

Students' engagement in metacognitive activities as a source of feedback for the translation teacher

Paulina Pietrzak
University of Łódź
Łódź, Poland
pietrzak.paulina@uni.lodz.pl

ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on the notion of the teacher as a learner, the author analyses the teacher's need for feedback and proceeds within a framework of formative assessment, also called *assessment for learning* (Black and Wiliam, 2003; Taras, 2005), intended to provide feedback on performance to improve learning. Information gained in the process of formative assessment can be used not only by students but also by the teacher "to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs" (Black et al. 2009: 2). There are a number of possible sources of feedback for translator trainers; they can learn about the student's competence and performance reflected in the product of trainee translation, which is most easily attainable but does not really constitute a comprehensive source of knowledge about the potential reasons for problems occurring in translation. The teacher can gain more insight into students' awareness and perception of translation problems by means of such pedagogically utilized tools as think-aloud protocols, screen recording software, keystroke logging or eye tracking, all of which offer great help in assessing the product of translation. They can be used retrospectively or concurrently to observe the process of translation, self-assessment or peer evaluation (cf. Pym 2009, Angelone 2013, Massey/Ehrensberger-Dow 2013), which lifts the veil on the translator's black box. The author discusses one more way to get some insight into students' thinking processes; however, the focus is laid not on the process of translation or evaluation but on the process of translator training. Attempts made by translation trainees to metacognitively consider the process of training may result in a substantial feedback for translation teachers. It is not the trainees' evaluation of the teacher's performance or class organisation that is the focus of attention, but a reflection on their own learning process. The article analyses the results and implications of a preliminary study in which translation students were asked to reflect, assess and freely express their opinion on a pairwork-based translation activity that they had participated in. Drawing on the findings, the author comments on the effectiveness of the metacognitive activity used in the study as a form of trainees' reflection on the process of learning as well as the advantages of using metacognitive activities for the purpose of feedback directed towards the translator trainer.

Keywords: feedback, translation teacher, formative assessment, self-reflection, metacognition

1. Introduction

In a non-transmissionist approach to translator training, the teacher plays a number of roles inside and outside the translation classroom. In every role, the teacher is expected to perform functions and fulfil a range of responsibilities which go beyond those currently imposed by institutional regulations due to the simple reason that there are no qualifying academic programmes for translation teachers since "translator education remains on the periphery of the general discipline of

education, and is still largely dependent on teachers' intuitions" (Király 2014: unpaginated). Teachers' main responsibility can be broadly defined as meeting the learning needs of translation students, which, however, rests upon the assumption that the teacher knows the needs beforehand. Therefore, in the presented approach, the teacher is primarily seen as a learner. First, however, a brief specification needs to be provided as to why the author uses the term teacher. There is a wide range of terms used in reference to translation educators, i.e. teacher, trainer, guide, supporter, master, instructor, facilitator, lecturer, etc. According to Kelly (2008), some authors associate the use of the term teacher with traditional didactic and teacher-centred approaches and, for that reason, prefer educator or facilitator. However, the term teacher is used in the present article – following Kelly – as the most standard term which implies no particular educational approach.

As regards the role and function of the translation teacher, Király (1995: 33) observes that, "the teacher assumes a variety of roles to allow learner participation in a variety of communicative situations" (Király 2000: 18) and stresses that, "instead of filling them with knowledge, teachers should serve as guides, consultants and assistants who can help set the stage for learning events" (ibid.). With an emphasis on the difference between role and function, it can be observed that the role of the translation teacher is to be a trainer, facilitator or organizer, which encompasses a number of other minor functions, e.g. controller, participant, supporter, advisor, editor, reviser, proofreader, guide, partner, model, expert, feedbacker, etc. The functions of feedbacker and controller appear particularly challenging in a non-transmissionist translation classroom, where both feedback and control should be shared with translation students, although they are the ones that are probably most difficult to share. In an attempt to show that mutual feedback between translation teachers and translation students constitutes, among others, a way of sharing control, it is primarily the function of teacher as learner that is the focus of the article. The aim is to emphasise the translation teacher's need for feedback and demonstrate the possible sources of feedback from translation students. The author suggests metacognition as an informative source of feedback for the teacher and discusses the results of a group-based study in order to analyse the effectiveness and advantages of using metacognition in the translation classroom.

2. Sharing control in the translation classroom

In light of the fact that teachers can control what they teach, but they cannot control what is learned (Ellis 2001: 71), the teacher is, in fact, not the only person responsible for a successful learning process. It is the learner that also needs to be held responsible for their own learning as they construct their own understanding (Glaserfeld 1989). It needs to be acknowledged that a good translation teacher does not hold the authoritative position of a "sage on the stage" (Király 2000: 79) but rather a "guide on the side" (ibid.). González Davies and Király observe an important shift towards student-centered learning which is reflected in the increasing popularity of "cooperative or collaborative approaches involving

extensive group work and a systematic transfer of control from the teacher to the learners" (González Davies and Kiraly 2006: 83).

The issue of transferring control in the translation classroom is, however, particularly problematic when it comes to assessment since it is assessment that gives teachers the greatest control. The authoritative role imposed on the translation teacher by various institutional regulations interferes with the image of the teacher as a guide, postulated by the idea of empowerment (Kiraly 2000; 2005), which might affect the distribution of power and control in the translation classroom. As far as assessment is concerned, control is hard to transfer not only because of the above-mentioned regulations but also because of the students' expectation that teachers be in control. Besides, transferring too much control can be risky as teachers certainly would not like to lose control and, consequently, let students feel overwhelmed with the burden of responsibility. Therefore, the teacher cannot stay too far on the side. According to Klimkowski (2015: 236), "[control] in the empowered classroom becomes subject to negotiation between the teacher and the students". Klimkowski comments on Kiraly's concept of transferring control stating that "a notion of sharing of control [is] more accurate in epistemological terms than the concept of transfer of control" (*ibid.*); indeed, resigning from control in translator training could turn out to be disempowering both for the teacher and for the student.

Therefore, what is advocated is not giving up control but allowing students to participate in assessment. Thanks to their participation in assessment, translation students feel they are in control of their own learning process as the translation class no longer involves only translating and being assessed but also active assessing and giving feedback. Contrary to summative assessment that tends to be limited to grades, the suggested approach – which follows the assumptions of formative assessment – engages students, makes them more responsible for their own knowledge and, as a result, improves the learning process (Bloom, 1969, Sadler, 1998: 77). Moreover, when students are allowed to participate in, for instance, peer-assessment or self-assessment, the whole process of assessment is more interactive, which gives the teacher opportunity to learn about the students from their opinions, comments, problems and their justifications. Such a shared control in the area of assessment is crucial not only for students but also for teachers since effective feedback must be reciprocal. It needs to be emphasised that student engagement in assessment does not have to be limited to peer revision or evaluation. The following sections show some advantages of having students evaluate their own learning process in a reflection practice, here in the form of a metacognitive activity (cf. section 4) in which students look back and comment on their learning experiences.

3. Teacher as learner

A teacher-as-learner approach implies redefining the role and function of both translation teacher and translation student. In translation pedagogy, the didactic application of the idea of teachers becoming learners and learners becoming teachers (Dewey 1998) allows for a multiplicity and diversity of voices in the

translation classroom (González Davies, 2004), which certainly contributes to an increase in the amount of students' participation in the class and a decrease in the teacher's dominance. It not only leads to balancing the distribution of power in the translation classroom but also gives teachers an opportunity to understand the nature of particular problems. As early as 1985, Bennis and Nanus observed that successful leaders are perpetual learners who take responsibility for their own development. This perpetual learning in the case of translation teachers may be twofold, and it may embrace: the process of getting to know the students through classroom interaction and the holistic life-long development of the teacher (Klimkowski 2015). The following sections of the article focus on the former and aim to advocate considering the student as the object of study. As Ellis (2001: xiv) reflects, 'often we have heard insightful teachers speak about how much they learn from their students. In some cases they may be speaking about content or subject matter, and more often probably about the students themselves'. Learning more about translation students undeniably helps identify and respond to the very real needs of the given students.

There are a few sources of feedback for the translation teacher; the teacher can learn about the student's competence and performance reflected in the product of translation which is easily attainable but does not necessarily constitute a comprehensive source of knowledge. The teacher can gain more insight into students' perception and awareness of translation problems by means of such pedagogically utilized tools as think-aloud protocols, screen recording software, keystroke logging or eye tracking, which can be used retrospectively or concurrently to observe the process of translation, self-assessment or peer evaluation (cf. Pym 2009, Angelone 2013, Massey/Ehrensberger-Dow 2013). Teachers can also get some insight into student thinking processes, when the focus is laid not on the process of translation but on the process of translator training. The focus is then laid on the way that students think of their own process of training. The information gained from students' metacognitive consideration and assessment of the process of learning can give teachers substantial feedback.

Metacognition can be described as cognition about cognition or knowledge about cognition and control of cognition. As Livingston defines it, "metacognition refers to higher order thinking which involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning" (Livingston, 1997: unpaginated). Metacognitive activities are therefore both in line with constructivist perspective on learning (Garner, 1987) and supports the idea of autonomous learning, which leads to student empowerment. In educational settings, "metacognition is a theory that states that learners benefit by thoughtfully and reflectively considering the things they are learning and the ways in which they are learning them" (Ellis 2001: xiv). Hartman (2001: 34) observes that, "two fundamental aspects of metacognition are awareness and control over one's thinking". When the teacher organises the translation classroom in such a manner as to allow for student reflection and discovery of what and why they are learning, it empowers them and places more control in their hands. Besides, what also matters here is the side effect of student reflection, which is additional feedback for the translation teacher.

Metacognition includes thinking about one's own thinking processes and the products of one's thinking (Hartman, 2001); however, the product of metacognitive

reflection is not limited to the self since, according to Schraw (1998), there are three main types of metacognitive knowledge, i.e. person/declarative knowledge (the understanding of one's own capabilities), task/procedural knowledge (the perception of the difficulty, content, length and type of a task and strategic/conditional knowledge (one's own capability for using strategies to learn information). Through the practice of metacognition students can therefore reflect and assess or even plan and monitor not only their skills but also their understanding of a text or a task. Metacognition can be used for instance to have students think of their own learning process, or one of its elements, and gradually gain more control over the process. The participants of the study described in the next section of the article were asked to reflect on a translation task that they had just completed. The main inspiration for this metacognitive follow-up exercise was 'I learned statement' presented by Ellis (2001: 69) as one of reflective assessment strategies used as a quick and efficient way to get a sense of the students' grasp of an activity.

4. Metacognition as a source of formative feedback for the translation teacher

The following section presents the results of a short study designed to gain more insight into the effectiveness of metacognition as a source of formative feedback for the translation teacher. The study was conducted in a group of second-year MA students in Translation Studies at the University of Lodz, Poland. First, the group participated in a pairwork-based translation activity and then in a metacognitive activity related to their first task. They were asked to assess, reflect and express their opinion on the translation activity with the aim of rethinking what they did in the translation class. The idea was not to assess the quality of teaching or the teacher's performance, but to trigger reflection on the students' own training process.

The first stage of the study involved a translation-related exercise in peer revision and feedbacking. The students exchanged their texts translated at home and were asked to correct them; having checked each other's translations, the students role-played translators and editors who discuss the translated text. The second stage of the study was a metacognitive follow-up activity in which the students were asked a number of questions in relation to the previous exercise. They were provided with a scrap of paper (cf. Table 1) with 6 questions (QI – QVI) about what they just did, why and what for.

Table 1. The questionnaire used in the study

<i>Answer the following questions:</i>	
QI: What did we do today?	
QII: Why did we do it?	
QIII: What did I learn?	
QIV: How will I use it?	
QV: Questions or doubts?	
QVI: Comments?	

A selection of quotes from the students' responses will now be presented to exemplify the kind of feedback that the teacher can receive thanks to such a metacognitive follow-up exercise. 17 out of the 18 students who participated in the study submitted a fully completed questionnaire. Tables 2-7 demonstrate example quotes from students' answers to all the questions (QI-QVI) from the questionnaire. A selection of responses to the first question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Example quotes from students' responses to Question I

QI: What did we do today?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We corrected each other's translations2. We were in pairs commenting our translations3. We were playing teachers4. We were talking about translations5. We were playing roles of translator and editor
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The first question revolves around the aim of the translation-related task which is quite aptly described in the first answer as it indeed involved correcting translations. The second answer reads 'commenting', which demonstrates that the student was aware that the point of the exercise was not only correcting but also commenting and thus giving precious feedback. While the second answer is quite agreeable for the teacher and shows a decent understanding of the aim of the performed activity, the third answer is a bit disturbing. The student who states that the group were 'playing teachers' misunderstood the instruction since the idea was to play not teachers and students but translators and editors. What is even more problematic here is the fact that the student probably considers the teacher to be the only person in a position to criticise and comment on their translations. Next, although 'talking about translations' appears to be a very general observation, it holds true for the whole point of such translation-related activities. The last answer to the question of what we did that day is truly reassuring as it shows a good understanding of not only the instruction but also the nature of the task.

What can the teacher learn from these answers? To be as clear as possible, it needs to be said that the answers to this questionnaire are not conclusive and the teacher cannot check what the responding students truly thought. However, the study was not intended to either verify the students' sincerity or their proper understanding of the task in question. The answers were supposed to help the teacher recognize the perspective of the students. The above-mentioned answers indicate that some of the students still regard the teacher as the one who is supposed to correct and comment on their translations. The answers provide some insight into the students' view on the teacher's position and demonstrate that the distribution of control in the translation classroom is still uneven, or at least perceived as uneven. Moreover, answers limited to the focus on single actions such as 'correcting' should help the teacher to judge whether the instruction was clear enough as the task involved not only correcting but also – more importantly – feedbacking.

The second question (QII) concerns the reason why the group did the previous task. A number of students' responses are demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Example quotes from students' responses to Question II

<p>OII: Why did we do it?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To talk in English 2. To do something pleasant after translation 3. For fun 4. To practice proofreading 5. To activate us
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The first answer quoted in Table 3 reads 'to talk in English', which shows a very low awareness of the whole sense of translator training but – since any occasion to talk in English is valuable for MA students – at least, they appreciated the opportunity. Interestingly, the second answer, which concerns doing 'something pleasant after translation', implies that sheer translation is not a pleasant thing to do for the respondent. The teacher gets important feedback which enables them to react and clear up such a blatant misconception about translation. As for the answer 'for fun', it certainly is important that students have fun since "what we learn with pleasure, we never forget" (Allen, 2008: 99). Nevertheless, such a comment can raise a legitimate doubt whether the whole training works as expected. Such a thoughtless observation can be a signal that the student is not necessarily aware of certain learning strategies. The teacher who receives such feedback learns that maybe next time it is a good idea to be more careful when giving instruction and, for instance, check students' understanding. While the fourth answer is rather expectable, the last one shows that there are still students who linger inside the walls of the classroom and whose vision of translation is limited to the Academia. Thanks to such feedback, the teacher can realise the need for looking outside the academic framework and situating the training so as to offer translation students activities which are linked with what they will be expected to do in their career as translators. It needs to be emphasised that translator education is not only training for the sake of training. Such activities aim at familiarising students with the real, social and cultural needs that they will be expected to meet in the outside world in their work of professionals.

The third question concerns students' impressions on what they learned during the exercise in peer revision, some of which are demonstrated in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Example quotes from students' responses to Question III

<p>OIII: What did I learn?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To argue 2. To name mistakes 3. To defense myself 4. Not much, my partner was not really talkative
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When questioned about what they learned, three out of eighteen respondents answered that they learned to argue, which suggests that those students felt more ready to fend for themselves after the very practice of peer revision and role playing translators and editors. The feeling that they are up to defending and arguing their point can prove not only useful but also empowering. As regards answer 2 about naming mistakes, it needs to be explicated that the group was familiar with the criteria behind identifying and naming translation mistakes; students were instructed to categorise the problematic issues in accordance with the typology that they knew and used consistently throughout the semester. The answer implies that the student probably had some difficulty correcting and naming mistakes, or was most focused on this particular action. The last quoted answer reads as follows: ‘not much, my partner was not really talkative’. The answer appears especially troubling for the author of this article who conducted the study. In as much as it can help recognise a serious problem, it also makes the author question the whole idea of pair work. It is the student’s prerogative to receive thorough feedback which is informative, timely, individualised, preventive and negotiable (cf. Pietrzak 2016). When a teacher gets to know that their students feel that they are not getting enough feedback, they surely claim responsibility for such a negligence since such an answer involves an implication that some of the students are dissatisfied. It is crucial that the teacher be aware that those who are not really talkative can pose a serious threat to successful pair work and be ready to help such a pair in trouble.

Table 5. Example quotes from students’ responses to Question IV

<p>QIV: How will I use it?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At work, talking to editors 2. In the future I will try to be more harsh on myself 3. When I will correct translations
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The next question (cf. Table 5) concerns the usefulness of the pair-based experience for their future work as translators. While first two answers quoted here are relatively reasonable, the third answer seems a bit worrisome; the author does hope that the student will correct translations as desired, but the way the answer is formulated hints at another problematic issue, namely linguistic correctness. The wrong use of will in a clause introduced by a subordinating conjunction *when* is a signal for the teacher that maybe more attention needs to be paid to particular aspects of grammar.

Table 6. Example quotes from students’ responses to Question V

<p>QV: Questions or doubts?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I don’t know if I can rewrite whole sentences 2. I don’t know how to find mistakes 3. I’m not sure if my partner was right
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Table 6 above provides a few examples from students' responses when they were asked about further questions and doubts. The first answer, though a bit vague, shows the teacher that the student was not sure to what extent he or she could rewrite, edit, reformulate and change the analysed translation. Such uncertainty indicates that the group needs more practice of this kind. Similarly heartening for the teacher is the second answer which touches upon a problem with spotting mistakes; the fact that the student realised the difficulty thanks to this activity shows that such metacognitive follow-up activities makes sense. The third doubt expressed in the answer to Question V constitutes another example of precious feedback pertaining to pair work. The situation in which one of the students in a pair is not sure if the partner is right can be confusing and, understandably, discouraging for the student. Having learned that such doubts exist in the minds of some students in this particular group, the teacher can try to prevent such situations by putting more effort into the organization of pair-work activities, for instance emphasising that effective feedback is negotiable and encouraging students to disagree and work together towards a satisfactory solution. Additional precautionary measures to ensure good understanding of the point of such negotiations can be a teacher-supervised demonstration by one pair. Such doubts also call for increased vigilance on the part of the teacher, which involves, among others, moving around the classroom and monitoring the students' involvement and behaviour in the role-playing part of the pair-based activity.

Table 7. Example quotes from students' responses to Question VI

<p>QVI: Comments?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We corrected quite a lot but our discussion was not successful 2. My pair was a bit exaggerating but I liked it 3. I prefer teacher comments, although they can be painful, now I appreciate them because I learn more 4. I liked the discussion translator-proofreader. It's not all that obvious 5. I'm glad that my translation was OK
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The last question in the analysed metacognitive follow-up practice left room for additional comments of the questioned translation students (cf. Table 7). First three observations provide more insight into the problems that students deal with during pair work. The teacher learns that a successful discussion is still a daunting challenge for some students and that they appreciate teacher comments more. The author of the article has yet to come up with the solution to some students' negative attitude to pair work, but definitely – thanks to such comments – some improvements can be implemented, e.g. making students aware of the importance of pair work which simulates future work of the translator, builds up their confidence and contributes to their future self-reliance (cf. Harmer, 2001). With the aim of preventing the afore-mentioned problems, the teacher also needs to make sure that students are assigned a specific goal that they must complete within a

certain time frame, and possibly incorporate some methods of motivation into the course. Moreover, after such metacognitive practice, the teacher knows the group better and is able to pair students up in such a way that students who are unlikely to have a successful discussion do not need to cooperate. As for the last two comments, they provide more positive feedback and remind about the good aspects of pair work. The fourth comment seems a bit vague, but surely the student came to some illuminating realization, which shows that the student needed and appreciated the feedback. Contrary to Answer 3, the last comment proves that it is not only teachers' comments that are welcome or even preferable. Arguably, the fact that their translation is considered to be 'ok' is invaluable to the student, and even more so if it is not the teacher but their peer who says so, for it is the disinterested opinion that is likely to matter most.

6. Conclusions

Because of the nature of the translation-related exercise which was the object of students' metacognitive reflection, considerable amounts of feedback discussed above concern pair work. The focus of the article, however, does not lie in pairwork patterns of interaction, so it is not within its scope to provide comprehensive solutions to the problems that occurred during the study. The aim behind the article was showing a possible way of collecting feedback from translation students, which helps teachers realise potential problems and take countermeasures. Thanks to such practice, not only problems but also students' needs are expressed and, therefore, can be properly addressed by the teacher. As exemplified above, the teacher who receives this kind of feedback learns how students perceive and understand a given type of practice, which frequently means that problems and doubts only multiply and require additional commitment from the teacher; however, it is just this proliferation of hurdles that formative assessment pivots on.

With an assumption that formative assessment is intended to provide feedback on performance, the article serves to put emphasis on a two-way nature of formative feedback; it is not only the translation student that is in need of feedback but also the teacher. Mutual feedbacking, realised for instance by means of metacognitive activities, provides students with a number of added benefits. Metacognitive activities, at least when used as a form of follow-up practice after translation-related activities, lead students to analyse what they did and rethink certain elements of translator training. Students who are encouraged to freely express their concerns or doubts gradually become aware that they are responsible for their own learning process and learn to take this responsibility. Allowing them to express their opinions on the process of training contributes to their commitment as they feel encouraged to participate in planning and monitoring their own training. More empowered students have greater control over their learning process and, in a broader perspective, such practices can result in a better distribution of control in the translation classroom.

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