Abstract: Corpus-based translation pedagogy is a thriving subfield of Applied Translation Studies, as testified by the rising number of publications in recent years ranging from practical guides on how to use corpora in the LSP classroom (e.g. Bowker and Pearson 2002) to scholarly volumes that examine and illustrate the use of corpora for a variety of teaching and learning purposes (e.g. Granger et al. eds. 2003; Zanettin et al. eds. 2003; Gavioli 2005). These works draw on the theoretical and descriptive branches of Translation Studies as well as neighbouring areas of scholarship such as Corpus Linguistics, Information and Communication Technologies, Computational Linguistics, Machine (Assisted) Translation, Contrastive Linguistics, Terminology, Lexicography, and LSP studies. This paper takes stock of this important development and examines the main methods currently employed in corpus-based translation pedagogy using an adapted version of the three-level model elaborated by Richards and Rodgers (2001) for the analysis of language teaching methods. This investigation brings to light significant differences between translator training, where corpora are well established, and translator education, where they have just started to make inroads. Arguably, one of the reasons for this gap lies in the lack of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks conceived specifically for translator education. On the basis of these considerations, I will explore, in the second part of my paper, the principles underlying an envisioned transcultural conceptual framework, within which corpora can play a significant role in equipping students of language and translation with the competences and capacities...

Introduction

In Contrastive and Translation Studies corpora have come a long way. Scholars working in these fields rightly deserve credit for having pushed both areas of enquiry towards empiricism, interdisciplinarity and multilinguality. With this broad vision in mind, today I’m going to take you on a discovery journey into corpus-based translation pedagogy, a thriving subfield of Applied Translation Studies, whose development has been enhanced by the insights provided by Contrastive Analysis across a wide range of languages. Before setting off, we will pack our suitcases with the definitions of three key terms: corpus; translation pedagogy; corpus-based translation pedagogy. During our travel we will explore the main approaches and methods currently employed in corpus-based pedagogy. Our final destination is a burgeoning transcultural conceptual framework for translation pedagogy within which corpora have enormous potential for transforming the teaching-learning process into an exchange where knowledge, expertise and mutual understanding across languages and cultures are achieved to meet the needs of today’s increasingly globalized world. The aim of our journey is to make a contribution to the current debate on the future of translation in foreign/second language teaching (cf. Cook 2010) as well as widen and enrich the interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue between language and translation educators from countries across the world.
Definitions of key terms

What is a corpus?

In modern linguistics a corpus is a collection of authentic texts held in electronic form and assembled according to specific design criteria; these principles determine the physiognomy of a particular corpus type. Corpus types are classified according to six sets of contrastive parameters:

1. *Sample or Monitor*
2. *Synchronic or Diachronic*
3. *General (or Reference) or Specialized*
4. *Monolingual, Bilingual or Multilingual*
5. *Written, Spoken, Mixed (Written and Spoken) or Multi-modal*
6. *Annotated or Non-annotated.*

Translation pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of teaching translator and interpreter skills. It is an umbrella term which comprises:

1. translator training, a denomination which is preferred by those who adopt a market-driven, vocational approach to the teaching of translation,

and

2. translator education, which tends to be favoured by those who situate translation teaching in the broader social context of higher or tertiary education, where translator and interpreter skills may be taught for a variety of purposes, e.g. as an aid to achieving accuracy and fluency as well as intercultural communicative competence in the foreign or second language; language awareness; literary understanding (Witte et al. 2009; Cook 2010).
Corpus-based translation pedagogy refers to the theory and practice of teaching translator and interpreter skills through corpora. This subfield comprises:

1. translator training

2. and translator education, which in turn includes:
   - language teaching at an advanced level for prospective translators (Bernardini 2000, 2002, 2004a,b);
   - translation teaching in ESP pedagogy (Gavioli 2005; Zanettin 2009).

Methods in corpus-based translation pedagogy

I will use a three-level model adapted from Richards and Rodgers (2001) to examine corpus-based translation teaching methodologies. In this model, the method is theoretically related to approach, it is organizationally determined by design and it is practically realized in procedure.

Approach:

- the theories that serve as the source of practices and principles in translation teaching.

Design:

- The general and specific objectives of the method;
- The syllabus model the method incorporates;
- The types of learning activities the method advocates;
- The roles of learners;
- The roles of teachers;
The role of instructional materials.

Procedure:

- The level of method analysis at which we describe how a method realizes its approach and design in the actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices and behaviours in the classroom.

**Corpus-based translator training**

Corpora are widely and systematically used by translator trainers who adopt the collaborative-constructivist method devised by Donald C. Kiraly (2000, 2003). This method draws its major inspiration from social constructivism. This theoretical perspective was put forward in the 1930s by the Russian developmental psychologist Lev Semënovič Vygotskij. His work, suppressed by Stalin, became known to the West thanks to the translation of his writings in a volume titled *Language and Thought*, published in 1962 in America. Vygotskij’s ideas were developed during the 1960s and early 1970s by the American psychologist and educationalist Jerome Bruner. Since the 1990s social constructivism has been one of the most important paradigms in educational philosophy and teacher training programmes. Central to social constructivism is the view that the teaching-learning process is, above all, a social exchange in which shared meanings are built up through joint activity. Unlike Jean Piaget’s radical constructivism, the Vygotskijan approach brings into the foreground the constructive role of the teacher in the learning process, thus holding out the possibility of forging a link between developmental psychology and the study of formal teaching.

While social constructivism provides the method with a general framework, modern functionalist theories of translation underlie language-related activities, which are based on Christiane
Nord’s (2005) model of translation-oriented source-text analysis. Translation tasks, on the other hand, are underlain by the insights of expertise studies. Particularly relevant in this regard is Donald Shön’s (1987 in Kiraly 2003: 10) notion of ‘knowing-in-action’. This refers to the know-how displayed by the expert’s skillful, spontaneous execution of the performance.

Design is based on collaborative learning and project-based activities. The aim is to prepare competent, self-confident, reflective professional colleagues. The teacher assumes the multifarious role of: a) project manager; b) mediator between students and clients; c) native speaker informant; d) guide in providing feedback on complex problems that are beyond the students’ capacities.

As for procedure, in the translation-praxis classroom, students engage in an authentic or realistically simulated translation project together with peers. Monolingual and bilingual specialized corpora are designed and compiled to retrieve and examine lexical, terminological, phraseological, syntactical and stylistic equivalents (Bowker and Pearson 2002; Bowker 2003). Corpora are also used to acquire subject-specific knowledge, to evaluate translation quality, and as essential components of Computer-Aided Translation Technology (Bowker 2001; Koby and Baer 2003).

**Corpus-based language teaching for prospective translators**

The method, which has been put forward by Silvia Bernardini (2000, 2002, 2004a,b), draws largely on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), that provides a good general background in as far as it focuses on the expression of meaning in context and on the growth of the individual. The approach is inspired by the theories of language put forward by the British school of functional linguistics from John Rupert Firth via Michael Halliday to John Sinclair. The basic tenets underlying the British tradition of text analysis are as follows:
1. Linguistics is a social science and an applied science;

2. Language use is studied through comparative analyses across text corpora;

3. Language and grammar; form and meaning are interrelated;

4. Language reflects and transmits culture.

Another theoretical input is provided by American sociolinguistics, particularly by Dell Hymes, who, in the 1970s put forward the notion of ‘communicative competence’. This refers to the knowledge of what is formally possible in language use as well as what is feasible, appropriate and effective. The design is conceived as a learning journey aimed at fostering three translator capacities: awareness, reflectiveness and resourcefulness. Awareness is the critical ability “to go beyond the single words and texts and see language as a network of connected choices, which are influenced by the culture they express, which in turn they influence” (Bernardini 2004a: 20). This awareness is the first step towards developing a professional and ethical attitude towards the role of translators, who are not simply transcoders, but constructors of meaning and mediators of culture. Reflectiveness is the capacity to practise, store and adopt specific translation strategies and procedures. Resourcefulness is the capacity to use finite resources indefinitely and acquire new resources autonomously as the need arises in unexpected situations.

The student role is that of a traveller and the teacher role is that of a guide, a facilitator of the learning process. As regards procedure, in the student-centred classroom, students engage in discovery learning activities that “should not replicate potential future events in the outside world, but focus on the authentic problems of language learners” (Bernardini 2000; 170). Therefore, monolingual reference
corpora, such as the *British National Corpus*, are used as resources to discover the richness and variety of language use.

**Translation teaching in corpus-based ESP pedagogy**

The method adopts wholeheartedly CLT. The approach is inspired by the theories elaborated by the Firthian and Neo-Firthian approaches to the study of language as well as by Hymes’ notion of communicative competence. The design is based on the Data-Driven Learning approach devised by Tim Johns in the early 1990s, where the student is a researcher who puts forward hypotheses about language behaviour and then tests them by using corpus data. The teacher is a facilitator in this process. In the student-centred classroom students engage in discovery learning activities in order to carry out real-life communicative tasks, including those undertaken by the expanding category of non-professional translators (cf. Susam-Sarajeva and Pérez-González forthcoming). So, for example, bilingual specialized corpora are investigated to retrieve accurate and fluent translation equivalents at different levels of linguistic analysis. Corpora are used to translate into and out of the L1 and to evaluate the output of Machine Translation software (Gavioli 2005; Zanettin 2009). To sum up, the corpus-based methods employed in translator training and translator education differ as regards approach, design and procedure, while in translator education the main differences concern design and procedure.

Let’s take a pause at this point to collect our thoughts and reflect on these difference as well as the reasons why corpora have entered the mainstream of translator training, yet they’ve only just started to make inroads into translator education. Why is this so? I wonder. What can be done to tilt the balance in favour of corpora so as to unlock the true potential of these largely untapped teaching and
learning resources? Undoubtedly, one of the reasons why corpora are an essential component of the translator trainer’s tool kit lies on the exigencies of today’s increasingly technologized language industry (Koby and Baer 2003; Kelly 2005; Olohan 2007). Being market-driven, translator trainer programmes are rapidly responding to these requirements by incorporating corpora in their curricular design (Ulrych 2005). Postgraduate programmes that have joined the EMT network (European Master in Translation) are a case in point. They are required to provide training in the effective use of a range of tools and search engines, including electronic corpora, translation memories, terminology database, voice recognition software, machine-translation systems, and the Internet so that students can acquire information mining and technological competences (http://www.ec.europa.eu/emt).

Arguably, there is also another reason for the popularity of corpora in translator training and that is the adoption of a fresh approach, which draws much of its inspiration from social constructivist principles, that constitute a dominant paradigm in contemporary educational philosophy, and “serve as a strong cornerstone for the development of student- and praxis-relevant teaching methods” (Kiraly 2003: 8). Moreover, as we saw earlier, the approach is firmly grounded in translation theory and expertise studies. It follows that interdisciplinarity holds another key to the success achieved by corpora in translator training.

In sum, a coherent, interdisciplinary theory combined with the professional and institutional recognition of the importance of corpora as linguistic resources and CAT tools, has given rise to an effective partnership which is playing a crucial role in the creation of a culture of research education capable of catapulting pedagogic practice into the 21st century, as envisioned by Kiraly (2003). Meanwhile, researchers in translator education have planted new ideas. In order for these principles to burst into full bloom and bear fruit, translation scholars and educationalists would need to engage in
interdisciplinary and international research endeavours with a view to providing corpus-based translator education with solid interdisciplinary theoretical foundations.

The following analysis is intended to be a small, but hopefully significant contribution to the realization of this *desideratum*. So, in the next part of our journey we will explore the principles underlying an envisaged transcultural framework for translator education within which corpora can play a significant role in equipping students of language and translation with the competences and capacities they need for the future. These two principles are: ‘symbolic competence’ (Kramsch 2006; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008; Kramsch 2009) and ‘holistic cultural translation’ (Tymoczko 2007).

**Symbolic competence: premise**

The notion of symbolic competence presupposes that language use is symbolic:

- [1] because it mediates our existence through symbolic forms that are conventional and represent objective realities;
- and
- [2] because symbolic forms construct subjective realities such as perceptions, emotions, attitudes and values.

(Kramsch 2009: 7)

Since language is a symbolic system in two senses: denotational and performative, words can be used to act upon the social context “by the sheer power of their enunciation” (Kramsch 2009: 12). This is the symbolic power that is enshrined and wielded in language use. It has been theorized in linguistics, sociology and semiotics (cf. Austin 1962; Bourdieu 1991; Barthes 1957 in Kramsch 2009: 8). All
language users exercise the symbolic declarative and performative power of language. Moreover, “[f]or foreign language learners, the symbolic nature of language is enhanced as connotations multiply across codes and additional meanings thrive in the interstices of different linguistic systems” (Kramsch 2009: 12-13). This is because in the process of learning a foreign language, especially in formal educational settings, signs are dislocated from their natural context of occurrence. So words and worlds, words and thoughts, words and concepts are not yet perceived as one, as is the case with primary socialization in one’s native language, and the symbolic possibilities of the sign are much more evident (Kramsch 2009: 13). More specifically, in second language acquisition, the semiotic gap between signifier and signified, that can be used to give the speech act a meaning other than the conventional one (Butler 1997, 1999 in Kramsch 2009: 8), is exposed, and this enables language learners “to make quite different associations, construct different truths from those of socialized native speakers” (Kramsch 2009: 13).

This account of the way in which non-native individuals relate a given lexical item, phrase or construction to a particular concept is consistent with a usage-based approach to the multilingual mental lexicon, which sees the lexicon as an interactive activation network of lexical items, and posits that:

“the concept developed in the L1 will always play some role in the L2, because no matter how much one has used the L2, one cannot completely erase all previous experience and associations, and it would be difficult to develop a conceptual representation similar to one by a native speaker of the target language” (Lowie et al. 2010: 136).
A recent experimental study carried out within a usage-based perspective, has shown, in fact, that even the L2 concepts of Dutch advanced learners of English are affected by their L1 concepts (Lowie et al. 2010: 147).

**Symbolic competence: definition**

The notion of symbolic competence is put forward within a multilingual and ecologically oriented perspective on foreign language education and comprises a cluster of abilities (Kramsch 2009: 201):

- an ability to understand the symbolic value of symbolic forms and the different cultural memories evoked by different symbolic systems;
- an ability to draw on the semiotic diversity afforded by multiple languages to reframe ways of seeing familiar events, create alternative realities, and find an appropriate subject position;
- an ability to look both *at* and *through* language and to understand the challenges to the autonomy and integrity of the subject that come from unitary ideologies and a totalizing networked culture.

Moreover, symbolic competence is essential “[f]or the growth of a multilingual’s sense of symbolic self, the development of his or her ability to take symbolic action and to exercise symbolic power” (Kramsch 2009: 199). Symbolic self is consciousness of self that implicitly includes consciousness of other selves and other consciousnesses and is represented through symbolic forms (Deacon 1997: 452 in Kramsch 2009: 44). Symbolic action is the performative power of language “that can create different symbolic realities in different languages and, by changing others’ perception of social reality, can change that reality” (Kramsch 2009: 188).
In order to achieve symbolic competence, learners must be able to (Kramsch 2006: 251):

- interpret meanings from discourse features, paying attention to form, genre, style, register, social semiotics;
- understand how linguistic form shapes mental representations;
- appreciate that symbolic forms are not just items of vocabulary or communication strategies, but embodied experiences, emotional resonances and moral imaginings.

Imagination plays an important role in the development of symbolic competence, but what type of imagination? Not a fanciful one, but one which gives voice to the multilingual experience of language use. Kramsch calls it ‘a multilingual imagination’ and defines it as:

“the capacity to envision alternative ways of remembering an event, of telling a story, of participating in a discussion, of empathizing with others, of imagining their future and ours, and ultimately of defining and measuring success and failure” (Kramsch 2009: 201).

This is the reason why:

“[s]ymbolic competence has to be nourished by literary imagination at all levels of the language curriculum. For it is through literature that learners can communicate not only with living others, but also with imagined others and with the other selves they might want to become” (Kramsch 2006: 251).

According to the foreign language pedagogy envisioned by Kramsch (2006), what literature can bring to the development of symbolic competence is first of all a sense of the ‘production of complexity’ in
human communication, where participants do not simply exchange factual information accurately, effectively and appropriately, but construct and negotiate meanings as well as personal and social identities in ways which may differ across languages and cultures. Another way in which literature nourishes symbolic competence is by openly discussing the ambiguity between myths and reality, what Kramsch (2006) calls ‘tolerance of ambiguity’. A third way in which the teaching of literature can contribute to the achievement of symbolic competence is by appreciating ‘form as meaning’ (Kramsch 2006) in its various manifestations: linguistic, textual, visual, acoustic or poetic.

What is the role of translation in this multilingual pedagogy? A focus on translation is absolutely in line with the way Kramsch conceives of symbolic competence. However, one would have to make it clear that we are not talking here of translation as transfer from text to text, but as a rethinking of one context in terms of another, where by context is meant a whole ecology of which text is only a part, drawing on Larsen-Freeman’s complexity theory of language learning, which provides an additional theoretical dimension for the notion of symbolic competence (Larsen-Freeman 1997; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008: 115-161, both cited in Kramsch and Whiteside 2008: 660; Kramsch, e-mail message to the author, 31.03.2009).

Translation (intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic) is therefore fully legitimated as clearly explained in the following statements:

“If meaning is relational, then what we are teaching are not linguistic facts, but semiotic relations between words, between linguistic codes, between texts, and between the associations they evoke in the minds of hearers and readers. In this regard, it is time to rehabilitate translation and the study of style and voice at advanced levels of language instruction” (Kramsch 2009: 204).
“Translation as a way of exploring the relation between different sign systems has an important role to play in language pedagogy. [...] As a practice that brings out the cultural differences in the relation between language and thought, translation should be rehabilitated, not only from L1 to L2 or L2 to L1, but across the languages shared by students in the class, or across modalities, textual, visual, musical” (Kramsch 2009: 211).

**Holistic cultural translation**

I will now move on to outline the main features of the holistic approach to translating cultural difference (Tymoczko 2007), which presupposes that translations be considered as forms of three interrelated modes of cultural interface (or exchange). The first mode is ‘representation’: usually translations stand in lieu of a source text. The second mode is ‘transmission’ (or transfer): most translations involve carrying across some elements of a source text into the target text. The third mode is transculturation: a smaller number of translations privilege transculturation, generally intended as the performance of borrowed cultural forms in the receiving culture. More specifically, “[i]n textual domains transculturation often involves transposing elements that constitute the overcodings of a text, including elements of a literary system (poetics, genres, tale types, and other formal literary elements)” (Tymoczko 2007: 121).

Tymoczko makes two important observations in connection with these three modes of cultural exchange. The first is that the way in which they are negotiated and balanced by translators is determined by specific cultural and historical contexts. The second is that, while transculturation has hardly ever been discussed in translation studies, representation and
transmission have been widely addressed, but mainly as attributes of translation rather than superordinate categories within which translations are located.

So, what are the benefits that derive from considering these modes of cultural interface as large frameworks that partially encompass, intersect with, impinge on and illuminate translation? Firstly, these broad categories enable scholars to theorize translation as a cross-linguistic, cross-cultural and cross-temporal concept, which Tymoczko (2007: 128) names “*translation” (translation with an asterisk). Secondly, they infuse translation pedagogy with understandings that prepare students to translate in a globalizing world demanding flexibility and respect for differences in cultural traditions. Thirdly, they will aid in establishing typologies of translations and in discerning affinities between translations from very different contexts as well as differences between translation orientations within a single translation tradition.

The holistic approach to translating cultural difference draws in particular on the early work of Pierre Bourdieu, which centres on the notion of *habitus*:

a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks (Bourdieu 1977:82-83 in Tymoczko 2007:226, author’s emphasis).

When adopting a holistic approach to translating culture, translators should undertake an analysis of the *habitus* of the source culture “as it relates to the text to be translated and to the translation project” (Tymoczko 2007: 236, author’s emphasis). In practice this means that translators will take into account “the largest elements of cultural difference that separate the source culture and
the target culture” (Tymoczko 2007:235). This in turn will provide the translator with a framework that will guide his/her particular decisions about culture as the text is actually rendered into the target language. To aid translators in creating such a framework, Tymoczko offers the following set of interrelated cultural elements to consider:

- Signature concepts of a culture;
- Key words;
- Conceptual metaphors;
- Discourses;
- Cultural practices;
- Cultural paradigms;
- Overcodings.

Examples of signature concepts of different cultures in the world today are freedom, wealth, progress, bravery, shame, or purity (Tymoczko 2007:238-239). They are central to social organization as well as cultural practices and dispositions. Key words are loaded words that may refer either to the signature concepts of a culture or to idiosyncratic cultural elements chosen by the author to structure a given text. So, for instance, in Toni Morrison’s novel The Bluest Eye (1970), the metaphor of blue eyes represents racist hegemony in the United States on the eve of World War II (Tymoczko 2007:241). Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson (1980), conceptual metaphors shape the mental representations of a given source group as well as its perspectives on the world. An example of variation in conceptual metaphors across languages is offered by Yan Ding et al. (2010). Their analysis of the metaphors of fear and kongju in a comparable corpus of
English and Chinese reveals that the metaphor FEAR IS AN OPPONENT is used in English to conceptualize the state of falling victim to fear, whereas in Chinese it is used to conceptualize an attempt to control it. Discourses too are related to cultural dispositions and as such they motivate action and practice, as is the discourse of ‘imperiled privacy’ in women’s biographical and autobiographical writing in 19th Century America (Adams 2009).

Some examples of cultural paradigms are humour, argumentation, logical sequencing in a text, or the use of tropes, which may well vary from culture to culture and within single cultures over time. Argumentative prose in Arabic, for example, is characterized by repetition of both form and content so that the same information is reiterated in a variety of ways so as to persuade by assertion (Baker 1992: 237). Cultural practices, such as naming practices, the use of forms of address and titles, the naming of kinship relationships, which play an important role in constructing personal and social identities and achieving social cohesion, are also varied. In English, for example, the word grandfather means ‘father of one’s father or mother’ and the word grandmother means ‘mother of one’s father or mother’, but in Thai the word ปู (po) means ‘father of one’s father’, the word ตา (ta) means ‘father of one’s mother’, the word ยาย (ya) means ‘mother of one’s father’, and the word ยาย (yay) means ‘mother of one’s mother’. In Chinese there are five equivalents of the English word uncle, i.e. shushu, bobo, jiujiu, guzhang, and yizhang, each referring to a specific family relationship. Finally, overcodings are linguistic patterns that signal different genres and modes of communication. To this category belong aspects of register, dialects and technical languages. In this respect it is worth mentioning Niu and Yong’s (2010) study or rhetorical repetition or words, phrases and sounds in a bidirectional
parallel corpus of English and Chinese advertisements in Singapore, which revealed significant
differences in the patterns displayed by these two languages.

To sum up, Tymoczko (2007:233) argues that:

“a holistic approach to cultural translation rather than a selective focus on a limited range
of cultural elements enables greater cultural interchange and more effective cultural
assertion in translation, allowing more newness to enter the world”.

How relevant are corpus-based studies in fostering symbolic competence and holistic cultural
translation?

Corpus-based studies can be invaluable for raising awareness about the symbolic nature
of language (as amply testified by corpus linguistic research since the 1980s), and for discovering
some of the largest elements of cultural difference that separate the source and the target
language (as demonstrated by contrastive and translation studies research since the 1990s).
What is the relationship between symbolic competence and holistic cultural translation as
principles of good pedagogic practice?

It is reasonable to affirm that symbolic competence is a valuable asset to the development of
holistic procedures for translating culture, which require the following essential skills:

- an interest in and sensibility to cultural difference;
- the ability to perceive and negotiate cultural difference;
- the ability to appreciate that cultures like languages are open, heterogeneous, and marked
  by generativity and performativity.

(Tymoczko 2007:235-236)
In turn, holistic cultural translation enhances symbolic competence because:

- “experience in dealing with more than one language and more than one culture in interface elicits implicit and explicit comparison, hones skills in comparison, and inculcates a sense of self reflection” (Tymoczko 2007: 236);
- “[t]ranslation across cultural difference is not only the center of a translator’s power and agency, it is where the translator demonstrates the greatest skill” (Tymoczko 2007: 232).

Evidence supporting the assumption that symbolic competence fosters holistic cultural translation and holistic cultural translation enhances symbolic competence is provided by a case study (Laviosa 2010) that examined:

- the self-reflexive comments made by Isabella Vaj on her translations of Khaled Hosseini’s novels The Kite Runner (Il cacciatore di acquiloni) and A Thousand Splendid Suns (Mille splendid soli);
- Isabella Vaj’s book, Il cacciatore di storie, where the author-translator tells the stories hidden behind Hosseini’s allusions and her own stories, as they were vividly remembered afresh from her childhood and adolescence after translating Hosseini’s nostalgic narrative.

Evidence of having achieved symbolic competence through foreign language learning is manifested by Isabella Vaj’s passion for language; her understanding of the symbolic meaning of
form; her humble and open-minded reconsideration of the familiar through the experience of the Other:

My literature teacher, the linguist Carla Schick, author of *Il linguaggio. Natura, struttura, storicità del fatto linguistico* (Language. Nature, structure, historicity of the linguistic fact) (1960), instilled in me a passion for language in its various aspects of individual freedom and norm established by tradition as well as a focus on historicity. (Isabella Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming).

My curiosity was aroused in the early 1990s by the desire to learn Semitic languages, which I perceived to be as something mysteriously other. So I graduated in Arabic language and culture at the ISMEO in Milan. I discovered that what we call nominal predicate is defined as state complement in Arabic and takes the accusative! I discovered that the paratactic construction doesn’t presuppose the simplification of thoughts, but gives order and rhythm. I discovered that repetition is not considered to be annoying, it is regarded as an elegant stylistic feature. As always, the Other makes us aware of our limits. (Isabella Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming).

Evidence that symbolic competence fostered a holistic approach to translating culture is provided by Isabella Vaj’s consideration of the largest elements of cultural difference that separate the Afghan culture - as represented in the source text - and the Italian culture. These are:

- orality (Hosseini’s novels give you the pure pleasure of fairytales, his talent as a narrator is nourished by the oral tradition of his country) (Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming);
the symbolic meanings expressed by the verb *run* (guilt, joy, redemption) and its value as a key word in the novel, starting from the title right through to the last sentence (Vaj 2009);

- the use of Farsi, “Hosseini’s mother tongue, which he uses when he experiences the inadequacy of the English language” (Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming);

- the use of culture-specific allusions (Vaj 2009).

Moreover, in unveiling the pleasure derived from translating the world of Hosseini, Isabella Vaj vividly demonstrates how translating literature enhanced symbolic competence by enabling her to experience language as “a lived embodied reality” (Kramsch 2009: 4) and identify with the Other at a deep, emotional level:

My greatest pleasure was to talk about things belonging to a culture I knew and loved. Things that echoed inside me and made me feel close to the author: from the classic Persian poets to the greatest artists in XV century Herat. (Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming).

Finally, Isabella Vaj’s own book, *Il cacciatore di storie*, is in itself living proof of a heightened symbolic competence. The motives for writing a “companion book to enhance the pleasure of reading Hosseini, offering fragments of knowledge of the world where his stories take place” (Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming) together with the author’s cherished hopes about its sociocultural impact reveal, in fact, how translating fired her multilingual imagination enabling her to assert her belongingness to a newly discovered transcultural world:
The seed [that gave rise to *Il cacciatore di storie*] was my curiosity and that of my friends who read Hosseini’s novels. When they asked me about the Afghan culture I told them the stories hidden behind Hosseini’s allusions such as the duel between Rostam and Sorhab. My friends encouraged me to write these stories and when I began to write the book everything became relatively easy. After all, for the previous seven or eight years my readings had focused on Afghan culture.

Hosseini’s nostalgia for his lost country aroused my nostalgia for the world of my childhood and adolescence, which is ignored, if not despised, by today’s dominant culture, here in Italy, but similar, in a brotherly way, to the ancient and remote world of Afghanistan. Reminiscing about that past has been my way of testifying my rejection of the present, dominated by loud noise, vulgarity, shameless distortion of the meaning of words. A homage to the power of love and affection. I don’t know whether my book will ever bear any fruit. If it arouses curiosity for a very rich culture unknown in the West and compassion for the tormented Afghan people, if it make us feel the absolute necessity for peace in a country that has been living in a state of war day after day for the past thirty years, perhaps my book will have not been fruitless.

(Vaj in Laviosa forthcoming)

What can we, as language and translation educators, learn from this real life experience of language learning, translating and writing? I think we can envisage a co-operative learning environment where symbolic competence will facilitate holistic cultural translation and holistic cultural translation will enhance symbolic competence. It is therefore proposed that these principles be integrated into a theoretical framework for an ecologically oriented translation
pedagogy, where corpus-based teaching methods can play an important role in transforming language learning and translation into self-engaging activities aimed at developing vital interlinguistic and intercultural competences in our multicultural world.

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