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Critical Translation Pedagogy: Different Social Contexts, Different Approaches

*Pedagogía crítica de la traducción: diferentes contextos
sociales, diferentes enfoques*

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ABSTRACT: This study reflects on different teaching approaches for two different translators' pedagogical projects at the Federal University of Bahia in Brazil. The theoretical framework is mainly based on Paulo Freire's (2020 [1996]) critical pedagogy which proposes to diagnose and use the specific local reality to conceive education in a transformative way. Taking into consideration the different nature of the projects analysed here, different teaching approaches are necessary. While one is closer to the dynamics of a professional translational activity requiring several translation subcompetences simultaneously, the other can dive deeper into cultural, linguistic and situational contexts with (almost) no concern related to external demands. The projects also present convergent points considering as both attempt to compensate the lack of a graduate programme in translation at the university.

KEYWORDS: critical translation pedagogy; translators' pedagogical projects; different approaches.

RESUMEN: Este estudio reflexiona sobre diferentes enfoques de enseñanza para dos proyectos pedagógicos de traducción en la Universidad Federal de Bahía. El marco teórico se sustenta principalmente en la pedagogía crítica de Paulo Freire (2020 [1996]) que propone diagnosticar y utilizar la realidad local específica para concebir la educación de

manera transformadora. Teniendo en cuenta la diferente naturaleza de los proyectos aquí analizados, se necesitan diferentes enfoques de enseñanza. Mientras que uno está más cerca de la dinámica de una actividad de traducción profesional que requiere varias subcompetencias de traducción simultáneamente, el otro puede profundizar en contextos culturales, lingüísticos y situacionales sin (casi) preocuparse por las demandas externas. Los proyectos también presentan puntos convergentes considerando que ambos intentan compensar la falta de un programa de grado en traducción en la universidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: pedagogía crítica de la traducción; proyectos de pedagogía de traductores; diferentes enfoques.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation pedagogy has been increasingly addressed in applied research for the last years with different approaches (Kyrally 2012; Venuti 2016; Vasconcellos 2020; Pym 2020; Pereira et al. 2020; Hurtado Albir [2008] 2020). Currently, we can see sophisticated research and successful attempts to organize and propose translation pedagogies in higher education programmes and free courses with didactic units, types of evaluation, competence levels, etc. These studies are important to give recognition, autonomy, and singularity to translation education.

Still, if we look into different social contexts where translation is taught, we may see that such proposals often need to be adjusted to be applied to their particular realities. This is observable from this case study, which presents two translation pedagogic projects at the Federal University of Bahia, in Brazil. My proposal is to look at them from the perspective of critical pedagogy, founded by the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire.

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education whose ideological view concerns the perception of students' needs and desires, the diagnosis of the environment within the community, and the purpose of transformation and social justice through education in a dialogical relationship.

2. A CRITICAL TRANSLATION PEDAGOGY

The philosophy of critical pedagogy does not cover a specific field of knowledge. Paulo Freire applied it in literacy education but it has always concerned a wider view. Nowadays it has been highly discussed in language education (Rashidi and Safari 2011; Pereira 2020), for example.

In general terms, the theoretical space for critical pedagogy enables an approach based on diagnoses to be carried out in teaching and learning situations. In *Pedagogia da Autonomia*, Freire ([1996] 2021) recalls the political and ideological role of teaching. He highlights the teacher's role related to diagnosing the students' real situation within their own community. So, in a critical, ethical and aesthetic conception, students have voice in the establishment of their own learning environment to construct their investigation, define their themes, and problematize them.

These pedagogical proposals can be transferred to translation education with the purpose of reflecting both on professional conditions and the social environment. In this same spectrum, translation apprentices should be able to question educational and professional environments according to their present and future realities, as well as to struggle to transform their structuring, valorisation and visibility.

A critical pedagogy is a non-monolithic or singular method of teaching and it takes into account the adaptability to students' social contexts. In this perspective, education varies in assumptions, values, priorities and meaning-making processes where teachers and students interactively learn and teach in the educational process (Patton 2017). That is the reason why critical pedagogy is not and should not be a neutral process, but political and transformative. Therefore, if we see education as a political enterprise, critical pedagogy aims to increase students' critical awareness of their socio-political environment to fight against the *status quo*, with the intention of transforming both, the classroom and society.

In a previous article, I have considered a critical translation pedagogy by proposing to map out the students and communities' translation needs and desires with the following questions (Pfauf 2023): What are the translation needs and desires in this environment and its surroundings? What are the spaces available for translators in our locality? Can we open new spaces for translation through education? Who needs or may need translation from us, and why? What languages and genres are applicable and/or necessary for translation in this community? How can translation improve spaces of intercultural relations between the communities that will be translated and will receive the translation? How can translation contribute to the lives of future translators? How can the profession be better recognized among them? How can the community recognize the intellectual effort of a translation work?

3. SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Translation education may take place through two main strands, at least in Brazil (Lima and Spolidoro 2019): «undergraduate translation, language and literature courses at the universities and free courses» —which may be related or unrelated to an institution of higher education—, of short or long duration, for specific or general purposes, specific or general languages, online or in person. So, if we think of translation courses more focused on students' social needs than on marketing needs, university courses tend to offer more space for discussion, although it should not be limited to them. In this perspective, Lima and Spolidoro (2019) differentiate the concept of «educating» (*educar*) from that of «training» (*treinar*). They see that the idea of translators' «training» tends to focus on more technical issues related to learning procedures and use of language and technological resources. A programme aimed at the translators' «education», however, could cover a universe of various topics related to translation, including ideological and political debates.

Da Silva Moura and Loguercio (2021) analysed data related to graduate translation students' final paper (*Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso*) from several universities in

Brazil. They see a growing desire to study political issues such as feminism and accessibility. From this, they argued in favour of encouraging young researchers to carry out research that gives them personal and professional satisfaction. This way, perhaps, Brazilian students are able to contribute more directly towards dismantling hegemonic structures and transforming the social environment (local and global) in which they live. They defend the idea that:

[i]t would be well accepted if our young translators learned that, even if the profession suffers from conditions imposed by a society that increasingly gives in to neoliberal dynamics—which makes work precarious based on oppressive practices—, we can create alternatives to existing situations effectively intervening in «this world», in this work environment¹. (Da Silva Moura and Loguercio 2021, 20; my translation).

Lawrence Venuti (2016) also notes the dangers of education giving in to the pressures of the translation market, if translation programs and courses take it as the main criterion. He is aware that the development of pedagogies in accordance with changing market conditions and demands is likely to rank well in the evaluation of teaching, especially in texts and fields of knowledge where functionality is inextricably linked to economic value. He understands that this type of practice limits or even prevents a more critical analysis that encourages innovations and improvements, both in translation and in the market itself. He states that if the only standard of pedagogy is based on the market, translation runs the risk of serving merely quantitative thinking, aiming to reduce or separate linguistic and cultural differences possibly neglecting values, beliefs and representations that are part of these differences that translation can bring them to light (instead of hiding them).

4. A PARTICULAR REALITY

My purpose here is to present my reality as a professor of translation at the Federal University of Bahia, in Brazil. To start with, translation is present but fragmented at the university because we do not hold a graduate programme in translation. Our graduate programmes on Languages and Literatures offer elective and compulsory translation courses in their curricula together with other courses on linguistics, teaching education, and literature criticism. We also hold two postgraduate programmes, one in language and culture (*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Língua e Cultura*) and another in literature and culture (*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Literatura e Cultura*). Both programmes hold research lines in translation.

In this sense, postgraduate students who desire to research translation can find a safe space in our postgraduate programmes. However, in terms of graduate level there is not a full programme to educate translators. Still, some of our students who are willing to learn more about translation may find shelter in our several research groups on translation

¹ *Seria muito bem-vindo se nossos jovens tradutores aprendessem que, ao mesmo tempo em que a profissão sofre com as condições impostas por uma sociedade que cede cada vez mais à dinâmica neoliberal —que precariza o trabalho a partir de práticas opressoras—, é possível criar alternativas ao que existe, intervir efetivamente em «seu mundo», em seu meio de trabalho.*

(led by different professors) or in our service/educational project to translate texts from external demands. That being said, I will comment on these possibilities students have study and practice translation. More specifically, I will present the research group I lead (KiT) and the translation service/educational project that I am the current supervisor (NUPEL). From their similarities and differences, I will discuss both activities considering our situational context based on a critical translation pedagogy.

NUPEL (*Núcleo Permanente de Extensão em Letras*) is a language teaching and translation centre where students translate on demand for the university's external and internal communities. NUPEL has a one-year translation training programme for graduate and postgraduate students who want to learn and practice translation. KiT (Key Texts in Translation) is a research group in which students translate translation theories in a metatranslational process.

Both projects have some similarities because they deal with actual translation practices under supervision and theoretical discussion (although NUPEL is more practical with little space for theoretical discussion from texts but more reflection on the students' own translation practices). Also, both projects develop activities in collaboration and work with real projects (Kiraly 2005; 2012). In terms of genres, both work with scientific texts (NUPEL also accepts other written texts such as academic websites, certificates, literary texts, etc.).

Regarding the translators' social context, they are quite similar. Both of them accept only graduate and postgraduate students of Languages and Literatures but KiT is open for students from other universities. All students recruited in both projects express strong desires to be translators. In both projects, we find that most students have already some years of experience in translation (especially in freelance subtitling and academic translation). Still, both projects count on and are opened for novice translators considering that the idea is to train/educate them in translation. Regardless, all students from both projects show some kind of interest in research (as they currently carry out or plan to work with translation in their graduate and postgraduate individual research). This scenario proves that, despite a lack of a formal graduate programme in translation, they look for specialisations of different kinds and manage to insert themselves in translation jobs and research available.

Nevertheless, the projects also present several differences. First of all, NUPEL is a more a translators' «training»-oriented project whereas KiT tends to be more a translators' and researcher's «education»-oriented project. The table below presents some differences in relation to recruitment, perspectives, demands, time, method, language and autonomy in each project:

Differences	NUPEL: university extension project	KiT: research project
Recruitment	Institutional: prerequisites, translation test, interview	Informal: students interested in taking part of research groups in translation and/or professor's invitation

	Limited and small: 3 translators in training per year	Unlimited: 10 translators in training at the moment
Students' perspectives	Scholarship General translator's training project in a technical and critical approach (criticism usually from their own practices discussed during and after the translation task)	Voluntary Specific translator's education and translation researcher's project in a technical and critical approach (criticism from their own practice, theoretical reading and the texts in translation)
Demands	Scientific texts from several areas of knowledge, institutional texts, documents, and literary texts from external commissioners.	Academic texts related to translation theories selected by the professor.
Time to translate	Limited (with deadlines)	Unlimited
Collaborative method	Translators > supervisor <> translators > supervisor > NUPEL > commissioners	Translators <> supervisor <> authors <> translators <> supervisor > publisher ²
Language direction	Portuguese into English English into Portuguese	English into Portuguese
Students' autonomy	Supervisor is responsible for final decisions. Partial visibility	The group must come to a consensus. Full visibility

Table 1. NUPEL and KiT's differences. Source: the author (supervisor of both projects)

From the table above, we can see that NUPEL is more institutionalized than KiT in terms of recruitment, scholarship and demands. In terms of collaboration, although both projects are collaborative, collaboration happens differently, as translators at NUPEL are more subjected to the supervisor's decisions than in KiT, where translation decisions are taken collectively. One of the reasons is related to time, as NUPEL works with deadlines and KiT does not. In relation to visibility, KiT's purpose is to publish every translated material and make sure that the participants will receive translation credits. This is not fully controllable at NUPEL because it depends on the commissioners who demand translations. We can also see difference related to language direction and demands. KiT's participants have the comfort to translate only from English into Brazilian Portuguese (everybody's native language) and only texts of translation theory. At NUPEL, we accept different types of translations and work in both language directions.

² The symbol <> means that the step is taken collectively between the two agents involved whereas > means that the activity is not done collectively (from one agent to another).

Regarding subcompetences, perhaps NUPEL's project is closer to a professional reality counting on (nearly) all translation subcompetences simultaneously, considering, for example, those named by the PACTE group (Hurtado Albir [2008] 2020): bilingual, extra-linguistic, instrumental, knowledge about translation, strategic subcompetences, and the psycho-physiological components. NUPEL is close to the «real world» of translation demands where there are, for example, agencies, clients and deadlines (still, it is a pedagogical programme, so deadlines tend to be longer than professional demands). KiT's participants, however, perform in a more idealized context in terms of self-reflection and collective discussion: we do not deal with specific external demands, so deadlines do not really concern us and we do not see the authors' of the texts as our «clients» (we contact them, though, in order to solve doubts and tell or ask permission for interferences that we may find relevant). We know that time pressure and other intermediate factors do influence greatly the translation task and we understand that in professional situations, translators have to deal with them. Nevertheless, due to their particular formats, there are more possibilities to reflect critically at KiT than NUPEL.

5. CONCLUSION

Considering that the Federal University of Bahia does not count on a graduate programme of translation, the two projects of translation presented above are fragments from a demand of students, professors as well as the internal and external university community. Even though both of them come from the same university and students present similar profiles, we can see different methodological approaches.

On one hand, NUPEL external demands tend to show a great influence on the learning process (e.g.: different genres and the commissioners' specific demands), which partly fulfils the desire of these students to become professional translators. The project tends to be more practical than theoretical and collaborative translation is organized in individual steps, as it happens in some translation agencies, for example. KiT, on the other hand, besides of being a translator's and researcher's «education»-oriented project, students have more time to read and learn translation theory as well as to reflect on their own actions (often according to the translation theory they translate which enhances the metatranslational nature of the project by combining theory and practice in single activities). Because of that, collaborative translation is organized in more collective steps.

Still, both projects (and other research groups at the *Instituto de Letras*) are not able to embrace every student's desire to be «adopted» in a translation project. In case of NUPEL, we only have three vacancies for translators in training in the English-Portuguese team every year. So, if we diagnose the students' desires to be more in contact with translation, we certainly do not offer enough, but anyway we try to compensate the lack of a long term programme on translation.

In terms of demand, NUPEL regularly receives texts to translate, which means the community needs and uses our services. Still, we often receive translation demands on texts that the programme does not cover (e.g.: subtitling or interpreting) and this is something we have to consider further. Anyway, different genres trigger different kinds

of discussion on translation as the situation demands. As for KiT, the project of translating theories of translation is an investigation proposal to observe how the texts themselves influence on the decision making process of the students and the professor. This investigation takes into account the individual world visions on translation practice and theories as well as related subjects discussed in the group. In this sense, it seems quite satisfactory that the students are learning translation and related theories through translation practices.

As we have seen, critical translation pedagogy sees education as non-monolithic and considers the learning community and its surroundings as a starting point to project the educational environment. According to the situational learning context (university, location, students' profiles), both projects analysed consider the students and society's specific «desires and needs» (Freire [1996] 2021) but the learning environment is still not able to fulfil the real demands. In other words, there is much more space for translation teaching and learning at this Brazilian university.

Taking into account the precepts of critical pedagogy, it is not possible to establish rigid formulas to teach translation, as each social context is specific. Yet, there are ways to establish human relationships in which the local reality becomes an eternal laboratory of experiments in the emergence of demands, social needs and individual desires on learning. These are intercultural exchanges between teachers, students and society, between internal and external knowledge, between the «self» and the «Other».

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