DEVELOPING GUIDELINES FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN TEXTBOOK OF TRANSLATION

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Abstract

The declaration of eleven languages as the official languages of South Africa brought about an increased need for translation and language planning in South Africa. However, many students of translation experience difficulty to produce quality translations, even after completing a course in translation. The purpose of this article is to report the findings of the original research on an investigation of the possible cause of this problem, as well as to find a possible solution to the problem. The results of the study show that the reason for this problem might be the training of translation students by using foreign textbooks and the lack of a South African textbook of translation. The findings further suggest that a translation textbook true to the South African context might be the solution to this problem. This study focuses on developing guidelines for the compilation of such a textbook.

Keywords: Translation, students, textbook, guidelines, quality, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1994, Afrikaans and English were the only official languages of South Africa (South African Government, 2009:32-33). Following the first democratic elections, the South African Constitution declared eleven languages to be the official languages of South Africa (Article 6(1): The Constitution, Act 108 of 1996:4 (South Africa, 1996:4). This change presented several linguistic problems that resulted in an increased need for translation and language planning in South Africa (Ferreira, 2002:1-7).

According to Naudé (2005:38), translation can, however, not be separated from the society and the culture in which it takes place. The fact that universities in South Africa make use of translation textbooks written by foreign translation experts to train students of translation (Liu, 2007:107), might be the answer to Marais's (2008:49) question of why some South African students cannot translate once they have completed a course in translation.

A South African textbook of translation that deals with translation problems and expectations true to the South African context might be the answer to this problem (Liu, 2007:107 & 117).

The data for this study were primarily obtained by interviewing translation lecturers from three universities: the Central University of Technology, Free State; the University of the Free State; and the North-West University.

These lecturers also completed questionnaires on textbooks currently in use in second year translation education. Furthermore, literature reviews of the study guides, the textbooks used by the participating universities, and other literature sources were conducted.

According to Haynes (2001:15), textbook research entails research into the market and context in which a textbook will be used, as well as an evaluation of the current textbooks used.

In the following sections, the aforementioned aspects of textbook research will be investigated and information obtained in each will ultimately be used to propose guidelines for a South African textbook of translation.

2. THE MARKET FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN TEXTBOOK OF TRANSLATION

According to Juta (2009:3), prospective authors should identify the readership profile of the book and, if it is intended for student use, it should " … state the nature and level of the courses for which it is suited, together with the type of institution and the department most likely to be responsible for the course."

Ferreira (2010a:1), on the other hand, argues that a broad overview of general translation theory should be offered in the first year. This approach suggests that the theory should be made more applicable to the South African specific context in the second year, which is where a textbook that is more South African specific should be used.

Marais (2010a) concurs with Ferreira's (2010a) point of view above. Marais begins with a general introduction to global translation theory in the first year, while only making students aware that their contexts play a role. He would then address both South African and international theory from the second year onwards, focusing on potential differences in theory.

Kruger (2010a) argues that such a textbook should be a resource that is utilised over three years of study, with different sections for different fields of translation study. Thus, Kruger agrees with Ferreira (2010a) and Marais (2010a) that it should complement, and not replace, international translation theory.

3. THE CONTEXT OF A SOUTH AFRICAN TEXTBOOK OF TRANSLATION

This entails enquiring information on the syllabi, courses, forms of assessment, student background and the resources and types of support available to students of translation in South Africa (Haynes, 2001:15-17).

3.1.   Syllabi

Research into translation syllabi is used to indicate aspects of translation in which second-year students should acquire knowledge (Haynes, 2001:17). The discussions below were derived from the learning guides of the universities participating in the study.

The Central University of Technology, Free State, addresses equivalence at word level; equivalence above word level; grammatical equivalence; advertising and the translation of advertisements; textual equivalence: cohesion; pragmatic equivalence: coherence; and ethics and morality in translation.

The University of the Free State provides students with a general introduction to creative translation, after which they address translating culture; functionalism in literary translation; and the translation of humour and advertisements.

The North-West University addresses theoretical perspectives on translation practice in the first semester, and copy-editing and technological skills for Language Practice in the second semester.

3.2.   Student background

This refers to the educational background of students who will be using the textbook. According to Haynes (2001:18), it is important to note how a textbook should relate to its readers' prior and future learning.

This implies that the textbook must be suitable for students who have already successfully completed their first year of translation study, developed their knowledge to a second year level of translation theory – while linking it to the first year knowledge – and it should prepare them for the third year of translation study.

Students at the Central University of Technology, Free State, are mainly Afrikaans, English and Sesotho first language speakers. The Sesotho first language speakers are in the majority. These students have all passed grade 12 with an average of 60% for at least two official regional languages, and have passed Translation in their first year of study (Ferreira, 2010b:1).

Students at the University of the Free State have a grade 12 National Senior Certificate and have passed the first year of Translation. Second year Translation students are mainly Afrikaans, Sesotho and Setswana (Geldenhuys, 2010:1).

The North-West University draws students from different linguistic backgrounds, namely Afrikaans, English, Sesotho and isiZulu (Kruger, 2010a:2).

4.   AN EVALUATION OF CURRENT TEXTBOOKS

In this section, the strengths and weaknesses of books used in second year translation studies at the participating institutions were assessed in order to identify niche or topics / themes that may be neglected in these books, but that need to be addressed (Haynes, 2001:15; 21 & 24). Lecturers from the three participating universities were requested to complete two questionnaires on textbooks they prescribed for their second year translation students.

The Central University of Technology, Free State, uses In Other Words: A coursebook on translation (by Baker). When requested to complete the questionnaire on the first (1992) edition of the textbook in 2010 (before the 2011 edition was published), Ferreira believed that the textbook was very authoritative. She stated that the book is comprehensive, as it provided extensive research on the theory associated with equivalence in translation, as well as suitable examples from different language combinations. According to Ferreira (2010b), the book was well written, easy to understand and very clear on what the author wanted readers to understand. She perceived the book as well organised, as the book starts off with elementary problems and gradually moves to the more complex problems of equivalence within translation. Although it had been published in 1992, it addressed the typical problems of equivalence within translation and provided solutions on how to deal with equivalence in translation, and could thus be seen as up to date regarding the theory of equivalence in translation (Ferreira, 2010b).

She stated that it was an excellent textbook, except that all examples were from languages foreign to the South African student. The theory component was of great value, but students did not always seem to grasp how to apply the theory into practice. In her opinion, the reason for this could be that they do not have enough background to apply the principles, and that they need to be tutored in the application of these principles.

Ferreira (2010b) argues that nothing should be altered with regard to the theory itself. However, she stated that it would be helpful if examples were of such a nature that students could identify with the examples in the languages of their choice.

Students should also be able to use these examples to explain how equivalence may be obtained in the languages from and into which they are working.

The Central University of Technology, Free State started using the second (2011) edition of the book in 2012. When Ferreira was asked in 2012 if her opinion had changed, she confirmed that the feedback given in 2010 was still valid, and that she had merely updated to the newer version. We changed the details in this study to the new version to make it more recent, but the feedback given regarding the textbook is still relevant.

The University of the Free State does not use a textbook in the second year, but has compiled a module guide consisting of articles on subjects related to creative translation. These focus on the translation of headings, advertisements, humour, weather forecasts, jokes, etc. (Marais, 2010c).

The North-West University uses Translation: An advanced resource book (by Hatim & Munday). Partridge (2010) is of the opinion that the textbook is authoritative, but that it is comprehensive because the theories are carefully explained and examples are provided to provide further clarity. She also states that the core readings in the textbook are invaluable. In her opinion, the book is well pitched and the material is presented in a well constructed manner. The book is well organised because it consists of three sections: an introduction (in which key terms and concepts are introduced); an extension (in which selected core readings are introduced); and an exploration (in which more examples are provided).

However, a problem often experienced with the book is students' need for examples in their working languages (Partridge, 2010). Partridge (2010) further states that the module in which the book is used, is an introductory module to translation theory and that time is limited. Therefore only the first seven units in the textbook are discussed. The rest of the contents in the textbook are discussed comprehensively in other modules (Partridge, 2010).

5. TAILORING A TEXTBOOK TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT AND THE NEEDS OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS OF TRANSLATION

Lecturers from the participating universities completed a questionnaire in order to answer the following questions:

- What could make a South African textbook of translation more appropriate to a second year South African translation class?
- In which regard could such a book be more modernised?
- How can such a textbook break new ground?
- What new approaches could be followed that would be to the advantage of second year translation students in South Africa?

Ferreira (2010c) from the Central University of Technology, Free State, points out that theory and practical applications true to the South African context could make a South African textbook of translation more appropriate to a second year South African translation class. The book should preferably concentrate on the theory explained regarding practical application in the South African languages, and enable students to obtain first-hand experience in solving practical problems in their target languages (Ferreira, 2010c). Furthermore, she believes that our approach to translation is different from that of other countries, as it has language planning at its core.

South African translators do not only have to deal with the translation of documents into indigenous languages, but these languages also need to be developed – a situation in which translators play a crucial role. Therefore, the approach used in the textbook should also support language planning and development, to enable students to understand the measures necessary to facilitate translation. She also states that writers should offer readers hands-on exercises that facilitate the learners' exploration of theory through several experiential channels: visuals, kinaesthetic and auditory (Ferreira, 2010c).

According to Marais (2010c) from the University of the Free State, the most obvious advantage of a localised textbook would be examples used. He believes that the book should deal with South African data, including orality, the informal language practice industry in which translators have to operate, and the developmental nature of its context (Marais, 2010c). The textbook should theorise its context, rather than other contexts. It could focus on the informal economy and community work / service learning in Language Practice. He further states that delivering into orality and its features would be meaningful, and looking at the role of translators in developing communities could add value to translation education (Marais, 2010c).

Kruger (2010b) from North-West University suggests a two-volume textbook that would include both theory and practice. It is her view that South African students would benefit most from a textbook that " … illustrates the usefulness of theory by means of case studies and examples of texts in languages and from context that (they) are familiar with".

Many students struggle with translation theory because they do not really understand the applications used to explain them. Therefore, a textbook with South African, African and global applications would be ideal (Kruger, 2010b).

Discussions of practical translation and translation exercises involving South African texts and languages; a focus on the practical and business side of translation; computer skills and resources for translators and sections on word-processing tools and Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools (Kruger, 2010b) could be included.

She is also of the opinion that the textbook should not only focus on translation proper, but should also investigate newer applications, such as subtitling and audio description[1] from a South African perspective.

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[1]Also "video description". " ... refers to an additional narration track for blind and visually impaired consumers of visual media ... It consists of a narrator talking through the presentation, describing what is happening during the natural pauses in the audio, and sometimes during the dialogue if deemed necessary" (Wikipedia, 2012:1).

6. A GUIDELINE FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN TEXTBOOK OF TRANSLATION STUDY

This section of the study is devoted to discussion of proposed guidelines for a South African textbook of translation study. It focuses on the market, content, level of education, language, topics and format that a textbook for second year translation should have. The aspects of the guidelines are summarised below.

A South African textbook of translation should be written for students in the second year of translation study because a general introduction is important in the first year and the courses should be more practice-orientated from the third year.

The main aspects that should be addressed in the textbook include theoretical perspectives on translation practice, amongst others:

- Equivalence at and above word level;
- grammatical equivalence;
- textual equivalence (cohesion);
- pragmatic equivalence (coherence) and;
- ethics and morality.

There should be special reference to the translation of creative texts, such as literature, humour and advertisements. Copy-editing and a section on technological skills should also be included in the textbook.

The textbook would have to integrate theory and practice.

In addition, the textbook should not only focus on translation, but it should teach students skills that could aid in the development of the official languages of South Africa.

The textbook should be suitable for students who have successfully completed their first year of study, and have developed their knowledge to a second year level – while linking it to the first year's knowledge. It should also prepare students for the third year of translation study.

Students from the three participating universities come from different linguistic backgrounds, including Afrikaans, English, Sesotho, Setswana and isiZulu. The textbook should be written in English, as English is the generally accepted medium of communication in tertiary education, and at a level that it is intelligible and comprehensible to the different language groups.

However, it should be noted that English is an additional language for the majority of the students of these universities. Consequently, students struggle to understand the theory and to apply the theory into practice.

In South African translation education, the use of practical examples in foreign languages often makes this difficult. It is therefore recommended that the textbook should include practical examples presented in the official languages of South Africa in order to enable these students to understand how the theory should be applied in practice and to enable them do so themselves.

Topics that should be addressed in the textbook include:

- An introduction to translation in South Africa;
- translation strategies;
- the unit of translation;
- translation shifts and equivalence (at word level, above word level, grammatical, textual and pragmatic), with special reference to the translation of creative texts;
- ethics and morality;
- the practical and business side of translation;
- computer skills and resources for translators and;
- word-processing and Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools.

We propose a book consisting of three sections, namely:

Section A - An Introduction to translation in South Africa

This section would answer the question "What is translation?" in the South African context. It would also address translation strategies, the units of translation and translation shifts, and ethics and morality in translation from a South African perspective.

Section B - Equivalence in translation

This section would address the problem of non-equivalence in translation, identify possible causes of non-equivalence in translation and discuss strategies to overcome these problems, from a South African perspective and with examples specific to the South African context.

Section C - Translation in an electronic era

The focus of this section will be on computer skills and resources for translators, as well as on word-processing and Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools.

A two-volume textbook should be ideal. The first volume should contain theoretical information, and should deal with data and practical applications true to the South African context. These will include the informal economy and the developmental nature of its context. The second volume should contain practical applications and case studies in languages and from contexts that students are familiar with, which may enable students to acquire first-hand experience in solving practical problems in their target languages.

The use of several experiential channels (visual, kinaesthetic and auditory), such as an accompanying CD / DVD / e-book, or Blackboard applications, could assist in facilitating the students' explorations of theory.

In addition, the textbook should address translation proper, language planning, newer applications (such as subtitling and audio description), the role of translators in developing communities and community work / service learning in language practice – all from a South African perspective.

7.   CONCLUSION

The change in South Africa's language policy after 1994 increased the need for language planning and translation in South Africa. However, it appears that many South African graduates cannot deliver quality translations, even after completing a course in translation. The lack of a South African textbook of translation that deals with problems and expectations true to the South African context could be a reason for this problem.

In this research, the market, content and format of a South African textbook of translation, as well as the requirements of OBE, were investigated in order to provide specific guidelines as to how a South African textbook of translation should be structured and the contents that should be included.

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