

## A Problem-Solving and Student-Centred Approach to the Translation of Cultural References

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Article abstract

Exploring possible answers to questions such as “Can we translate a cultural reference?” or even “What is a cultural reference?” is a highly relevant issue for translation students. These are matters that have been addressed by academics and full time translators alike, and no final or definite solutions have been found to the problems generated by the uncertainties, just as there are no final or definitive definitions of the concept of culture itself.

In an attempt to help and guide our students to improve this specific aspect of translation competence, a syllabus was designed within a pedagogical setting based on humanistic and socioconstructivist principles as well as on task and project-based learning, and an experimental study was carried out within that pedagogical setting to explore specific effects of such training. In this article, we will deal mainly with the experimental training itself, whereas the study will be reported on in a forthcoming publication.

# A Problem-Solving and Student-Centred Approach to the Translation of Cultural References

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## RÉSUMÉ

L'exploration des réponses possibles à des questions telles que « Peut-on traduire une référence culturelle ? » ou même « Qu'est-ce qu'une référence culturelle ? », c'est un sujet extrêmement important pour les étudiants en traduction<sup>1</sup>. Voilà des questions qui ont été suscitées par des académiciens et aussi par des traducteurs professionnels ; et on n'a pas trouvé des réponses catégoriques ou définitives aux problèmes posés par les incertitudes, de même qu'il n'y a pas de définitions catégoriques ou finales de la notion de culture.

Avec l'intention d'aider et de guider nos étudiants à améliorer cet aspect concret de compétence en traduction, nous avons élaboré un programme qui s'inscrit dans un cadre pédagogique basé sur des principes humanistes et socio-constructivistes, ainsi que sur un apprentissage par tâches et de projet. Nous avons effectué une étude expérimentale en rapport avec le cadre pédagogique afin d'explorer les résultats obtenus de cet enseignement. Dans cet article, nous nous contenterons d'insister sur la formation expérimentale elle-même, tandis que l'étude fera l'objet d'une publication ultérieure.

## ABSTRACT

Exploring possible answers to questions such as "Can we translate a cultural reference?" or even "What is a cultural reference?" is a highly relevant issue for translation students.<sup>2</sup> These are matters that have been addressed by academics and full time translators alike, and no final or definite solutions have been found to the problems generated by the uncertainties, just as there are no final or definitive definitions of the concept of culture itself.

In an attempt to help and guide our students to improve this specific aspect of translation competence, a syllabus was designed within a pedagogical setting based on humanistic and socioconstructivist principles as well as on task and project-based learning, and an experimental study was carried out within that pedagogical setting to explore specific effects of such training. In this article, we will deal mainly with the experimental training itself, whereas the study will be reported on in a forthcoming publication.

## MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

cultural references, problem solving, strategies, socioconstructivism, student-centred approach

...thinking about translation has been able to move away from the increasingly sterile 'faithful/free' opposition, and it has been able to re-define equivalence, which is no longer seen as the mechanical matching of words in dictionaries, but rather as a strategic choice made by translators. What has changed is that one type of faithfulness is no longer imposed on translators. Rather, they are free to opt for the kind of faithfulness that will ensure, in their opinion, that a given text is received by the target audience in optimal condition. (Basnett and Lefevere 1998: 3)

## Introduction

The study involved twenty-one second year students following an undergraduate programme in Translating and Interpreting at the University of Vic (Barcelona, Spain). The subject in which the study took place, *Translation Methodology and Practice III (English-Spanish)*, covered 60 contact hours. It consisted of designing a course that included student-centred explicit teaching of (a) cultural references and of (b) problem-spotting and solving strategies and procedures that emphasize noticing, deciding and justifying skills, and form part of a five-phase process. It was observed that, as the course progressed, the knowledge that was being acquired in a controlled way was becoming automatized in different stages and at different levels. Here, we will discuss the three main areas involved in the course design: translation issues, cultural references and the pedagogical approach, based on socioconstructivist principles.

## Exploring translation issues: translation competence

The challenge faced by translation teachers is to encourage re-creativity in re-expression in order to avoid literality (Bastin 2000: 234)

Both full-time translators and translation teachers need to constantly improve their operative (*know how*) and declarative (*know what*) knowledge. Consequently, one of the main aims of the teacher's job is to help the students acquire and improve both kinds of knowledge. While it often happens that full-time translators may experiment difficulty in verbalizing their declarative and operative knowledge, probably because they have become automatized, teachers, on the other hand, they should, in our view, be able to verbalize and transmit knowledge so that the students' attitude and aptitude towards the subject can improve.

In this study, the following question has been taken as a starting point: is at least part of what we call *translator intuition* really declarative knowledge that has become automatized? What may seem automatic behaviour may well be the result of previous controlled learning. According to Shiffrin and Schneider (1977 in Gil 2003: 32), these are the differences between controlled and automatic processes:

CONTROLLED PROCESSES	AUTOMATIC PROCESSES
• Attention consuming	• Do not take up attention
• Are not learnt as a routine	• Learning-acquired
• Are flexible and adapt to new situations	• Once acquired, are difficult to change
• Require a conscious effort	• Do not require a conscious effort
• Lose efficiency in adverse conditions	• Do not lose efficiency in adverse conditions
• Produce interferences when completing a second task	• Do not produce interferences when completing a second task

Controlled processes may be related to declarative knowledge, but may also lead to automatic processes, related to operative knowledge. At the expert level (fully practising translators in our case), the declarative knowledge may have become so internalized that it has become difficult for the translator to verbalize what or why a solution has been applied, producing what may seem like non-reflective behaviour (*intuition*). On the other hand, as has been mentioned, a translation teacher should be able to verbalize the declarative knowledge that led him or her to prefer a specific solution in order to present and model the issue adequately and then help the students to internalize the process.

So that students can become aware of the declarative knowledge underlying the apparently intuitive and non-reflective problem-solving behaviour of successful practitioners, we would like to suggest that the curriculum should include readings, debates, activities and tasks to practise the points usually included in discussions about translation competence: what should a translator know? (González Davies *forthcoming* (a)):

1. **Language work:** constant acquisition and improvement of the source language/s and target language/s, awareness of the existence and pitfalls of interferences.
2. **Encyclopaedic knowledge:** introduction to subject matter related to different disciplines, cultural knowledge, awareness of conventions of presentation in both the source and the target languages, and terminology management.
3. **Transference skills:** problem-spotting and problem-solving, creativity and self-confidence as translators, awareness and use of strategies and procedures, ability to decide on degrees of fidelity according to translation assignment and text function, learning to meet client's expectations, ability to translate with speed, and quality, overcoming constraints, practising direct and reverse translation to meet real market demands, self and peer evaluation skills.
4. **Resourcing skills:** paper, electronic, and human.
5. **Computer skills:** familiarization with a translator's workbench, computer-assisted translation, human assisted automatic translation, acquisition of electronic resourcing skills: databases and access to digital sources, unidirectional (e.g. Web pages) and bi-directional (e.g. e-mail) distance communication.
6. **Professional skills:** awareness of translator's rights, contracts, payment, familiarization with different editing processes and as much real life practice as possible, interrelating with the clients.

### **Defining and sequencing translation problems, strategies, procedures and solutions**

To apparent untranslatability, which results from structural incompatibilities between languages, one can respond with potential translatability, with the possibility of expressing the concepts of human experience in any human language (de Pedro 1999: 547)

According to many experts (discussed in Gil 2003, our highlighting), one important difference between beginner translators and experienced translators is the ability of the latter to *spot a problem* and to apply adequate *strategies* and *procedures* to solve it *efficiently* and as *quickly* as possible – the period between spotting the problem and solving it may go from a split second to whole days or weeks. Alongside these reflections, we consider other elements such as decision-making, coping with “uncertainty

management [patterns]" (Tirkkonen-Condit 2000: 123), and accessing creativity processes (Kusssmaul 1995) as valid starting points for teaching, since they imply that declarative knowledge may become operative for full-time translation practitioners, and also that there are no one-to-one solutions to translation problems, so that it is useful to know about a whole range of possibilities that are open. Consequently, we sought to explore and verify the following assumptions:

- The explicit teaching of problem-spotting and solving strategies and of procedures related to cultural references develops the students' translation competence significantly in this area.
- Learning materials can be designed to develop their cultural translation competence and awareness of strategies and procedures.

As a result of our pedagogical approach – with possible confirmation in the experimental study – we wanted to establish whether the students

- Had developed their *noticing* skills and could spot a cultural reference more efficiently as readers;
- Had developed their *decision-making* skills and were able to suggest more potential solutions to translate a cultural reference applying adequate strategies and procedures;
- Had developed their *self-monitoring* skills and were able to reach an informed *justification* of their final translation choice.

As a result of previous research (Scott-Tennent et al. 2000, 2001; González Davies et al. 2001), of classroom observation, and of recent literature on the subject which confirms that this is becoming a well documented area in Translation Studies, we would like to assume, for pedagogical purposes, a five-phase sequence in the problem-solving process of a translation:

- (1) general approach,
- (2) problem-spotting,
- (3) brainstorming and choosing strategies,
- (4) brainstorming and choosing procedures,
- (5) choosing a final solution.

These phases involve constant shifts between noticing, deciding and justifying skills, and can be related to Kusssmaul's interpretation of Poincaré's four-phase model of creative processing: (1) preparation, (2) incubation, (3) illumination, and (4) evaluating (1995: 40-50).

By *noticing* we mean noting, observing or paying special attention to a particular item, – in our context, cultural references –, generally as a prerequisite for learning.

*Deciding* is inherent to all the process: to making macro-decisions (see below), to brainstorming and choosing strategies and procedures, and to justifying the decisions.

*Justifying* is related mainly to final problem-solving in making an informed choice.

It is highly probable that some of these phases and skills may overlap and that the students will acquire them following different routes (sequential order) and rates (speed).

### *Macro-decisions*

1. **PHASE 1. General approach.** The choice of specific macro- or micro-decisions will depend on different circumstances: from the decision to follow or break social,

political, economic norms (Toury 1978, 1980, 1995) and the translator's subjectivity and ideology (for instance, the decision to translate a text from a feminist or foreignizing point of view), to practical issues such as the translation assignment, time, sources, equipment, fees, and the translator's expertise and personal or emotional situation. This phase may involve all the phases of the model of creative process adapted by Kussmaul (1995: 39-40): preparation, incubation, illumination and evaluation.

Micro-decisions or "explicit textual manipulation of units of translation" (Chesterman 2000)

2. **PHASE 2. Problem-spotting.** A translation problem can be defined as a (verbal or nonverbal) segment that can be present either in a text segment (micro level) or in the text as a whole (macro level) and that compels the student / translator to make a conscious decision to apply a motivated translation strategy, procedure and solution from amongst a range of options (Scott-Tennent et al. 2000, 2001; González Davies et al. 2001). This is related to what Kussmaul calls "non-routine process[es] ... which usually create problems and require creativity" and the preparation phase of the model of creative process during which "problems are noticed and analysed, and relevant information and knowledge are accumulated" (1995: 39-40).

3. **PHASE 3. Brainstorming and choosing strategies.** At this stage, the translator accesses mental or emotional actions to solve the translation problems or SL (verbal or nonverbal) segment that – potentially – cannot be transferred automatically or routinely. On detecting a translation or interpretation problem, the mind activates certain strategies, and explores available internal or external information to solve it (mental and emotional associations, parallel or logical thinking, resourcing, classifying, selecting, drawing mind maps, playing with words, accessing semantic fields and schemata, looking at procedures lists, scanning published translations etc.) (Lörscher 1991, González Davies 1998, Scott-Tennent et al. 2000, 2001; and González Davies et al. 2001). Here, a strategy is a group of coordinated decisions that link the goals of the translation assignment with the necessary procedures (see next phase) to attain those goals in a given translational context. This phase is related to the incubation phase in the model of creative process in which, for example, physical and psychological relaxation are recommended to "unblock" thoughts (Kussmaul 1995: 39-40).

4. **PHASE 4. Brainstorming and choosing procedures.** Considering a range of concrete acceptable translation procedures such as explicitation, footnotes, calques, cultural adaptations, exoticizing, reformulations, substitutions, omissions, additions... to re-express the source text in a re-creative way (Bastin 2000, González Davies et al. 2001, Gil 2003). This phase can be related to the illumination phase in the model of creative process during which Kussmaul recommends, for example, the "parallel-activity technique" or changing one's activity, also to unblock the mind (1995: 43).

5. **PHASE 5. Choosing a final solution.** In this phase, the translation solution is justified or evaluated according to the translation context (Scott-Tennent et al. 2000, 2001; González Davies et al. 2001). This final phase is related to the evaluation phase in the model of creative process, closely related to the illumination phase (Kussmaul 1995: 49-50).

### Noticing, deciding and justifying: the written protocols (WP)

The strategic competence of translators may be gauged by measuring their awareness of problems and by measuring their ability to achieve communication goals by compensating for losses in translation (Maria Piotrobka 1998: 210).

In accordance with the belief that explicit teaching can improve the students' competence and our agreement with Kussmaul when he says: "what translators then must have at their disposal are strategies for decision-making and for evaluating the end product, and these macro-strategies and micro-strategies, as Hönig calls them ... can be taught and should be part of a translation training curriculum." (1995: 32), we designed a means for the students to make visible their translating and reasoning processes: Written Protocols (WP). These protocols have proven to be effective to improve the students' awareness of their thinking process and of their evolution in the acquisition of translation competence, all of which has been clearly motivating and a positive encouragement for them. These WPs were designed to include the skills mentioned above: noticing, deciding and justifying.

The procedure is as follows: the students hand in a WP designed for them to record their solutions to between three and five translation problems found in the texts they have to translate as practical assignments. The standard sheet consists of six columns (see below): in the first, they write down the problem found in the source text, in the second, the range of possible solutions, in the third, the advantages of each solution, in the fourth, the disadvantages or reasons to reject some of them, in the fifth, their final solution, and in the sixth, a justification for their choice. Problems may vary from student to student according mainly to their aptitudes and background knowledge. As student personality and diversity are respected, if a student prefers to use a different format, it is accepted as long as it is clear, to the point, and they keep to the assignment.

Written protocol by Vicky Gasch (originally written in Spanish, 2001-2002).

PROBLEM	PROPOSED TRANSLATION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
English Comprehensive School	Instituto de Enseñanza Secundaria inglés	It can be easily associated with the Spanish Educational System	<i>Instituto</i> is used only for State centres.
	Colegio de Enseñanza Secundaria inglés		<i>Colegio</i> is associated with Primary Schools or private centres
	Centro de Enseñanza Secundaria inglés	It can be used for any centre.	
FINAL VERSION			
Centro de Enseñanza Secundaria inglés			
JUSTIFICATION OF FINAL VERSION			
It is the most neutral and least confusing version. It can be applied to any educational centre.			

Source text: *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* by Sue Townsend. London: Methuen (1984).

## Exploring cultural references in a pedagogical context

Translation ... is not just an exchange of words and structures, but a communicative process that takes into consideration the reader of the translation within a particular situation within a specific culture. (Paul Kussmaul 1995: 1)

### *Background*

Translators live on a *frontera* where linguistic communication may be commanded with relative ease, but where cultural immersion may take a longer time to be achieved. For undergraduate students the problem is twofold: detection is added to transference, that is, they are not always aware of specific cultural references in a text or of the cultural nuances of the text as a whole and, in addition, they may well not be sure of how to transfer those they have spotted. Explicit focus on cultural references helps the students' become aware of the need to identify the references as well as to make strategic choices which will affect the coherence and, thus, the quality of their translation directly. The identification and transfer of cultural references is not often dealt with in translation training, and we would like to suggest that vague generalizations can be replaced by a more systematic and explicit approach which may help to enhance awareness and acquire a more self-confident approach to the problem on the part of the students: "It is through self-awareness that translators acquire self-confidence" (Kussmaul; 1995: 32). Moreover, cultural awareness enhanced by reflection and decision-making may bring to the forefront the whole issue of otherness and of the subjectivity of the translator when identifying and when constructing cultural references.

### Defining cultural reference from a pedagogical point of view

The following operative definition of cultural reference is presented to the students:

Any kind of expression (textual, verbal, non-verbal or audiovisual) denoting any material, ecological, social, religious, linguistic<sup>3</sup> or emotional manifestation that can be attributed to a particular community (geographic, socio-economic, professional, linguistic, religious, bilingual, etc.) and would be admitted as a trait of that community by those who consider themselves to be members of it. Such an expression may, on occasions, create a comprehension or a translation problem.

In our case, the various models to deal with cultural references presented to the students are used as pedagogical tools in the undergraduate class and are not an exhaustive choice. They are points of departure for discussion that can be accepted or rejected by the students and, in our experience, have always led to further reflection on the relevance of the translator's role and background, and on the complexity of the topic.

As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, the first pedagogical aim is that the students become familiar with Eugene Nida's division of cultural references into five groups (1969, 1999), which they can later discuss and accept, modify or reject: **material**, related to everyday objects, e.g., food and drink, games, units of measure...; **ecological**, related to similarities and differences in the places, e.g., geography, flora and fauna...; **social**, related to social organization and its manifestations in the arts, politics, history, leisure...; **religious**, which include ritualized and ideological mani-



festations; **linguistic**, understood as the means to express all the previous and which refers to attitudinal and conversational cues.

Hanvey’s (1992) classification can then open a discussion on degrees of cultural immersion:

**LEVEL 1: Facts, Stereotypes and Deficiencies.** At this stage there is still a large comprehension gap between the source culture and the target culture.

**LEVEL 2: Shallow comprehension.** Subtle traits can be discerned in the thought and behaviour of the foreign culture community.

**LEVEL 3: In-Depth Comprehension.** Acceptance of the target culture and understanding of the reasons behind certain modes of behaviour.

**LEVEL 4: Empathy.** This stage can only be achieved by immersion in the foreign culture.

The procedures can then be illustrated taking the following adaptation of Hervey, Higgins and Haywood’s cline (1995) and building upon it (adapted from González Davies *forthcoming (b)*):

Exoticism      Cultural borrowing      Calque      Transliteration      Communicative translation      Cultural transplantation

- **Exoticism:** The SL is kept with no changes in the translation. For instance:

Source text: script from <i>Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios</i> . Directed by Pedro Almodóvar in 1988	Target text: Dubbed version
<i>¿Le gusta el mambo? Tengo de todo: heavy metal, rock, soul, cumbias, incluso sevillanas, salsa, tecno-pop, lo que quiera...</i>	Do you mind the mambo? I’ve got everything: heavy metal, rock, soul, cumbias, even sevillanas, salsa, Techno-Pop, whatever you like...

- **Cultural Borrowing:** the SL word or expression is rendered with little change in the TL e.g. *kleenex* in Spanish. Occasionally, these words and expressions can acquire different connotations (e.g. *party* in Spanish).
- **Calque:** the TL is similar to the SL word or expression (e.g. *salir del armario* in Spanish, for “to come out of the cupboard”).
- **Transliteration:** the cultural referent is changed according to the phonic or graphic conventions of the TL (e.g. *bumerán* for “boomerang”).
- **Communicative translation:** the SL referent has an identifiable correspondence in the TL with different lexis and/or syntax, (e.g. *Recién pintado* for “Wet paint,” or many proverbs and sayings).
- **Cultural transplantation:** the reference has been completely adapted to the target culture or has been substituted by a reference which is more in accordance with the norms of the TC or has been changed for ideological reasons. For instance:

Source text: <i>Just William</i> by Richmal Crompton (1977/1995)	Translation (1999)
Context: William is talking to his girl friend. Has anyone ever told you that you’re a bottled cherry? (Bottled cherry = Botticelli)	<i>¿Le ha dicho alguien que es usted un muro pequeño? (Muro pequeño (low wall) = Murillo (Spanish painter))</i>

Our aim is to make the students aware of the existence of a potential translation problem – here, cultural references – and guide them through a process which will enable them to solve it, justify their choices and produce a translation which is coherent (see below: Learning about cultural references: activities, tasks and projects).

### Exploring the learning process: From novice to expert

How do individual differences affect the acquisition process, and to what degree do they determine the level of competence eventually reached by the individual? (Hans Krings 1986: 263)

In publications on pedagogy and on psychology, the nature and characteristics of the learning process have been widely studied (from Piaget to Ausubel 1963, Arnold 1999, Brumfit and Johnson 1979, Richards and Rodgers 1986, among many others). In our case, we adapted the competence stages suggested by Honey and Mumford (1986, 1995) to help explain to our students the steps to achieve full professional competence in any area since they encourage reflection, self-evaluation, and give an overall vision of a possible path to be followed along the learning process. Needless to say, not everybody goes along this well-defined path in the same way, and the stages may overlap and recur. Honey and Mumford's proposal was adapted as a questionnaire that was given to the students. What follows is the questionnaire as it was presented to them.

Please read the following carefully and put a cross next to the learning stage you think corresponds to your own.

- a. **Beginner stage:** At a first stage, you are not aware of the intricacies of the discipline: this is the *unconscious incompetence* stage. Everything seems easy from the outside, which is precisely what the average person thinks translating is all about: easy if you have a dictionary and a smattering of a couple of languages. Here, you simply start gathering information. \_\_\_\_
- b. **Advanced beginner stage:** Once you have become acquainted with the first challenges and problems, however, you become aware of the fact that there is much to be learnt about the subject: this is the *conscious incompetence* stage. You hesitate, make mistakes and trudge along, but gradually make out the similarities, differences and relation patterns that can be established concerning the knowledge acquired up to this point. \_\_\_\_
- c. **Competence stage:** This is the stage of *conscious competence*. Now you know when you are doing something well and why. You follow the rules but begin to have your own ideas that work, too. Decisions are made, and problem spotting and solving skills are developed along with a global idea of the task and its possible outcomes. It is at these three stages when you learn most about the discipline or skill in which you are engaged. \_\_\_\_
- d. **Proficiency stage:** Finally, we may arrive at the *unconscious competence* stage, that is, you do well but sometimes cannot explain why: most of the skills have been internalized along with the knowledge and strategies necessary for a quality performance which is produced with the greatest ease. This stage corresponds to the expert level. \_\_\_\_

Eight students considered they were at stage B, eight thought they were at stage C, and 5 wrote they were between both those stages. Much discussion followed the

completion of the questionnaire in one of the most productive sessions of the course, according to the students themselves.

### **Favouring learner autonomy and group interaction**

It is now fairly well known and researched that positive motivation favours the learning process and that the acquisition of adequate skills is improved in an anxiety-free environment (Gardner and Lambert 1972, Gardner 1985, Arnold 1999). The ludic aspect in training also favours the exploration of creativity, self-confidence, and risk-taking, all of which are part and parcel of a translator's competence. As Cronin (in Tennent (ed.) *forthcoming*) observes:

Strangely absent in the theoretical speculation on translation teaching have been theories of play and game in language. This is all the more surprising in that any attempt to theorize intuition in thought and creativity in language must surely take into account the enormous cognitive contribution of play in human development.

Howard Gardner's enlightening studies on multiple intelligences (1996, 1999) have introduced a whole new perception of classroom dynamics. Activities, tasks and projects can be designed to cater to the main types in the group so as to bring out on their strong points and improve the students' competence, autonomy and interaction.

Finally, socioconstructivist principles – i.e. constructing knowledge in a social environment, in our case, the classroom – can be easily integrated in translation training and help to improve the students' competence (Kiraly 2000). According to our approach to socioconstructivism in translation training:

- Knowledge is not put across only by the teacher, but is also constructed and reconstructed by the students according to their previous knowledge, (transformation vs. transmission);
- The students build their knowledge not only through self-study, but also through social interaction;
- The teacher presents, models and disappears, becoming, first, a guide and then the coordinator of task chains and translation projects that mirror real life assignments as far as possible or are actual real life translation projects;
- The students assume the ultimate responsibility for their translations; they are helped by practising self and peer evaluation;

In line with this approach, the “read and translate” directive, still common in many translation classes, has no place. Rather, the most relevant activities and task chains (see below) are designed to be:

- challenging, building on the students' previous knowledge;
- well-sequenced, that is, graded, however loosely, to help the students evolve and improve their skills gradually;
- related to the group's interests, with clear objectives set at the start;
- inclusive of individual, pair and group work to advance self-study, learner autonomy, social interaction and group binding;
- favourable to the development and exploration of most types of intelligence so that they can be reinforced or improved upon, depending on each student's weak and strong points;
- creativity-oriented, challenging the students' problem spotting and solving skills;
- open-ended, favouring the students' reflection on different solutions to translation problems and accepting all those that can be justified;
- decision-making oriented, favouring an awareness of the range of translation techniques used by professional translators and a reflection on the most adequate solution according to the assignment in hand.

### **Learning about cultural references: activities, tasks and projects**

We agree with Olk (2001) in that – in the context of our study – five potentially problematic areas are: “(1) the lack of cultural knowledge, (2) insufficient reference skills, (3) lack of text-level processes, (4) source-oriented processing and (5) an apparently low degree of awareness at the discourse level.” Bearing this in mind, activities and tasks were designed and implemented to practice and improve the above-mentioned aspects during the course by means of these pedagogical procedures:

**activity** – concrete and brief exercises that help to practice specific points, whether mainly linguistic, encyclopaedic, professional, or related to transference, resourcing or computer skills.

**task** – a chain of activities with the same global aim and a final product. The full completion of a task usually takes up several sessions. In each of these, activities that lead along the same path towards the same end are carried out. On the way, both procedural and declarative knowledge are practiced and explored.

**project** – multicompetence assignments that enable the students to engage in pedagogic and professional activities and tasks and work together towards an end product. In the case of an authentic or professional project, the end product will be an authentic translation commissioned by a real client. In the case of a pedagogic project, the activities and tasks will mirror the professional outcome and set the basis and enable practice of the skills necessary for them to be competent when an authentic translation is commissioned (Haines 1989, Ribé and Vidal 1993).

The intention here is to suggest classroom procedures that have been designed bearing in mind that process research and results can only be valid for teaching if the social context or situation is taken into account so that they can be applicable in a similar way –not necessarily exactly– in similar situations. The underlying learning principles adhered to in our approach are the following:

- a. Improvement of students’ motivation and creativity owing to the fact that
  - a.1. there are clearly stated aims for each activity and each task, and
  - a.2. the students themselves are involved in searching for, choosing and assessing part of the learning material.
- b. Increase of the students’ responsibility for and awareness of their own learning process and outcome by means of a constant interaction with other students and the teacher in group work.
- c. Improvement of professional and self-monitoring skills by means of different kinds of assessment: self, peer and teacher evaluation, and by the introduction of translation assignments for potential or real clients.
- d. The final translations are negotiated by contrasting them with published translations (if available), with those of the other students (in group discussions), and with those of the teacher (in group and class discussions).
- e. The teacher’s role becomes that of a guide who presents, models and disappears after procuring adequate scaffolding according to the needs and requests of the group.

### **Outline of the task chain: What is a cultural reference?**

We would like to suggest a task chain that can be adapted to most learning contexts since the activities included are not constrained by a specific language pair or a given text (however, we have included the sample text “Spain – Winds of history can blow

hard” by Nicholas Woodsworth in an appendix). Therefore, the steps we suggest below can be followed more or less loosely, depending on the teaching situation.

### STAGE 1. NOTICING

In a first initial orientation stage, the teacher asks the students to read the text they will be working on (see the appendix, in our case), then writes two or three cultural references on the blackboard and asks the students to write down as many words or expressions related to them as they can. In threes, they discuss and contrast ideas, and compare their lists and comment on any interesting points that may now begin to come up, for instance, that their reactions and associations may differ. Now follows a whole class brainstorming of the references and the associations, which can be written on the blackboard. The teacher asks each team of three students to group them. Students from each team interact with each other by forming new teams with members from other teams to compare their groupings, perspectives and points. The students then go back to their original teams and compare their findings. Can they come up with a common set of groups? The different ways in which the references have been grouped are discussed. All can be accepted as long as they can be justified.

### STAGE 2. REFLECTING

The teacher presents and models Eugene Nida’s classification (see above). The students discuss, compare, accept or reject it. Then, the teacher presents Hanvey’s degrees of cultural immersion (see above). The students can discuss their own experiences and feelings when they started learning foreign languages and the degree of cultural immersion they think they are at for each one of them.

The teacher asks the students to circle the cultural references they can spot in the text. Different students may spot different references and nuances depending on their background and subjective interpretation and construction of reality. These discussions are a positive channel for the students to start reflecting on the fact that are no safe and stable cultural references, an assumption most of them have at this undergraduate stage. In threes, they try to classify them according to their grouping. A class discussion follows.

### STAGE 3. DEFINING CULTURAL REFERENCE

The teacher asks the students to write a definition of cultural reference in the groups and then presents her definition for the students to compare, accept, reject or elaborate on in groups. Once again, a member of each group forms new groups and they compare and discuss their ideas.

### STAGE 4. DECIDING

The students translate the references they had spotted in the text they had read (stages 1 and 2, above). Questions will probably arise: are they using mental or emotional strategies? Or both? (see above). They will probably ask whether there is any “correct” way to translate them.

This is a good time to reflect on the five-phase proposal of the translation process we have presented in this article: first, there are macrodecisions to be taken (naturalizing or exoticizing strategy? literal or free translation? ...) which will affect the

microdecisions. The teacher explains there is no need to think in dichotomies and that thinking in clines is much more useful, and presents and models Hervey, Higgins and Haywood's cline of procedures to translate cultural references (see above). The students discuss, accept, reject and/or complete it with other procedures they may suggest. What follows is an activity in which the students have to spot the strategies and procedures chosen in a published translation. It is interesting to note that almost invariably, the students' answer to the question: "Which one do you think is closer to the source text (do not look at the source text before answering this question)?" (see (a) below) is "Translation 2." Their reasons are that "Spanish style" is characterized by long sentences, subordinate clauses, etc. Once they have checked that this is not the case and that Translation 1 is actually closer to the source text, they realize that they have based their answer on a cultural simplification or stereotype.

### Backtranslation and translation choices

- (a) Read both translations of the following excerpt from *Me alquilo para soñar* by Gabriel García Márquez (it is a description of Pablo Neruda). Which one do you think is closer to the source text (do not look at the source text before answering this question)?
- (b) Underline any differences you see.
- (c) Try to write the source text (backtranslation).

#### Translation 1

*I Sell My Dreams.* Edith Grossman (translator)

I have never known anyone closer to the idea one has of a Renaissance pope: He was gluttonous and refined. Even against his will, he always presided at the table. Matilde, his wife, would put a bib around his neck that belonged in a barber shop rather than a dining room, but it was the only way to keep him from taking a bath in sauce. The day at Carvalleiras was typical. He ate three whole lobsters, dissecting them with a surgeon's skill, and at the same time devoured everyone else's plate with his eyes and tasted a little from each with a delight that made the desire to eat contagious: clams from Galicia, mussels from Cantabria, prawns from Alicante, sea cucumbers from the Costa Brava. In the meantime, like the French, he spoke of nothing but other culinary delicacies, in particular the prehistoric shellfish of Chile, which he carried in his heart. All at once he stopped eating, tuned his lobster's antennae, and said to me in a very quiet voice:

"There's someone behind me who won't stop looking at me."

#### Translation 2

*Dreams for Hire.* Nick Castor (translator)

I have never known anyone who approximated more closely the received idea of a Renaissance Pope – that mixture of gluttony and refinement – who even against his will, would dominate and preside over any table. Matilde, his wife, wrapped him in a bib which looked more like an apron from a barber-shop than a napkin from a restaurant, but it was the only way to prevent him from being bathed in sauces. That day Neruda ate three lobsters in their entirety, dismembering them with the precision of a surgeon, while concurrently devouring everyone's else's dishes with his eyes, until he was unable to resist picking from each plate, with a relish and an appetite that everyone found contagious: clams from Galicia, barnacle geese from Cantabria, prawns from Alicante, swordfish from the Costa Brava. All the while he was talking, just like the French, about

other culinary delights, especially the prehistoric shellfish of Chile that were his heart's favourite. And then suddenly he stopped eating, pricked up his ears like the antennae of a lobster, and whispered to me: "There's someone behind me who keeps staring at me."

(d) Now read the source text, sit with another two students, and discuss your back-translations, the published translations, the degrees of fidelity and the procedures each translator has used.

*Me alquilo para soñar* by Gabriel García Márquez

No he conocido a nadie más parecido a la idea que uno tiene de un Papa renacentista: glotón y refinado. Aun contra su voluntad, siempre era él quien presidía la mesa. Matilde, su esposa, le ponía un babero que parecía más de peluquería que de comedor, pero era la única manera de impedir que se bañara en salsas. Aquel día en *Carvalleiras* fue ejemplar. Se comió tres langostas enteras descuartizándolas con una maestría de cirujano, y al mismo tiempo devoraba con la vista los platos de todos, e iba picando un poco de cada uno, con un deleite que contagiaba las ganas de comer: las almejas de Galicia, los percebes del Cantábrico, las cigalas de Alicante, las *espardenyes* de la Costa Brava. Mientras tanto, como los franceses, sólo hablaba de otras exquisiteces de cocina, y en especial de los mariscos prehistóricos de Chile que llevaba en el corazón.. De pronto dejó de comer, afinó sus antenas de bogavante, y me dijo en voz muy baja:

–Hay alguien detrás de mi que no deja de mirarme–.

(e) Compare the vocabulary, syntax, punctuation, creativity, interpretation of the source text, the translator's subjectivity, and the problem solving techniques they have used. Here follow some interesting points:

un Papa renacentista: glotón y refinado.	Renaissance pope: He was gluttonous and refined.	Renaissance Pope – that mixture of gluttony and refinement – who
un babero que parecía más de peluquería que de comedor	bib around his neck that belonged in a barber shop rather than a dining room	bib which looked more like an apron from a barber-shop than a napkin from a restaurant,
en <i>Carvalleiras</i>	The day at Carvalleiras	That day Neruda
las <i>espardenyes</i> de la Costa Brava	sea cucumbers from the Costa Brava	swordfish from the Costa Brava
afinó sus antenas de bogavante	tuned his lobster's antennae	pricked up his ears like the antennae of a lobster
–Hay alguien detrás de mi que no deja de mirarme–.	"There's someone behind me who won't stop looking at me."	"There's someone behind me who keeps staring at me."

## STAGE 5. TRANSLATING

The students now have to apply what they have seen and discuss the macro- and microdecisions they will follow to translate the text in their teams of three. A good way to do this to reinforce awareness is to ask each group to translate according to either a mainly naturalizing or to a mainly exoticizing viewpoint.



## STAGE 6. JUSTIFYING

Once again, the members of the teams interact and reflect on their translation decisions by forming new teams to discuss and justify their different translations. A class discussion may follow.

## STAGE 7. REINFORCING NOTICING, DECIDING AND JUSTIFYING

The teacher presents the written protocols (see above) and asks each team to fill one in with their translation of the cultural references. We have found it useful to do this, first, orally, and then in written form. The students hand in a written protocol for between three and five translation problems with each of the translation assignments they have to complete and hand in during the academic year to reinforce and make visible the translation process.

The students add to the cline their own strategies and procedures, or those they spot in published translations.

### **An authentic translation project: Translating children's literature on the web**

As a final stage in the task chain, a project based on a previous successful experience (for a full account of the project and the results, see González Davies 2003a) was carried out to put the previously acquired concepts into practice in the real world with real readers. Moreover, it was designed to discover Primary School children's first-hand opinions regarding a naturalizing or exoticizing overall strategy when reading translations of literary works.

In a first stage, six groups were formed in the class. Three of these groups received as an assignment the naturalized translation of one of the stories of the *What-a-Mess* series (approximately, 600 words) by Frank Muir. The other three groups were asked to translate the same story applying exoticizing strategies.

In a second stage, a follow-up web-based questionnaire was designed after having brainstormed and selected five questions in the class. These were the questions:

1. Which of the translations did you prefer? A / B
2. What would you have called the dog?
3. Which name do you prefer for the ladybird? *Mariquito*, *Marioquito*, *Sergioquito*, *Chiribito*, *Señor Don Mariquita* (these were names proposed by the students).
4. Add two items of food and drink that could have been offered at the party.
5. Write any comments you may have here.

The first two questions were directed at discovering the children's preferences as to naturalizing or exoticizing qualities in a translated story. The third question was chosen so that the children were really aware that they were dealing with translations and, thus, could experiment a creative approach to the text. The fourth question was included to stimulate the children's imagination and to see whether they continued in a naturalizing or an exoticizing line. And the final open question was designed for the children to feel free to express their opinion.

Thirdly, the three primary schools contacted accessed the web pages and worked on the two stories they had been sent, one naturalized and one exoticized. The students belonged to the 4th and the 5th year (9-10 years old). The three schools contacted



were all in Catalonia: *Escola Minguella* (Badalona), *Escola Vedruna* (Palafrugell), and *Nostra Senyora del Carme* (La Llagostera).

The electronic address for each story was <<http://www.uvic.es/fchtd/cuentos/7841.html>>. The end number was assigned at random and was different for each of the six translations. The children had 4 weeks to read the stories and answer the questionnaire.

They downloaded them in their Computer Skills class, printed them, did further activities and discussed both stories in their Spanish class and the Library Hour before answering the questionnaires and sending them to us.

We received 135 answers and interacted electronically with some of the children and their teachers. The results were 77 children in favour of a naturalized translation and 54 in favour of an exoticized one. Four questionnaires were invalidated because they had not been filled in adequately.

(For more activities, tasks and projects in translation training, see Hurtado (ed.) 1999 and González Davies (ed.) 2003)

## Conclusions

... if subjects have been provided with translation strategies, there is a greater chance that they will arrive at good solutions. And the instances where, in spite of a knowledge of strategies, they do not arrive at useful solutions will perhaps highlight the bigger problems. (Paul Kussmaul 1995: 9)

According to the study that we carried out, translation problem-spotting and solving can be trained explicitly following our pedagogical approach and this leads to a significant improvement of the students' translation competence. Also, learning materials can be designed for this purpose. By discussing cultural references from different points of view (essentialist and non-essentialist) and practicing what they have learnt by means of different activities, tasks and projects carried out individually and in groups, the students develop an awareness of the limitations of any definition or classification of cultural references. Secondly, they realize that they themselves usually start out with simplified assumptions about their own community and about the target culture, and that reconciling both means exploring *fronteras*, spaces in between. Thirdly, that culture as a behaviour and way of perceiving the world permeates the whole text, not just loose words and expressions.

Finally, that, when they become full-time translators, they will be active agents for the reception of the source text and culture into another community and that, therefore, their decisions matter and should be informed.

The instruments used to measure whether the assumptions had been validated and the results attained were:

- a. a pre-and post test that consisted of the students reading a text and circling any cultural references they could spot,
- b. Written Protocols (WPs) that were completed during the whole course and also as the second part of the pre- and post-test setup,
- c. a questionnaire to be completed at the end of the course, and
- d. the teacher's diary.

A more complete description and discussion of these instruments will appear in a forthcoming article.

As a final reflection, we would like to suggest that a full time translator who has been trained in a formal educational environment will probably end up with at least three inventories of strategies and procedures:

- a. **the institutional:** these will have been acquired at the educational institutions (universities and so on), especially if strategies and procedures are taught explicitly;
- b. **the academic:** once the formal training period is over, a translator should be constantly updated on findings in the field, like any other professional. This can be done through refresher courses and reading the most recent publications on the subject;
- c. **the personal:** the previous, plus those they go on acquiring throughout their professional lives.

#### NOTES

1. Le même groupe d'étudiants qui ont participé à cette étude a complété un questionnaire sur différents aspects de la traduction pendant leur premier et second an d'études. 39% en première année avaient marqué «références culturelles» comme l'aspect le plus problématique en traduction; en deuxième année, le pourcentage a atteint 67%.
2. The same group of students involved in this study completed a questionnaire on different aspects of translation in their first and second years of studies. In their first year, 39% marked "cultural references" as the most problematic aspect of translation; in their second year, the percentage increased to 67%.
3. Adapting Nida's classification (1969: 55, and Seminars FCHTD (1999)).

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## APPENDIX

Spain – Winds of history can blow hard.  
08/30/2002  
*Financial Times*

Spain's wonderfully elemental Coast of Light may not remain in the shadows for much longer, predicts Nicholas Woodsworth

The tourist authorities promote it as La Costa de la Luz, the Coast of Light. But the Atlantic coast of southern Spain has never really taken off – even today it receives less than one-twentieth of the holiday makers who crowd on to that frantic, nearby Mediterranean coast, the Costa del Sol. For most visitors the Coast of Light remains a dark spot on the map.

Why this should be so I am not exactly sure. Personally, after a day or two, I find life on a beach towel a little stifling. As I drive past one high-rise Mediterranean resort town after another I heave a sigh of relief. Ahead lies the Strait of Gibraltar, gateway to the Atlantic. I like winds and tides and the open sea, and the breathing space that comes with them.

There is certainly more than enough of all those things in Tarifa. It is the windiest place I have ever been.

Driving down steep coastal hills of limestone and scrubby pines into the town, I am met by a forest of windmills. They are not the quaint, creaking, sail-equipped variety once tilted at by Don Quixote, but sleek electricity-generating wind-turbines standing on towering masts. I do a bit of tilting, too – not with a lance, but with my head. Craning back to gaze up at these monsters, a sudden gust rips the hat from my head and carries it off forever.

Wind is everything in Tarifa. The town itself seems largely given over to windsurfing and the hip lifestyle that goes with it. The streets are

lined with surf shops, with boutiques selling surfers' baggy clothing, sunglasses, tattoos and body-piercing jewellery.

Signs in English, French and German invite outdoors enthusiasts indoors for drinks, music, tapas and giant TV-screen entertainment. I find it difficult, however, to keep my eyes off the widescreen spectacle that sits right in front of Tarifa, vast and infinitely more compelling.

For this is the point where two seas and two continents come together – to the east lies the Mediterranean, to the west the Atlantic; to the north Europe and to the south Africa.

Beyond a dozen freighters plying these troubled waters, no more than 14km across the Strait of Gibraltar, the slopes of Morocco's Rif mountains rise out of the sea. You cannot quite hear these colliding worlds meeting, but Africa is so close that I can see individual houses clinging to its hillsides. Is it any wonder, in this great melee of cultures, history and geography, that you can hear fierce winds blowing?

Tarifa may be young and trendy, but half an hour up the coast is a place that is ancient and shows no concern whatsoever for changing fashions.

La Costa de la Luz is one of the oldest shorelines in western Europe. The Phoenicians, settling here 1,000 years before Christ, made relative latecomers of the Romans. But the Roman port of Baelo Claudia, a well-preserved, stone-carved city lying on a peaceful bay, is a marvellous place to wander into an older, unchanging world.

Forum, amphitheatre, baths, markets, graceful temple columns rising into the sky ... Baelo Claudia was no isolated outpost, but a transit point between Roman Europe and Roman Africa. And a very pleasant place to live it must have been, I decide as I stroll beside the

sea – at least until a second century earthquake brought it all to an abrupt end.

Then I discover a series of stone-dug pits at the far end of the settlement, and learn that Baelo Claudia was a principal production site of garum, one of the Roman world's smellier culinary delicacies. A sauce made from the aged and fermented entrails of fish, it became oenogarum when mixed with wine, oleogarum when mixed with olive oil, and oxigarum when mixed with vinegar. God help Baelo Claudia when the wind dropped, I reflect.

The town of Barbate lies at the base of Cape Trafalgar, site of Nelson's victory over the combined fleets of Spain and France. Bloody battles still take place along this coast today, but the contestants are modern-day fisherman and that king among Strait of Gibraltar fish, the 1,000lb red tuna.

Down at the Barbate fishing port, I meet Juan Utrera Jimenez, a skipper for 40 years. On the quay beside the gently bobbing Pilar and other stern-decked tuna-boats, he shows me the apparatus used to catch tuna – the almadraba net. Vast and cunning traps of age-old Arab design, just four exist today.

The complex labyrinth of Barbate's almadraba snakes out from the shore for 3km – its construction requires 6,000 bright red floats, 1,500 steel cables and 400 anchors. Further up the coast at Conil, Atlantic Spain's biggest almadraba is 14km long. Heroic fish, Captain Jimenez tells me, require heroic nets.

Cadiz fast becomes my favourite Andalusian city. Almost surrounded by water, hidden behind stone bastions and sea-walls, its narrow streets and tiny squares hide treasures from another age.

The city's still-dazzling churches, its once-proud merchant houses, its formidable fortifications are reminders of its long-gone heyday as the great colonial entrepot of Spanish-American trade. Unaccountably, they fail to draw the crowds that turn up in, say, Granada or Seville. There are few tourists and no economic boom in old Cadiz.

So much the better. To me, the city is all the more appealing in its slow-paced, paint-flaked dilapidation.

I enjoy its simpler, old-fashioned things – the *penas*, or social clubs, that gather in neighbourhood locales to eat and drink, to celebrate and sing; the *hermandads*, or secular brotherhoods, that gather throughout the year

to prepare for religious festivals and celebrations; the busy *mercado central*, where some of the best fish and seafood in Spain is sold; the endless small restaurants and bars where it is eaten.

Cadiz' charming ambience of neglect is slowly being discovered. As I stroll towards La Caleta beach one afternoon I run into the crowds and hoop-la that accompany a film shoot. So much does Cadiz resemble Castro's run-down Havana that Pierce Brosnan has been in town making the latest James Bond film. At this rate dilapidation will soon be a valuable commodity.

The old port-town of Sanlucar sits where the sluggish waters of the Guadalquivir river meet the sea.

Its best-known product is manzanilla, a fine, dry aperitif. Its greatest asset, however, is its water.

I drive upriver past dyked fields of evaporating Atlantic brine, soon to become salt; past a nutrient-rich estuary that keeps fish busy and the Sanlucar fishing fleet hard at work; past riverside hothouses where flowers and vegetables are irrigated by Guadalquivir water.

But Sanlucar's best use of water is no use at all. Standing beside a forest of bright red carnations, I gaze across the river to the opposite bank and the beginning of 15,000 sq km of marshes, ponds and lagoons.

There is not much resemblance to Benidorm or Torremolinos. But here, too, each year millions of northern visitors, enamoured of warm weather and easy living, take up temporary residence. The only difference is that the Donana national park is Europe's biggest wildlife reserve, and these visitors include graceful, long-necked herons, exotic ducks and stilt-legged pink flamingoes.

One day, perhaps, they will be joined on La Costa de la Luz by that even more flamboyant migrating species, *homo touristicus*. But not too soon, I hope. No matter what the developers say, the coast of light is better left unilluminated.

#### WEIGHING THE COSTAS

Four nights at the Marbella Club (bed and breakfast) costs from GBP830 per person; four nights at La Bobadilla (bed & breakfast) from GBP745 per person. Prices are inclusive of return flights from London to Malaga with British Airways (tel: 0845-7733377) and private car transfers.