

## VESA LAHTI

### On the Process of Translation

The topic is linked to my research for the University of Jyväskylä/The Department of Literature/ Creative Writing. The source material consists of the original texts, translated texts, interviews with the students, discussions and emails.

We (Professor Tuomo Lahdelma and Vesa Lahti) have been teaching the basics of translation to the students of the University of Jyväskylä for several years (2005-2010). The course goes by the name The Course of Adaptation and Translation and is meant for all the students who can link it to their studies and who are interested on translation and adaptation. The choice of the source text is free. You can choose any kind of text you prefer: novels, poems, newspaper articles, comic strips, song lyrics etc.

We give the students some basic information about translations` history, translation techniques, the process of translation and we do some short translation exercises during the lessons. At the first point the students select their source texts and produce the first translated version. We examine the produced text together as a group or team. The translator receives the feedback from the teacher and from his/her colleagues and gets back to work for the second version. When we are handling with the second version, we are focusing to the language and style the student has produced and we discuss about the problems of the translation trying to find out suitable solutions for the translator. There may be also a third version. That depends mostly of the time we have in use and the interest of the translator to start with still a new version.

#### General

The amount of the students attending to the courses varied from 8-20 people. The ideal composition would be around 8-10 students. Occasionally we had two different groups.

We started with introductions, some information of translation`s history, techniques, about the process generally and some essential words and terms. At the beginning there were several lessons, approximately four to five where we handled these issues and questions. Meanwhile the students were faced to the question of their task, their source text. They had reasonable time to reflect upon the genre, the text itself, have discussions and still alter it if the first suggested text sounded too difficult to translate. During the lessons we did some short exercises. For instance we took a poem and each of us did a translation of it. Sometimes we worked as pairs. Then these translations were read aloud so we could get the picture about how we had succeeded. Usually there were right from the beginning very good translations and different approaches to the translation. The texts were from different periods of time so we had to think about the changed language and how to approach the source text and what

were the things we had to consider while translating it to our own language. There were also translated texts in Finnish and our task was to find for instance how well the translator had succeeded within his/her task. The questions were like: is it good Finnish, do you think that the translator has been faithful to the original text or has he/she changed the style etc.

## **The process (appendix 1)**

### **1. Picking up the source text**

The students were given a free choice on the source text's language. Of course we had to draw the line to languages that the teachers did know. We had: Swedish, English, Hungarian, Italian, German, French and Spanish. Mainly the chosen texts were fiction. Also the genre and the length of the writing to be translated was totally built on each translators' own interest and liking. The sources were: newspaper articles, newspaper reviews, poems, short stories (part of a short story or the whole text), and selected parts of the novels, comic strips, song lyrics, fairytales and some others.

### **2. Presenting the idea to colleagues and to the teacher**

Starting at the first meeting we were asking for the students' opinions concerning the possible text or topic to be translated. By this way, during the lectures each student had plenty of time to consider his or her future task. When the source text was chosen, there was no need to go into that for too deeply. The text was approved and more detailed introduction was to be performed when starting to go through the first version of the translation. Also at this point we settled down each translators' date to show the first version.

### **3. Writing of the first version**

Most of the students had several weeks time to write their translations. The teachers were available for the translators from the beginning and it was possible to make questions by email or get personal guidance. It was also possible to alter or change the source text. Translated texts were sent by email beforehand a few days before the presentation of the version to the teachers and to other students. So there was time for each participant to read and make notes and remarks.

### **4. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions**

When the first version was presented, the translator was asked to tell something about the background, about the author of the source text and anything relevant to this task. Most important was also to have a short description of the process of this translation. Sometimes the students were asked for keeping up a diary during their work. If the translated text was short, like: a poem or a few poems or a few pages, we read the whole text and analyzed the possible mistakes, spellings, phrases etc. in order to make it sound good Finnish. In the case of a longer text the translator made the questions by her/himself concerning the parts that she or he had reflected or passed the time with considerably long time and perhaps was not yet satisfied to the result at this phase. At this point the colleagues were asked to make their remarks. Many times it happened that we had long talks trying to make sense to a very long sentence or phrase. Often the conclusion was that we had not a ready answer but we had alternative solutions to offer to the translator and finally it was up to him or her to write it down. Altogether the first presentation and meeting was all about handling the most difficult things with the translation like: odd words, odd phrases including long sentences and perhaps to shorten them by punctuation marks in the meantime avoiding to change the source text's style.

### **5. Working up the text, second version**

While writing the second version the translator had all this feedback available. He or she received also some detailed comments from the teachers if he or she had asked for it. Now it was also possible to use colleagues as assistants to answer to any questions. The second version was also sent to everybody for closer reflection few days before the next meeting.

### **6. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions**

As for the second time we were focusing to the language, to the translated text's Finnish. Often the translation was read aloud so that the mistakes and faults could be easily heard. Many times the problems that were in the first version still existed and the translator had not found the solution or reasonable solution so at this phase more work and time was used to get this sorted out. Often the student had made up his or her mind and was defending and arguing firmly on behalf of his or her decision which actually is a sign of a strong devotion and reflecting of the case.

### **7. Finishing the translation**

After the second meeting the translator made the suggested corrections and was writing the text to its final shape. If he or she wanted to there was possible to get some detailed information and notes still at this point from the teacher. The final version was sent by email to all to the participants of the course.

## **8. Possible third version**

If the translator was really interested in her or his task and wanted to write a third version, that was possible. The text was not handled in the meetings because at this phase the course usually has ended. The needed correspondence concerning the third version was done by email between the teacher and the translator. A couple of times there was arranged an extra meeting where this kind of discussions took place.

## **An example/ a case**

### **1. Picking up the source text**

### **2. Presenting the idea to colleagues and to the teacher**

This student was studying art education. Her previous studies were focused on modern dance. She chose the source text dealing with the subject of dancing. The book is titled “The Language of dance” and written by a famous German dancer and choreographer Mary Wigman. The book was published and translated in English by Walter Sorrell in 1974. Our student translated the foreword titled Secret of the Dance; totally two and a half pages long. She wanted to use this text in her studies in art education. This is also a course book in the University of Jyväskylä.

### **3. Writing of the first version**

### **4. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions**

The difficulty with this text was that it was originally written in German and then translated into English. There were very distinguishable marks from the German text especially the constructions of sentences like verbs etc. So the English translation was rather complicated and our translator had a hard time working with it. Here is an example:

*“ – even then one may convey something of that pure and profound bliss with man is blessed when, in moments of full awareness of his being, he opens and shapes the realms of his experience.”*

(Wigman 1974, 9)

This first version was translated almost word by word and so caused some confusion and was not very comprehensible. In the meeting we tried to find out a reasonable solution and translation together with the translator, teachers and other students. Suggestions were made but no any definite translation. The rest was up to the translator. Of her method or the way of working, the translator said that first she reads, then changes the text and leaves it to rest awhile and then returns to it.

## **5. Working up the text, second version**

## **6. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions**

The second version was a little better but there were still some problems. The translator admitted the fact that she could not find good solutions. For instance this example text above had yet a little complicated form and this was discussed of more carefully. Generally the translation was improved. The translator said that the clumsiness at the beginning of the translation is due to too keen concentration and the rest part is therefore more fluent.

## **7. Finishing the translation**

## **8. Possible third version**

The translator wanted to produce a third version. This is not the case normally, but it showed some interest and ambition to the work on process. And we had a meeting consisting of two teachers and three translators later on. We made some notes and remarks to this third translation. The writer was still not totally satisfied to the result. By experience we have learnt to know that the third version is the hardest one. It is not easy to find out new ways to express the complicated parts of the translation. Our example text still owned its stamp of personality. Perhaps the main problem was that the translator was a professional when we were talking about dancing and performing and she could feel and understand the slightest nuances of the original text but was not able to find out the right words and expressions.

Appendix 1

**Process writing by Helena Linna; The great adventure of writing; process writing. 1994. (Kirjoittamisen suuri seikkailu: prosessikirjoittaminen.)**

1. Choosing the subject/text
2. Getting to know the selected text (collecting ideas and information)
3. Building up the base of the writing
4. Writing of the first version
5. Feedback ( teacher and other students)
6. Working up the text, second writing
7. Finishing the translation, getting the text ready for publishing(checking the language)

## 8. Publishing

### **Process translation: Course by Tuomo Lahdelma, Vesa Lahti**

#### **The University of Jyväskylä 2005-2010**

1. Picking up the source text
2. Presenting the idea to colleagues and to the teacher
3. Writing of the first version
4. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions
5. Working up the text, second version
6. Feedback from the teacher and other translators, discussions
7. Finishing the translation
8. Possible third version

#### **Sources:**

Linna, H. 1994. Kirjoittamisen suuri seikkailu: prosessikirjoittaminen. Porvoo: WSOY.  
Wigman, M. 1974. The language of dance. Middletown, Conn.