

DEVELOPING TRANSLATOR'S INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: A COGNITIVE APPROACH

MARIA YAROSH AND LARRY MUIES
UNIVERSITY OF DEUSTO, BILBAO

ABSTRACT

Despite the widespread criticism of making intercultural training cognitively-focused and despite the fact that defending the cognitive approach might seem to prove those who maintain that the university limits itself to the knowledge dimension right, this paper argues that the cognitive and metacognitive components are central to the aim of developing the translator's intercultural competence. This is substantiated through reviewing opinions expressed in the literature on Intercultural Training and Translator Training, on the one hand, and on the other with an introductory account of *Intercultural Training for Translators* four pilot sessions held at the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain) in autumn 2010, which made use of the approach advocated.

KEY WORDS: intercultural competence, translator training, cognitive

CONTENTS:

1. Introduction
2. "The cognitive" in intercultural training
3. Witte: translator intercultural competence and "the cognitive"
4. Why the cognitive approach?
5. The University of Deusto classroom sessions
 - 5.1. *Setting*
 - 5.2. *The classroom activities*
 - 5.2.1. *Big Mac vs. the River Spirit*
 - 5.2.2. *What do you know about dogs?*
 - 5.2.3. *Say what you see*
 - 5.3. *Discussion*
6. Conclusion
7. References

1. Introduction

The emphasis on the cognitive is not accepted by everybody within the field of intercultural training. This was probably due to the fact that some of the earlier attempts at developing intercultural competence were narrowly cognitive and had to be renounced as ineffective (cf. Fowler and Mumford, 1995: xii). As a result, some writers actually claimed that if an intercultural training programme focused on the cognitive, the trainer was not professional enough (Paige, 1996: 159). Nonetheless, rejecting cognitively-oriented intercultural training simply because of its focus on the mental processes may be counterproductive. Thus, the intercultural training field itself has similarly abandoned the excessively affective sensitivity training model and moved to the currently employed integrated cognitive/experiential model (Fowler and Mumford, 1995: xii; Hoopes, 1979: 5; Paige and Martin, 1996: 42). Moreover, explicitly stating what is meant by “cognitive approach” is of crucial importance for judging how appropriate the training proposed is.

This paper argues that the cognitive and metacognitive components are central to the aim of developing the translator's intercultural competence. In order to demonstrate this, the article first explains what interpretations of the cognitive approach to intercultural competence development the authors want to differentiate themselves from. Next, the authors' understanding of the term is outlined and advantages of focusing on the cognitive and metacognitive components of the competence are formulated. Finally, a brief account of four *Intercultural Training for Translators* pilot sessions based on the approach advocated is provided. The four sessions were held at the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain) in autumn 2010. Three of the activities tried out are discussed in more detail.

2. “The cognitive” in intercultural training

Cognitive training, approach, method or orientation, alternatively labelled “intellectual model” (Blake, Helsin and Curtis, 1996: 168), is what came to be called the university model within the intercultural training field. It is considered the most traditional (Witte, 1996: 75) approach and the safest and easiest in terms of preparation and conducting the training sessions because it is based on the pedagogy of transmission: information is transmitted from lecturers, and/or people with first-hand experience, to the trainees. Teachers transferred facts while students were expected to accumulate the information in their memory (Cushner and Brislin, 1996: 21). The number of facts was often overwhelming, which made it difficult for the learners to organise them into a meaningful whole (Brislin, 1977: 206). Such a content-oriented approach has also been widespread in foreign language teaching (cf. Byram, 1997: 43)¹ and in translator training with Culture and Civilization B or History and Literature courses. In the 1960s, intercultural trainers borrowed the teaching methods from the universities. That is why, with lectures being one of the favourite teaching formats, the approach received the name of “university model” (also cf. Risager, 2007: 135). As for the “cognitive” label, this is probably due to information not being strictly differentiated from knowledge (cf.

¹ Yet, it should be pointed out that even in the 1980s there were authors within the foreign language teaching domain who advocated a much broader understanding of the cognitive - cf. Zarate's position outlined in Risager, 2007: 86-87.

Paige and Martin, 1996: 40). Indeed, speaking of early cognitive intercultural training, many authors use the terms interchangeably (e.g. Albert, 1995: 164).

Even when knowledge was distinguished from facts, it still formed part of the “old-fashioned” cognitive domain. When, also in the 1960s, the cognitive-affective-behavioural/motor triad attracted increased attention after the publication of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning objectives (Bloom et al., 1956), the idea of cognitive learning being somehow deficient emerged. Although the original intention can be roughly formulated as making learning more holistic through incorporating all three domains, affective learning was interpreted as more progressive and more desirable, while it became far less prestigious to explore the principles of cognitive learning, possibly due to the false impression that the cognitive domain had already been thoroughly studied. In the case of Intercultural or Cross-Cultural Training such a negation of cognitive foci produced a shift towards the affective “human relations/sensibility training model” (Fowler and Mumford, 1995: xii). The “affective” approach was excessively focused on the “personal growth” of the trainees and did not prove successful either. The second failure has been attributed to three causes:

- 1) absence of a conceptual framework to base the learning on,
- 2) not drawing differences between culture and personality, and
- 3) ignoring such key issues as perceptual differences, cultural attitudes and assumptions, and cultural awareness (Hoopes, 1979: 4-5).

With the failure of training initiatives that emphasised the affective, those involved in intercultural training gradually came to realise that cognitive was not synonymous with information transmission, i.e. that the process of knowledge acquisition can be experimental (cf. Albert, 1995: 164). Cognitive is still quite often seen as only the first step, with affective involvement and behavioural changes being the final aim (Hayles, 1995: 215 and Wallace, 1993: 16), or as forming the first stage of every developmental cycle (Bennett, 1993: 26). Yet, the current model of intercultural training is conceptualised as an Integrated Cognitive/Experiential Model (Fowler and Mumford, 1995: xii; Hoopes, 1979: 5). It does include the affective component, in terms of making trainees conscious of their culturally-conditioned attitudes and assumptions, but simultaneously makes explicit use of the theoretical framework in order to help students understand principles of intercultural communication (Hoopes, 1979: 4). Besides, in this new model, cognitive comprises both informational and conceptual learning (Paige and Martin, 1996: 42).

3. Witte: translator intercultural competence and “the cognitive”

Such broader interpretation of “the cognitive”, which embraces both factual and conceptual learning, and an emphasis on cognitive processes other than focusing on information transmission are the two elements adopted and advocated in this article for translator intercultural training. Yet, not all writers in the area of Intercultural Training understand the cognitive in the same way. For example, Kim (1994: 395) is at the narrowest point of the continuum, because his cognitive knowledge embraces the knowledge of pragmatics together with a great variety of cultural issues (history, social institutions, beliefs, etc.), which is still very close to the “collection of facts” position. Hammer, who indicates that his position is shared at least by Gudikunst, Wisemen,

Chen and Starosta, identifies the cognitive component of intercultural competence with intercultural awareness (Hammer, 1999: 11). Still others within the field incorporate both knowledge and awareness into the cognitive (Gudykunst, Guzley and Hammer, 1996: 65).

Among Translation Studies scholars, Grosman also associates cultural awareness with the cognitive domain: she speaks of cross-cultural awareness as an “indispensable body of knowledge about the possibilities and relevance of differences between cultures” and insists that it “must be integrated into the training of students of translation” (Grosman, 1994: 51). This is an interesting development at least for two reasons. Firstly, becoming aware is associated with a cognitive development, while within the general discourse on learning objectives, awareness is traditionally associated with the affective domain (e.g. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia, 1964). Secondly, considerable importance is given to cultural differences, thus moving away from focusing on the facts about a certain (often implicitly national) culture. Student translators are no longer expected to be taught as much information as possible about cultures associated with their working languages. Knowledge base acquisition and amplification remains a valid aim, but it is not the prime objective of a translator intercultural training programme. It is much more important for students to become aware of the relevance any difference between the source and the target culture might have for communication success or failure, depending on the quality of the translator's intervention. Equipped with this awareness, students will be able to continue developing their knowledge base in a conscious and methodologically more correct way.

What Grosman expounds seems to share common ground with the key idea of competence-based learning – enabling students with the awareness, understanding and skills or habits necessary to continue developing towards the desired objectives on their own, and on a lifelong basis. That is why it appears reasonable to conceptualise the (inter)cultural component of Translation (and Interpreting) degrees as intercultural competence development. It must be said that translation scholars and practitioners have been advocating the competence approach for some time now (e.g. McAlester, 1991; Nord, 1991; Pöchhacker, 1992: 89-90; Mohanty, 1994; Englund Dimitrova, 2002; Schäffner, 2003; or Kastberg, 2007). However, Witte is probably the main proponent of the translator's intercultural competence and the writer who has done most to specify the concept and familiarise the Translation Studies academic community with it (Witte 1993, 1994, 1996, 2008). Thus, it is Witte's definition upon which we build our research and which lies at the foundation of the methodological proposal under development. Witte is also highly critical of the teaching that calls itself cognitive but limits itself to informing and teaching facts (Witte, 1993: 161-162). This should not be interpreted, however, as an anti-cognitive stand, which becomes clear from her definition of the competence:

- the ability to become aware of what is “known” unconsciously,
- the ability to “learn” consciously what students do not “know” about their own culture as well as about other cultures, and
- the ability to relate and contrast cultures with the aim of perceiving and producing behaviours appropriate for the aims, needs and circumstances of a particular communicative situation so as to enable communication between at least two parties (cf. Witte, 2008: 143).

Becoming conscious of one's unconsciously held assumptions, comparing and relating cultural aspects, acting on the conclusions drawn and taking into account characteristics of the communicative and translation situation are all cognitive processes. Making efforts towards developing such abilities, as well as the ability to purposefully acquire comparative knowledge of the cultures one is likely to work with, not only involves cognitive operations but also requires a metacognitive framework, i.e. comprehending what one needs to learn and how to do it, becoming an autonomous learner. Apart from the cognitive capabilities listed above, general cognitive flexibility is required of the translator. To be more precise, to be able to communicate effectively across cultures, one needs cognitive flexibility (Fowler and Mumford, 1995: xiii). This is even more so in the case of the cultural mediator, which is how an increasingly larger number of Translation Studies writers are conceiving the translator's (e.g. Katan, 1999: 66, 125).

4. Why the cognitive approach?

In general, within Translation Studies the cognitive approach is differentiated from the cultural one (e.g. Chesterman, 2007: 173). Yet, there are no reasons why emphasising the cognitive processes involved in translation (e.g. Wilss, 1996: 43) could be incompatible with focusing on the differences between the source and the target culture and the way of dealing with these. In fact, this is exactly the approach defended by House (2001: 72). The translator's intercultural competence is not limited to behaving in a culturally-appropriate manner. Translators' intercultural training does not need to aim at helping students overcome the emotional challenge and adapt to living in a new culture, either. On the contrary, intercultural training for future translators should be very much focused on various cognitive operations involved in dealing with linguistic forms that refer to cultural scenes or schemata easily understood by the representatives of the author's culture, but not common among or known to the target audience.

In the cognitive approach to culture, the cultural phenomena to which linguistic forms refer are represented in the format of mental structures that appear to exist in the minds of certain culture representatives. Culture is embodied in the form of cognitive models that condition people's interpretations of the outer world phenomena (Katan, 1999: 18). The constructs of cognitive or mental structures – scenes, schemata, frames, scripts, scenarios, – or whichever other terms are used to specify their composition – are precisely, in our point of view, what makes the cognitive approach optimal for the task of developing the translator's intercultural competence. Cognitive psychologists and those involved in artificial intelligence research have created taxonomies of knowledge structures (cf. Kachru and Smith, 2008: 28; van Dijk, and Kintsch, 1983: 47ff; Sperber and Wilson, 1996), while scholars devoted to deciphering the speech comprehension and verbalisation processes have many things to offer on text-specific mental structures (e.g. Emmott, 1994). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to try and give even an outline of all these findings, the point we wish to make is that the incorporation of such theoretical insights would greatly benefit the intercultural training of student translators.

As already indicated, mental structures can be used to explain both the verbalisation and the comprehension processes (cf. Dancette, 1997: 79 and Rickheit and Sicherlschmidt, 1999: 22). Making distinctions between different types of the cognitive models is optional, but helping students see that behind the linguistic form there is some kind of

mental representation is crucial. The trainer might decide to speak of meaning or concept as such a representation (cf. Jackendoff, 1992: 195) or speak of linguistic form as the tip of an iceberg, which must always be visible enough for the intended audience to be capable of reconstructing the whole envisaged by the author (cf. Seleskovitch, 1976: 100). These chunks of knowledge – also understood as beliefs, as well as opinions, as well as attitudes, as well as images, etc. (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; Gumperz, 1995: 157) – are brought into the communication process and it is essential for interlocutors to be able to draw on them if the communication is to be successful (Jackendoff, 1992: 195 or Kachru and Smith, 2008: 28 and 37). The translator's function then is to first create mental representations as close as possible to those that a hypothetical average target reader or listener in the source culture would have created, and then to choose a way of expressing these models in the target language so that the target audience would have a chance to create as similar models as possible. Besides nearly any schema, however general, could be culture-specific if it happened that there were differences between the elements normally included in it by representatives of the source and the target culture (Pagano, 1994: 257). If students realised this, they would realise the importance of developing intercultural competence and building their knowledge bases around discovering differences in apparently analogous models. Inability to acquire the knowledge necessary and/or to compare and relate models will lead to translators creating erroneous models either in their heads, or in the target text, or both.

Moreover, mental models are deemed to be created for well-known situations and are, therefore, conditioned by the person's experience (Bell 1991: 250; Gumperz, 1995: 21; Schank and Abelson, 1977: 41). On the one hand, this means that some of the cognitive models will be personal; on the other, there are models that are culturally specific. However difficult it is to draw the dividing line, the translator has no choice but to operate with generalisations. There is some more or less vaguely defined target audience, and if the translator can imagine which cognitive models an average representative of the target culture might have, there are more chances of enabling the communication process with the translation that will be created. Cognitive models simply cannot be universal, because people's life experiences differ. To form a cognitive model a person needs to have experienced the phenomena, preferably more than once, and the person's culture determines the person's experience and the way things happen in 'their world'. If certain phenomena are not represented in the person's culture it is highly unlikely that this person will develop a cognitive model for them, although this can be done on the basis of indirect experience of learning about these phenomena from others. If such indirect experiences are used, the manner in which the source of knowledge thus acquired interprets the phenomena in question and the degree to which those phenomena are understood will affect the cognitive model formed. If certain phenomena are present in both cultures but display considerable differences, the cognitive models of the phenomena formed by the representatives of the two cultures are bound to differ. For example, in many countries people use buses as means of public transport. However, the rules that regulate the way people board busses and pay their fares might differ substantially. So can the emotions associated with taking a bus, for instance, of comfort vs. discomfort. Unless the interlocutors are aware of these differences, the mentioning of a bus ride would evoke in their heads their-own-culture-specific cognitive model as well as making them expect a story of a typically unpleasant

journey or vice versa.² Thus, the translator as mediator must be able to shift between cultural viewpoints: to understand, match and create cultural frames (Katan, 1999: 125 and 147).

Furthermore, apart from being necessarily stereotyped, cognitive models are possibly best described as stereotypical assumptions and expectations representatives of the culture bring to interpreting texts (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996: 216; Sperber and Wilson, 1996: 88). In this respect, it is important to point out that those expectations refer not only to how things happen in the world but also to what different types of texts are to be like, or even to the degree of freedom the translator is considered to have (cf. van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983: 16 and Chesterman 1997: 64).

Beamer (1995) offers one more perspective on the relation of cognitive models and intercultural communication. Ideas one has about another culture also come in the form of schemata. Thus, when trying to adjust the message to a culturally-different other, the speaker or writer filters it through his/her schemata of the other's culture, "according to perceived cultural priorities of the receivers" (Beamer, 1995: 158). When receiving messages from a culturally-different other, again, these might be filtered through schemata the person has about the sender's culture. Beamer uses the term "projected schemata" to highlight discrepancies that exist between the schemata representatives of one culture have about their own culture and the schemata representatives of another culture might have in respect to the first culture. Projected schemata describe the person's 'knowledge' of the other culture (ibid: 146). The schemata one has of the other culture are modified through direct experiences and thanks to accumulating data about the other culture. Yet, they often heavily depend on the person's own culture, because the data one looks for about the other culture and the data one can notice and acquire are conditioned by one's own cultural priorities. Besides, if the person lacks knowledge of the other culture, the inferences drawn are guided by general considerations of cause-effect relationships. Beamer fully recognises dependency of these explanatory tools on the person's culture, which is why she considers awareness of cognitive models theory should form a crucial part of intercultural training (ibid: 159). The "schemata model" of communication, as she calls it, can serve as a theoretical framework for practical training because of its explanatory power. This model can replace the traditional transmission model in explaining what happens in the process of intercultural communication from the cognitive point of view, how meaning is attributed and, thus, can cast light on what can be done to improve intercultural understanding.

Thus, in summary, the two major advantages of introducing students to the notion of mental/cognitive models might be, firstly, the fact that these "make explicit what the user of the concept [signalled to by the linguistic form – *MY&LM*] implicitly knows about the concept" (Bell 1991: 251), and secondly, the fact that this way the students' attention is drawn to the real-life differences, to the cultural and away from vocabulary and grammar. Nevertheless, as indicated above, there are many other benefits of the cognitive approach to meaning, to culture and to intercultural translator training.

Simultaneously, there is another important argument in favour of emphasising the cognitive component of intercultural competence training, at least in the context of

² For more examples of similar wordings evoking totally different and, thus, in case of translation, erroneous images and associations see Vázquez-Ayora, 1977 (Hispanic vs. North American contexts) and Witte, 1994 (German vs. Spanish contexts).

translator education: the need to assure that by the end of their formal training students have developed a metacognitive framework to base their further intercultural development on. On the one hand, the metacognitive skills are clearly not limited to the intercultural competence component within translator education (cf. for example Ulrych, 1996: 251). On the other, the role of autonomous learning for continuously increasing one's intercultural competence cannot be overemphasised either - so much so that Casse proclaimed learning how to learn to be "the main objective of any intercultural training programme" (Casse, 1981: xiii).

Thus, the explanatory power of mental structures and the importance of the metacognitive component, which enables autonomous lifelong learning, are the two key arguments in favour of adopting the cognitive approach. Mental or cognitive models are highly instrumental when talking of translation and culture, translating cultural items and developing student translators' intercultural competence. So is the cognitive approach to culture, if combined with focusing on cultural differences. Fear of overloading students with theory should not become an obstacle for adopting a cognitive approach. Although experiential and hands-on learning should never be substituted with the original narrowly-cognitive purely theoretical approach, theory-based learning is recognised as more effective than one devoid of any theoretical framework. Without such a framework, there is no support system students can use in order to organise their knowledge and their out-of-class learning (cf. Bhawuk and Triandis, 1996: 17-19).

5. The University of Deusto classroom sessions

5.1. Aim and setting

Four 50-minute pilot sessions with the title of *Culture in Translation* were held at the University of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain) as a first step towards developing a pedagogical proposal for the *Intercultural Training for Translators* component for Translation (and Interpreting) degrees. The main objective was to raise students' cultural awareness in terms of helping them free themselves from blindly translating at the linguistic or word level and taking a step towards operating at the level of images and associated concepts/ideas, i.e. not at the purely linguistic but at the cultural level. Thus, activities that implicitly built on the mental models theory formed the core of the experimental sessions. To balance the training and make it more overtly relevant to translation, students were given opportunities to practise identifying culturally-specific items, and strategies for dealing with such items were also discussed. It should be pointed out, however, that making students "see behind words" is an objective that allows for and cannot be achieved without practising such crucial skills as those of comparing and relating cultures or verbalising cultural models. This appears to be precisely the advantage of using the notions of mental models as the theoretical framework.

The four classes were incorporated into an *Introductory English-Spanish Spanish-English Translation* course offered as an optional subject for all second cycle undergraduate students of the university. The group, consisting of some 15 learners, was made up of local students, having either Spanish or Basque as mother tongues, and exchange students from Ukraine and Belarus. The sessions were designed by the authors of this article and conducted by Larry Muies, one of the two course instructors, with Maria Yarosh acting as an observer. From the pre-planned activities, only ten

could be tried out during the experimental sessions. These sessions were recorded (audio and video) and the instructor was interviewed about his perception of each session. Besides, in order to find out the students' point of view, after the last session students were asked to fill out *Activities Evaluation Forms*. While recognising that a full description of the experiment would be more valid, with the emphasis of this article being on the cognitive approach, we would like to focus on three activities that were most closely related to the 'word – mental structure (image or concept)' dichotomy.

5.2. The classroom activities

5.2.1. Big Mac vs. the River Spirit

Objectives:

- 1) to introduce the idea of culture as knowledge
- 2) to foster the sense of professional ethics and responsibility in the students, in terms of avoiding translating without understanding in addition to avoiding at all cost leaving your readers to guess something you as translator have not researched in order to fully understand
- 3) to practise "bridging the cultural gap" by incorporating into translation the cultural knowledge your readers lack
- 4) to practise explaining cultural phenomena well-known in your own culture
- 5) to become aware of how things can be misinterpreted or visualised erroneously if a different mental model is applied when comprehending a linguistic fragment

Grouping: Initial translations were done individually. A whole-class discussion followed. Editing was done individually, while the explanatory task was performed in pairs, small groups or individually.

Steps:

- i. Students were shown the two fragments below and asked to individually translate them into Spanish and their mother tongue (if different)
 - a) He went to McDonald's. The Big Mac sounded good and he ordered it.
 - b) The river had been dry for a long time. Everyone attended the funeral.³
- ii. Students were asked to read their versions and comment on any difficulties they came across when translating.
- iii. Students were asked whether they fully understood the two fragments. If they answered positively, they were asked to explain the link between the two sentences of the second fragment.
- iv. Since students failed to draw the wider picture in which the two sentences of the second fragment would make sense, they were given the information – i.e. the cultural knowledge – they lacked.

³ Examples are taken from Blakemore, 1995: 35-36. Example "b" comes from a culture where rivers are believed to have spirits and a river drying up is understood as the river's spirit having died. Sentences and not whole texts are chosen in order to facilitate the task of focusing on particular words and associated concepts, images and schemata.

v. Students were asked if they considered that their initial translations of the second fragment required any changing so that the reader could also comprehend the fragment. Next, in groups students edited their translations of the second fragment keeping in mind the cultural knowledge they now possessed but which their readers most likely lacked.

vi. Students read their versions. If students opted for the use of different translation strategies, these were not named or defined as such but the students' attention was drawn to the conceptually different versions.

vii. Then, students were asked to imagine they needed to translate the first fragment to someone who had never seen or heard of McDonald's. Students were told that their translation should allow this imaginary reader to understand the first fragment the way the students understand it. The instructor led a whole-class discussion eliciting information from the students and showing them how issues students automatically interpret correctly might be misinterpreted if corresponding (cultural) mental models are missing.

Materials used: The fragments to be discussed were shown to students with the use of a projecting system, or written on the blackboard. The information required for understanding the second fragment was also projected and read aloud by the instructor.

5.2.2 What do you know about dogs?

Objectives:

- 1) to make students aware of the fact that words are linked to images or associated ideas (knowledge and/or beliefs)
- 2) to draw their attention to the fact that the person's culture – knowledge, life experience, professional formation and occupation, religion and national culture – conditions the images and the ideas associated with concepts, and, thus, with words
- 3) to foster students' ability to put themselves into other people's shoes and try to imagine how these people would perceive certain world phenomena

Grouping: Several steps were carried out in the whole-class format. This was followed by group work and whole-class discussion.

Steps:

i. To introduce the activity, the instructor asked two questions without – at this point – expecting any answer: “So do you think that translating is about knowing words? Or is there something ‘behind words’?”

ii. The word “dog” was taken as an example and students were asked to explain what they visualise in their heads when hearing or reading the word. Information about the aspect or breeds of the dogs was repeated and/or summarised by the teacher, especially that which coincides with the idea of prototypes – an Alsatian or a Collie.

iii. Then four sentences suggesting particular breeds were read with “erroneous” images shown right after each one:

- 1) He opened the door to face a pretty young woman with a dog in her arms

- 2) Right from the start of the race the dogs began chasing the rabbit.
- 3) She took her dog to the salon to have its curls reset.
- 4) The policemen lined up with the dogs to face the rioters.⁴

iv. Students were asked to formulate as precisely as they could what image of a dog is suggested by each sentence. An observation was made that the context and our knowledge of the world modify what we see in our mind and, thus, our comprehension. Say, if the only breed of a dog a person knows is Alsatian, this person is bound to have problems with sentences like (1) or (3) as will any reader who cannot visualise the “right” thing.

v. Students were asked to think of differing perspectives on or opinions about dogs: “Now, if we talk of dogs in general, what perspectives on and different opinions about them can you think of? What might the following people say if asked about dogs?” For example:

- a) a child who wants to have a dog
- b) a person whose relative has been recently attacked by a dog without a muzzle
- c) a drug-dealer
- d) a science teacher in an elementary school
- e) a vet

The idea was to cover people with different life experiences and professional formation with regards to dogs.⁵

Steps envisaged but not tried out due to the time constraints:

vi. Students are asked to think of as many different opinions conditioned by people's personal life experience and/or professional formation as they can about a number of different issues. Students can work individually or in groups.*

vii. The groups present the results of their brain-storming and members of other groups are invited to add more ideas. These could be summed up on the blackboard, on a transparency or in a Word-document projected on the screen.

* Alternatively this task can be carried out by students individually at home for the next session. In this case, students should be given two or three notions and asked to think of one or two more themselves.

viii. Three more opinions about dogs are introduced. Impact will clearly be greater if these could be presented in form of videos with representative of respective cultures depicted and/or voicing these positions. However, the crucial idea is that of students becoming familiar with these cultural differences they might not have even suspected:

1. Of all the animals represented in the world today, the dog is one that many would place in the category of *family member, household pet, or companion*.

2. A devout Muslim, in contrast, might place the dog in the category of *dirty or disgusting animal*, similarly to how many others would place a pig – as an animal to be avoided at all costs.

3. Someone living in Korea, on the other hand, might place the dog in the category of *food*

⁴ Examples are taken from Ungerer and Schmid, 1996: 43-44.

⁵ The instructor might choose to conduct this task in the format of a whole-group brainstorming or ask students to work in groups, each working on one or two characters. Alternatively, only the respective groups' members are told whose opinions they are expected to construct, so that other groups can then be asked to guess on the basis of the opinion heard.

ix. Students are asked to add cultural perspectives on the issues they already considered in (vi). This is better done outside of the classroom so that students can conduct the research needed.

Materials used: Mismatching pictures of dogs for step (iii). Videos or images and audio recordings created or found on the Internet, might greatly increase the impact of (viii), but are not considered an absolute must. Students might be provided with sheets of paper for their group brain-storming. When the results of the brain-storming are shared, these might be summarised so that everyone can see them.

5.2.3. Say what you see

Objectives:

- 1) to further raise students' awareness of how linguistic form evokes visual and conceptual associations
- 2) to practise verbalising mental models specific to a certain culture/cultures the students are likely to work with as translators

Grouping: A whole class activity

Steps:

i. The instructor read out different utterances very strongly associated to certain visual images or social situations, e.g. "No smoking" and "Drink up now", "Move on, please". Students were then asked what they had seen after each one.

This step was also envisaged but not tried out due to time constraints:

ii. Students are given a couple of minutes to think of similar phrases in their own culture or one of the cultures they were studying. Ideas are shared with the group and the situations and/or images associated with them are discussed.

5.3. Discussion

All three activities are based on very simple principles. Therefore, other concepts, ideas and situations can easily be used, either in order to make training more culture-general or more culture-specific. These activities are aimed at developing two of the most crucial skills for the translator: visualising and verbalising what the original target culture representative is most likely to visualise or think of when reading a text or hearing a speech. The two skills are interrelated but often underdeveloped. More precisely, in cases when the cultural phenomena referred to are familiar to the reader or listener, such linking occurs automatically without the need to verbalise the knowledge activated. In the case of unfamiliar cultural phenomena, there is either a conscious communication breakdown, when the person realises he/she does not understand what the text is about, or an unconscious communication failure when erroneous concepts and images are correlated to the words and phrases without the person realising this. Translators need to monitor the limits of their knowledge base (a meta-cognitive skill), to be able to verbalise familiar cultural phenomena, as well as to be able to research unfamiliar cultural phenomena and then verbalise them for the target audience who is as

ignorant of the phenomena in question as translators themselves were before the research (all cognitive operations).⁶

The ideas set out above might appear obvious for the translator trainer, but, as the students' comments have revealed, the need for visualisation and verbalisation of cultural mental models is not something students necessarily recognise as relevant for improving their translating skills:

- (1) I liked it but at the same time I found it nonsense because I think it had not much to do with translation. (Student 1 on Activity 5.2.1);
- (2) I did not find any particular purpose (Student 9 on Activity 5.2.1);
- (3) I don't think it was too useful, although it was interesting (Student 2 on Activity 5.2.2); or
- (4) I think this activity was not meaningful so dislike me a little (Student 7 on Activity 5.2.2).⁷

If students do not see the relevance, they can hardly have useful insights or build on these. As Student 3 observed on Activity 5.2.3, "As the one with the dogs I felt we passed it really quickly because there wasn't much to it". Thus, on the one hand, such dramatically different examples as MacDonald's and River Spirit or such a familiar concept as the dog might help students grasp the importance of cultural knowledge and the differences between images and perceptions of "the same" phenomena depending on one's cultural belonging, which is an argument in favour of such somewhat simplistic activities. Yet, on the other hand, unless these activities are linked closely to more challenging and less out-of-context translation samples and tasks, students might not link the insights to their self-concept as student translators. If no such link is made and students do not see where in "real translation" they might encounter similar difficulties and where they will need to shift perspectives or explain the obvious, etc., they will dismiss such activities as puerile and not serious enough. This way the possible "teachable moment" – the moment when students feel the need to develop a certain skill and feel motivated to undertake the efforts required (Gander, 2006) – will be lost. Therefore, activities of this type should be supported by immediately applying the new awareness to discussing text fragments to be translated or already translated once representing similar difficulties. This also means, for example, that the concepts discussed in 5.2.2 and situations evoked in 5.2.3 might be altered depending on the concepts and situations the follow-up fragments contain.

Making students participate is also of great importance. Unless they try to formulate what is unconsciously activated in their heads, they will never realise that their skill of verbalising mental models is not developed. Thus, one of the students, who was little active during Activity 5.2.1, later observed: "The concept was interesting but then the activity turned out a little too simple". At the same time, with MacDonald's being so well-known internationally, students find it difficult to imagine someone might never have heard of it. If they do not accept this premise, they perceive the instructor's request

⁶ For the full description of the translator's intercultural competence components and related learning objectives, as the authors conceive these, see Muies and Yarosh, 2011 (to be published in the *XV International Conference on Translation and Applied Linguistics: Teaching of Languages and Translation in Face to Face and Distance Education* conference proceedings).

⁷ Students' comments are reproduced without any language changes. Only when the students' answers might seem incomplete without seeing the question, are they completed with phrases in square brackets.

to explain what a Big Mac is as devoid of any sense. Thus, although from the pedagogical point of view explaining what Big Mac and MacDonald's are is aimed at developing the ability to explain well-known cultural phenomena, students might well see the task as artificial and lacking any practical value. Therefore, active involvement is necessary, but so too might be inclusion of fragments that refer to phenomena of students' own culture – instead of or along with the fragment about the universal fast-food chain – and to some aspects of one of the foreign cultures the students are likely to work with – again, instead of or along with the fragment built around an indigenous river spirit tradition.

Although possible difficulties and pitfalls have been outlined first, this is not to say that the activities proved ineffective. On the contrary, even in the noticeably reduced format they were conducted in due to the time constraints (steps vi-ix of Activity 5.2.2 and step ii of Activity 5.2.3 were not tried out), students' comments reveal that the majority of those who evaluated these activities benefited from them and were conscious of this. Activity 5.2.3 probably lost most due to the reduced format. Only two of the five students who evaluated this activity felt involved, found it meaningful and generally liked the activity (Students 4 and 7).

Thus, Activity 5.2.1 received the following evaluations:

- (1.1) I liked the fact that it made me think about something that I didn't even consider before. [Its purpose was] to make us realise other people have a complete different understanding of life. (Student 2);
- (1.2) I liked that we had to think in order to respond, and also that it offered enough interesting content to discuss in class (Student 3);
- (1.3) [Its purpose was] to make us aware of the different interpretations in cultures (Student 5);
- (1.4) [Its purpose was] once again to see that people behave differently and that everything is not as it seems (Student 8).

Activity 5.2.2 also received considerably more positive evaluations than negative ones:

- (2.1) I liked it because it was a way of showing us how the same concept can be represent in different ways. It was, as I said above, a way of teaching us that the same concepts may be different in each mind (Student 1);
- (2.2) [Its objective was to] show us that even simple words can have different referents because people can have different images of the same objects in their brains (Student 4);
- (2.6) [The activity helped me realise that] sometimes a word in the target language is not enough to express the idea of the original text. The activity gets directly to the point (Student 5);
- (2.3) [Its objective was] to show us the different interpretations and that words make us think of different images according to the context (Student 2);
- (2.4) [Its objective was] to have us realise the kind of images we associate to certain expressions/words and to make us think about the reasons for these associations we make (Student 3);
- (2.5) I think that is wanted us to see the cultural difference between our language and our knowledge about some themes that were relationed in Spanish and English alike (Student 7);
- (2.6.) [The activity helped us] to see that the definitions are attached to certain ideas and features (Student 8).

Another issue of interest is the precision with which students were often able to formulate the objectives of the activities. The instructor never explicitly stated what was to be achieved and also abstained from verbalising what the students were expected to have learned once the activity was over. This makes us think that the task of evaluating activities may also be instrumental for helping students adopt a meta-cognitive, conscious approach to their learning.

6. Conclusion

It would be wrong to claim that four 50-minute sessions held with a group of non-specialist students constitute evidence for a cognitive approach to be considered optimal for translator intercultural training. Besides, more data is required if any valid conclusions are to be drawn. Yet, the data obtained so far seem to indicate that such an approach may permit new perspectives to be opened up to students and may help them see the process of translation and the task of the translator from a new, much more cultural angle. Thus, taking into consideration the theoretical arguments in favour of the cognitive approach set out above, focusing on the mental models and encouraging students' meta-cognitive efforts appears to be a promising way forward for translator intercultural training.

The pilot experiment should be analysed in more detail, but it has also become clear that longer and more profound intervention is required. Therefore, the next step is a ten 80-minute session course aimed exclusively at developing student translators' intercultural competence, which is currently being carried out at the Institute of Foreign Languages (St Petersburg, Russia). The three activities presented above are to be conducted in their full versions and the results are to be recorded and analysed. At the same time it has been decided to report on this teaching research in progress in the hope that it will contribute to bringing the discussion about developing the translator's intercultural competence from the level of policy and theory to the level of practice and implementation. To conclude, the authors of this article believe that emphasising the cognitive and meta-cognitive should no longer be considered irrelevant. Such aims as making students "see cultural worlds behind the linguistic forms" should not be dismissed as intangible. On the contrary, activities that will enable students to take this step should be designed, tried out and reported so as to bring the debates on intercultural training implementation attempts out of the "grey literature" domain.

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