that the nature of the message transmitted via the Internet is basically intersemiotic, combining text, sound and image. It is also interactive, prompting the users to take part in shaping the messages. Recipients in more and more cases become participants.

Technology works (and sells) globally, the net of interrelations among participants of culture is also of global range, and its functioning to a large extent ignores the traditional divisions of nationality and language. We inhabit a seemingly one-dimensional world of global culture with one boundless space of communication and interrelation. The participants of culture take in huge amounts of information from very different contexts. The number of variables is infinite, as is the number of their combinations. One has to constantly react to changing situations, so interpretive skills become central. The outcome of interpretation processes – more or less fortunate – is nevertheless a fascinating object of study. The sphere of global
communication is a meeting place of radically different languages, cultural positions, sets of values and ideas.

It would be naive to think that in this changing model of participation in culture the cultural differences between its participants are reduced. Globalization, for all its unifying force, tends to highlight rather than hide them. Students around the world may use the same communicators, chat in any language (or a language hybrid) they know, play the same computer games, watch the same films, listen to the same music, but they still enter the flat world of global communication with the luggage of their specific cultural background. The input they offer, their active participation, is marked by their specificity and differences.

When thinking of possible implications this new model of culture participation has for education in humanities, what seems obvious is a strong stress on the activity, intellectual agility, creativity, and interpretation skills necessary to negotiate cultural spaces. In order to become efficient in moving between these spaces, students need to be proficient at recognizing meaningful information, decoding it, understanding the difference it introduces, interpreting it in the context of their own position and producing a response. It may be surprising to realize that these qualities have always been at the core of arts and humanities.

Overcoming obstacles in understanding, negotiating distances between participants in cultural dialogue and producing appropriate creative responses to messages is the very central element of hermeneutics or the art of interpretation.\(^3\)

The stereotypical juxtaposition of passivity and art-for-art-sakeishness of humanities, and literary studies in particular, with the active and pragmatic character of hard science and business-related education is not only superficial and short-sighted but fundamentally false. As the Polish writer-reporter Ryszard Kapuściński said, it is the stories we tell that make us human and it is the ability to understand other people’s stories that is the condition of our survival in the plural words we inhabit.\(^4\) Perhaps it is even more true in the context of the new
dimensions of communication today’s students already enjoy and are going to shape and develop in future.

I believe that the voice of the translator may and should be heard at school. In this paper I would like to look at how this could be achieved in school literary education by introducing the concept of translation through its role as a model for intercultural communication in the globalized world. The new forms of cultural participation have a number of positive implications for the development of literary education at school. An analysis of translation offers students insights into ways of understanding, interpreting and creating cultural texts. There is a clearly visible parallel between what translation does and what happens in global communication patterns. I claim that the study of translation may be helpful in developing approaches to teaching humanities that would respond both to the changing landscape of today’s culture and the changing needs of students today. They must learn how to navigate the global environment, be ready for the experience of the ‘other’ and be able to understand differences in order to overcome or problematize obstacles in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication.

Contemporary Translation Studies and the Turns

Before discussing this issue though, it is necessary to look at Translation Studies in the context of the dynamic development and reorganization the discipline has experienced in the last couple of decades. Translation Studies has undergone a gradual shift from the research domain of linguistics and philology towards the much wider space of (inter)cultural studies. This can be traced in the way the concept of translation has been defined in different periods. The definitions formulated at the early stage of the discipline’s history are strongly philologically oriented and normative in character. Later ones, formulated already within the context of the cultural turn in Translation Studies, open up the field to encompass a much wider set of phenomena and to adopt a descriptive rather than normative position.
Lefevere’s (1995) understanding of translation as a form of refraction or re-writing, opens the field of translation research even further to include objects and processes that language oriented methodologies would reject as not belonging to the scope of Translation Studies at all. Another important step was taken by Maria Tymoczko who in her 2006 book put forth the idea of “enlarging translation” and radically broadened the definition to say that translation is a cross-cultural cluster concept of open and permeable borders, grouped together on the family resemblance principle. According to Tymoczko, there are three broad “cultural interfaces” or modes within which translation operates: representation, transmission and transculturation. This definition reorganizes the scope of translation research. Translation Studies as a discipline is no longer limited to the issues of interlingual text transfer, but now contributes to broader debates within the humanities and society.

Turning away from the structural linguistics-inspired methodology and returning to concepts rooted in antiquity, contemporary Translation Studies views translation not as an inter-linguistic operation aiming at a recreation of the same sense in a different medium, but as an act of intercultural meaning creation and communication. On the one hand, translation is seen as being strongly conditioned by its positionality and entangled in a number of ideological constraints; on the other, it is viewed against the philosophical and philological tradition of hermeneutics as a framework for understanding and construing the world of human experience. The concepts produced within Translation Studies have been adapted in other areas of cultural studies. Doris Bachmann-Medick who writes about the translation turn in Cultural Studies claims that no matter how we analyze intercultural communication, religious interaction or conflicts, integration strategies in multicultural societies or relations between humanities and hard science, it is the translation processes that supply a methodological framework for the description. She predicts that the translation turn which has been present for instance in post-colonial and feminist studies is certain to become the future theoretical
and systematic paradigm for social and cultural research aimed at understanding the ways human beings produce meanings. It is against such a backdrop that George Steiner, drawing on the hermeneutical tradition, defined translation as the *conditio humana*, the human condition, and placed it at the core of any act of language use and every act of understanding.\(^{11}\) It is translation we live by, claims Steiner. The same idea permeates Paul Ricoeur’s writing on translation as “linguistic hospitality,”\(^ {12}\) a radical act of trust and of understanding self as other. Jacques Derrida writes as well that the human fate to translate and be translated is the gift of the Tower of Babel, an opening of the diversity of cultures, an invitation to comprehend the ‘other.’\(^ {13}\) These hermeneutical ideas, present in Western thought for centuries, surface more and more often in contemporary translation research, as it tries to come to grips with the reality we live in.\(^ {14}\) In the multilingual, multicultural world of mass migration, the boundaries between cultures, instead of being division lines, become centres of hybrid in-between spaces where new cultural values are created and where new conflicts begin.\(^ {15}\)

The everyday experience of living in increasingly multicultural societies creates a demand for a set of operational terms and methodological tools for navigating the complex spaces of culture. At the same time, all and every text of culture, when seen from the point of view of translation, reveals its inherent hybridity.\(^ {16}\) Every translator and, by extension, every foreign reader, looks at a text from a perspective different from that of an insider. Translation thus means understanding differently, forming an alien point of view, and always destabilizes the seemingly stable senses, minorizes and foreignizes the text.\(^ {17}\) By introducing change in the linguistic set-up and the contextual sphere of its implications and connotations, translation makes any text equivocal and problematic.

Back to School
Unfortunately, the visibility of translators and translations, and awareness that translation can teach one to understand the processes shaping today’s cultural realities, are generally very low. This is also true for educators, textbooks authors, teachers and parents, who in most cases are ignorant of translation’s meaning as a layer of culture (or even the sheer fact that it is there), the problems it poses and the possibilities it opens up to readers in general and to teachers of literature and culture in particular. The new or renewed findings of Translation Studies have not yet secured their place in academic curricula and programmes in humanities, and in teachers’ training. Much of what is written on translation, especially for the general reading audience, usually still takes for granted its “second hand – second rate” status. Translation is perceived as visible only in negative terms, when it seems inadequate or marked, or eccentric. Analysis concentrates on ‘mistakes’ on the part of the translator. Fundamental as the need for making translation and translators present at school is, it will not be satisfied without the more extensive presence of Translation Studies in university education in the humanities.

As well as teaching translation and Translation Studies at the university, I have given translation workshops to students at both university and secondary levels of education. In 2011, I published a translation of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness into Polish. The novella is included in secondary school reading lists in Poland, and I have been invited by schools and other institutions to speak about Conrad’s masterpiece and teach lessons in understanding translation. In what follows I would like to present some of the observations and conclusions I have formed on the basis of this experience, with respect to teaching literary translation to secondary school students, introducing the concept of translation and showing its cultural significance. I sketch out some possible topics and tasks for translation analysis classes. I also attempt to show how to use translation as a model for processing cultural texts generally in the multicultural and multilingual environment in which the students live.
My experience is that discussions of translation with secondary school students are in most cases very successful. There is an element of discovery present in them from the very start. The students are able to relate to the problem of communication across languages, and there is also a potential for a creative element, often in the form of a follow-up activity. Not being a practicing school teacher, I am fully aware that my experience is limited and some of my claims may prove false or impractical in everyday school applications. Still, as I teach translation and Translation Studies as well as literature on an everyday basis at the university, I do believe the space between the two (translation and literature) is a rich common ground.

I would like to briefly discuss three separate but interconnected aspects of translator’s work, relate them to the needs of global culture participants and then look at them from the point of view of possible classroom applications. These three aspects which are, in my view, common to the work of translators and interpreters of culture, are:

1. reading and interpreting – related to overcoming various obstacles in communication and responding to the impact of different media;
2. describing and comparing – related to understanding differences in intercultural and interlingual communication;
3. assessing and creating – related to reaffirming one’s own position in the intercultural dialogue and taking active part in it.

Reading and Interpreting

The most immediate question that comes round at the beginning of any discussion of translation is: “What does it mean that a text is a translation?” The obvious answer is that it was written originally in a different/foreign language and then translated into (say, in this case) Polish. There are several directions this opening may suggest, one of them being the difference this makes for the reading of the text: do we read translations in the same way we read originals? The discovery the students often make at this point is that there is more than
one way to read a translation. Either you read it as a replacement of the original, as if it were the original; or you read it as a translation in order to relate it to some other texts, i.e. the original and/or other translations into the same or another language. Each of these reading procedures serves different purposes and is prototypically practiced by a different kind of readership (popular vs. professional) with a different aim in view (enjoyment or information vs. study and criticism). This distinction is an important point for young readers as it raises the question of their own reading strategies and techniques.

The next question seems to be even more revealing: in what way do translators read? It’s a commonplace to say that translation involves a particularly intense form of close reading, that it goes deeply into the text linguistically and culturally. This kind of reading becomes a dialogue between the reader and the text, as the translator must not only grasp all the features of the text (semantic and formal, but also contextual) but also be able to recreate them. The concept of “reading for translating” makes the students aware of the inner construction of texts, the units they are built upon, the structure of language used, the making of literary effects. Again there is more than one way of developing the topic at this stage depending on the concept of the lesson as well as the material chosen for analysis.

One possible direction leads towards the differences between language systems and ultimately may lead towards the pessimistic, though revealing conclusion that, in a fundamental way, all languages understood as word-views and stylistic repertoires are untranslatable. On the other hand there is always the optimistic reverse to this conclusion: in spite of the fundamental difficulty, translations have been produced and read for millennia and that any translation is proof of victory over untranslatability. All these issues may potentially turn the students’ attention towards the nature of intercultural communication, particularly to the fact that form (language) is a vital part of the message and that all meanings are contextually bound.
Another idea to discuss is the semantic potential of the linguistic make-up of texts and the power of language which is highlighted in comparative analysis. Examples, either bi-lingual (translation vs. original) or monolingual comparisons (in case of works with parallel translations) can show how much is expressed by means of stylistic and poetic techniques and conventions. Translation offers students a rare opportunity to study the limitations but also the possibilities of conveying meanings through style. This kind of reading also helps them understand that texts are not made up of ideas but of words (one is reminded of Williams’ famous adage: “no ideas but in things”) which is a discovery fundamental to understanding the mechanism of meaning creation, including for example communicative efficiency, encoded messages and language manipulation. In this way, translation analysis helps develop the most important communication skills.

In this context the physicality of the work of literary art can also be brought to the fore: words are not only abstract signs connoting ideas, but they have their sound, visual aspect, aura and fields of associations. Meaning arises from the multidimensional intersemiotic relations within and among words. Reading for translation means approaching the text as an artist would, as if from the inside, treating words as a material for creative activity, as opposed to the standard school-type interpretation which tends to use reading to encourage pre-defined meanings. Translation analysis is a unique opportunity for students to experience the process of multi-dimensional meaning creation.

Another aspect revealed in reading for translation is narrative voice. From my perspective as a translator of narrated fiction voice plays a crucial role in the construction of the text. The speaking subject – a personality, a voice – is the central element upon which the linguistic construction of the textual world hinges. The text is never anonymous, it is the reader’s task is to answer the question ‘who is speaking?’ The reader-translator has to imagine the speaking character (whether a hero or a narrator), to see the person behind the communication. This
aspect of reading for translation illuminates the human element at work in any cultural text, and helps students understand the thoroughly communicative nature of cultural texts, as well as what this implies: their positionality, historicity and subjectivity. The objective nature of linguistic messages is put on trial here and the teacher has a chance to highlight the relative value and context dependence of any text.

In the case of my principal example, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, this aspect of the text is particularly salient (though I claim that it is fundamental with any narrative) because of the Chinese boxes structure of the novel. Marlowe, whose voice we hear through most of the text, is not the principal narrator. His voice functions within a double frame: the situation in which he actually tells the story (on board Nellie anchored on the Thames) and the narrative situation of one of his listeners retelling it. Conrad’s text itself becomes an exercise in ‘translating’ and negotiating the distance in time and space between the source and the final recipient.

Describing and Comparing

A session in reading for translation already includes a fair amount of translation comparison, and opens up a space for describing translations as texts in relation to other texts. The very fact that there can be more than one translation of the same work of literature (as is the case with the Polish renditions of *Heart of Darkness*), whether in one language or across languages, prompts a number of questions: why do we need more than one version of the text? What is the reason behind re-translating? What do we mean when we say that translation ages? Who decides that a new version should be produced and on what basis? How is the new translator chosen? What is the role of the translator in all those processes?

These questions leave the area traditionally cut out for talking about literature. They concern the social and institutional context in which literary texts function and construe translation as a social practice. Discussing them may help explain that literature belongs to the universe of
discourses, and is an element in a web of interconnected subsystems of social communication. These concepts, fascinating as they are, may be too complex for secondary school students, especially given that to discuss them is any reasonable way one has to consider broad social and cultural contexts in historical perspective. Nevertheless, even if only mentioned, they introduce the importance of extra-literary factors in the processes underlying “the manipulation of literary fame.” I usually put some effort into trying to prove that changes in the language of translation are not the most important reason behind the differences in translations; nor is the ageing of language the main reason for producing new renderings.

Still, the linguistic and stylistic differences between particular renditions are immediately striking in a comparative analysis of parallel translations. In the case of *Heart of Darkness* I had four existing versions to “compete” with: a classical, authorised translation done by Aniela Zagórska in the 1920s and three later versions published in the 1990s, very soon after Conrad’s writing entered the public domain. There are numerous ways in which to compare translations – students intuitively look for signs of text ageing in the older versions: archaic vocabulary, syntax and stylistic conventions. In more recent translations they look for the presence of contemporary language. The claim they seem to have ready at hand is that the language changes and so we need new translations. It is a surprise to them to discover that this is not necessarily always the case. They learn at least two things. One is that authors of new translations quite often use the technique of archaization in order to imitate the original. The other is that it is not always true that the older translation is always more difficult to read or even incomprehensible.

The delicate matter of literary and stylistic excellence comes to the fore in this context. It is a difficult notion to introduce and discuss not just because it involves subjective judgements but also because the students have to move beyond the level of lexical meaning of individual items of vocabulary to look at their stylistic make up. Nonetheless, I would argue that these
complex questions prove more accessible for students in the context of an analysis of competing renditions than in a discussion of a single text.

Another outcome of the comparative reading of translations is the discovery of the relative indeterminacy of translation. This phenomenon strongly influences our understanding of the notion of equivalence. The fact that different translators produce different translations of the same source text, all of which are basically correct undermines the concept of sense to sense correspondence.\textsuperscript{25} Without going too deeply into the philosophical debate of the matter, students may still profit from such a hands-on encounter with understanding linguistic signs or signs in different arbitrary systems. The basic lesson is that there is no such thing as stable, objective meaning. Hence there is always space for misunderstanding. No translation is final or correct; no translation can fully represent the text. Translation always adds something to the message of the text. Understanding is conditioned by the interpretative horizon of the interpreter so translation is a risky endeavour, especially if it entails negotiating relatively big distances in time or space.

Assessing and Creating

The position of the translator is the main focus in the third area I discuss. Although I am never tired of repeating that the main stress in any discussion of translation must be on descriptive analysis and not on critical assessment, there is an intuitive tendency towards judgemental attitudes as far as translation is concerned. Assessing translators’ choices and decisions though is a natural part of the discussion and what is more, a particularly satisfying one, so it would be unfair to deny the students the right to enjoy it. The more so that translation criticism is an important (though often neglected) field in contemporary Translation Studies. The skill that the students can develop in this stage of the discussion is how to define one’s position and find arguments to defend it. The difficult part is to make students go beyond sheer impressionism and stereotypical views and relate their opinions to the texts.
Certainly offering students an opportunity to produce their own translations and study their attempts yields some of the most interesting educational effects. The difficulty of the task becomes visible, both at the stage of the comprehension of the original and at the stage of its rendition into the target language. Usually it is this latter task that proves to be much more difficult. “I know what it means but I don’t know how to say it in Polish,” is a very common remark. In the process of translating, all the issues discussed above are highlighted, as if seen through a magnifying glass.

What needs stressing is that it is not the comprehension and processing of the source text that is the most challenging part of the task. Surprisingly, what is easily said and understood in the original language poses insurmountable difficulties in the process of transfer to the target language. The problems stem from the fact that the inexperienced student writers cannot find ways of liberating themselves from the structure of the original sentences. The interference of the original structure blocks the use of good, efficient Polish style. Young translators produce sentences they would never thought of writing in a text in their native tongue. Another source of difficulty stems from the fact that the close reading they are engaged in before actually translating a passage reveals many possible meanings in the text they are about to translate. The nuances and complications discovered in the process of ‘reading for translation’ make it very hard to decide what the target version should look, sound, mean like.

Alternately then, one could reverse the order of activities. It might be a good idea to start the translation class with an exercise in production and only then go on to the discussion of the gains and losses, the compromises reached or the interpretations revealed. The next stage would be the comparison with existing translations and a study of the meanings as produced by different interpretations and their contexts. The reflection on the issue of reading for translation and the nature of translation as a genre would come by way of conclusion. I find that a rather high level of flexibility in the lesson design and opening up to the
unexpectedness of developing classroom situations is the best way to introduce the topic, perhaps because such an attitude seems to be inherent to the very core of what happens in translation. It also reflects the surprising character of any interpretive negotiation of linguistic and cultural distances within multimedial globalized culture.

Making Something Happen

In her book *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* Martha Nussbaum argues for studies in literature as a fundamental element of the education of ‘citizens of the world.’ It seems obvious to me that translation, which is the mode of communication for citizens of today’s globalized world, can play a major role in preparing young people for living in such a cultural environment. The would-be world citizen, as Nussbaum stresses, must become “a sensitive and empathic interpreter”26 of other people’s perspectives, values and behavior. She claims that “education at all ages should cultivate the capacity for such interpreting.”27 My presentation of some possible uses translation may be put to at school was inspired by the observation that being “a sensitive and empathic interpreter” of what others say and mean is in fact one of the most apt definitions of the job of the translator. In its most fundamental sense translation signifies understanding the ‘other.’ The same lies at the core of hermeneutics.28 Through studying translation young people are able to see and hear others, to notice their own otherness, to gain a strong conviction that it is worthwhile to communicate and help others understand in order to communicate.

In his lecture “Translator, the figure of the 21st century,” delivered during the First World Congress of Translators of Polish Literature, Ryszard Kapuściński said that the role of translators in the multicultural world is “to make us aware of the existence of different literatures and cultures, the existence of the other, who is separate and unique, the fact that we form the great human family and it is the condition of our survival that we get to know one another better, accept each other, live together.”29 For this reason, Kapuściński goes on, the
role of translators is so fundamental, since they can understand the experience of the other in the world which is so varied and complex it needs incessant translation. By teaching students to understand translation, and letting them experience its reading and creating, we do not teach a skill, a linguistic technique or a marginal issue in literature. Rather we introduce students to one of the most basic modes of “cultivating humanity,” to use Nussbaum’s title. Paraphrasing Auden’s famous line I claim that “translation makes something happen.”

Bibliography

Secondary Sources


Notes

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For a wider view of the revolution in education brought about by the revolution in technology see Collins and Halverson’s book *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology: The Digital Revolution and the Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009). The authors claim that we are witnessing a beginning of a new, third phase in education. The apprentice era has been replaced by the schooling system era but we can already notice the “seeds” of a lifelong learning era where one of the striking changes is a shift in responsibility for education form the state to parents in the case of young students and individuals. The change in content the authors notice is from the knowledge in different disciplines to generic skills, such as problem solving and communication in different media, and on finding resources and learning from them. In pedagogy the change is from didacticism to interaction as well as from the relation to authority figure to computer mediated interaction.


28 George Steiner, “Translation as *conditio humana*,” pp. 1-11.
