Information Literacy at the heart of Librarianship and Translation Studies: A Case Study of the University of Alberta Libraries

Since the University of Alberta’s (UA) Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS) department in Edmonton actively integrated information literacy into its translation certificate programme five years ago, the university’s libraries have moved from the periphery to the heart of the programme, teaching the basics of finding, accessing, managing and evaluating information in the context of translation studies to approximately 250 undergraduate and graduate students. The UA Libraries (UAL) is the largest university library in Western Canada and offer more than 10 million volumes of resources in multiple formats to translation students at the UA. It also offers customized information literacy sessions to help students learn to conceptualize the various pathways to information that translators need to consider in the course of their careers.

The translation certificate at the University of Alberta began ten years ago and is available to students of Chinese, Japanese, French, Spanish, German, and Ukrainian. The certificate is not meant to train professional translators; however, it is a fundamental stepping stone in becoming a professional translator and developing the information, cultural, and other literacies necessary in such an endeavour. In the last four years, an average of 28 certificates per year have been awarded to students, but there are many more students who take translation classes even though they are not in the certificate stream.

The information literacy programme for translation students at the University of Alberta helps students develop their documentary competence in what Maria Pinto describes as three complementary aspects: as users, processors, and producers of information (107). The UAL teaches students not only how to locate and retrieve relevant information, but also how to prepare themselves for the various information needs that they will encounter as they are translating texts. I like to think of translation as a mental sport for which students must train, the information literacy programme offers strategies that allow them to do so by using appropriate information tools and correct techniques so that they may recognize their information needs and know where and how to meet those needs throughout the various stages of the translation process – before, during, and after the translation act.

Since documentary competence depends on a translator’s cognitive complements consisting in knowledge of the world and of the discipline, a foundation in information literacy is required. In fact, the American Library Association states that information literacy enables individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

Literacy is commonly defined as the ability to read and write, but there are many other types of literacies, however, it seems information and computer literacies, which to a certain degree go hand in hand, are the most applicable to translation studies. (As an aside, literacy is translated in French as *alphabétisation*, but I prefer translating *information literacy* into French as littératie informationelle in order to avoid the confusion with the ability to read and write. The word *littératie* is commonly used in Canada and is marked as correct by the Government of Canada’s tri-lingual translation database Termium, despite being labeled as an anglicism in the French *Nouveau Petit Robert* dictionary.)

When speaking of information literacy, Dora Sales and Maria Pinto’s Infolitrans survey of translation and interpreting tenured academic staff identified both information and computer literacies as important in training translators (62). Information literacy addresses most of the needs noted in the survey, such as analysis and synthesis of information, awareness of information sources, and evaluating information. Those are higher order competencies that can only be met once the basic information literacy competencies are also met. The basic competencies involve at the outset knowing which questions to ask about the source text, which would take place in Maria Pinto’s “interpretation” (Pinto Molina, 21) stage. If translators realize what they do not know before formulating a translation, they will be able to identify the type of information source needed to answer their question relating to world knowledge, subject knowledge, or linguistic knowledge. Marianne Lederer calls for discerning one’s ignorance and filling knowledge gaps with new information about a discipline or the world (“Apprendre,” 232-238).

Jean Delisle agrees with Lederer that cognitive complements and extralinguistic knowledge are essential to an accurate translation and help avoid nonsensical renderings (Delisle, 186; Lederer, “The Role” 59). Lederer (58) identifies knowledge of the world or encyclopedic knowledge as a cognitive complement, while Delisle (187) distinguishes between knowledge of the world and encyclopedic knowledge, where the latter informs the former. Maria Pinto, when discussing information literacy, also makes a distinction between knowledge of the world and of the discipline, which all contribute to what Pinto calls a translator’s “documentary competence” (108), which serves to compensate for a lack in world or discipline knowledge, or, informally speaking, bring the translator up-to-speed.

Processing and transforming information requires students to learn and practice translation techniques in and out of the classroom, which puts information seeking to the test. As a librarian, my initial interaction with students is to address the first two out of five Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) information literacy competency standards: the first standard is determining an information need and the second is accessing information to meet the need. Becoming information literate or fluent is a reiterative process: hopefully students will repeatedly learn techniques in all five of the information literacy standards throughout their university training. Therefore, translation students in French and Spanish, which are my areas of responsibility, will learn about determining the information they need and accessing it effectively and efficiently at least two or three times and probably more in other classes like the first year prerequisite English language and literature course. The extent to which students need information when translating can be misleading for the neophyte, who may not realize that finding any bilingual dictionary is probably not sufficient to translate a text adequately.

The first information literacy standard, therefore, when addressing translation students is helping them realize not only the variety of dictionaries that exist, but also that translators need information from secondary sources as well as tertiary, the latter referring to dictionaries and encyclopedias. In that respect, librarians regularly produce subject or research guides that give an overview of the resources useful to a discipline, in this case translation studies, and suggest strategies for finding information sources. In combination with information literacy training, they are especially powerful in solidifying students’ research strategies and in selecting information sources.

Standard two tries to dispel students’ false sense of simplicity when constructing a search strategy: information is not all online and finding appropriate information requires time and creative thinking. Umberto Eco, in his *Experiences of Translation*, identifies the nature of the problem that translation students face in understanding that “[t]ranslations do not concern a comparison between two different languages but the interpretation of two texts in two different languages”(14). The ability to interpret and go beyond the literal meaning is a challenge to students, and information literacy assists them with the ability to determine the nature of their information need and how best to meet it. Good translators know how to avoid linguistic obstacles, but they are also able to develop an effective search strategy and retrieve information to find a solution to the translation problem.

Based on the other three information literacy standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL), transforming a text into a target language requires students to know how to incorporate their knowledge effectively, legally, and ethically after evaluating the information sources for their credibility, reliability, and accuracy. The information literacy-rich translation studies courses at the University of Alberta encourages students to give as much, if not more, attention to higher order information literacy thinking skills as to those outlined initially in standards one and two. Processing credible information and applying it effectively legally and ethically very much depends on the translation product and the expectations given to it. Translation students at the University of Alberta are, therefore, given reliable professional resources, like the subscription-based Robert and Oxford uni-lingual and bilingual dictionaries online or the freely available Government of Canada’s tri-lingual translation database *Termium* or Quebec’s similar tool *Le Grand dictionnaire teminologique*, and taught how to find them and use them. Their assignments and their information literacy skills enable them to become effective at communicating their translated texts in the most appropriate medium and for the intended audience. This refers to the social-structural and publishing literacies, which Shapiro and Hughes consider an integral part of an information literacy curriculum. Community-based translation projects allow students to develop this portion of information literacy with texts by various community groups (e.g. university, government, local associations…) that are destined for publication and distribution to a specific audience. These projects often are part of a community service learning or CSL programme that the University of Alberta offers to integrate service in the local community into existing courses. CSL students will work on projects important to their local community and in line with course topics. Community partners are not usually otherwise formally associated with the university, because most projects are professional in nature and aim at giving students real-life work situations using the skills they learn in class. If students take a certain number of courses with a community service learning component, they can earn a [Certificate in Community Engagement and Service-Learning](http://www.csl.ualberta.ca/Students/Certificate%20Program.aspx) upon graduation.

The University of Alberta Libraries have taken both a central and peripheral role in training translation students. The central role consists in teaching information literacy skills and knowledge to translation students and in providing world-class resources. The peripheral role, which is more professional or praxis-focused, becomes apparent only when considering the community-service projects that the UA Libraries have organized for students.

As Romance languages librarian responsible for liaising with the French Studies programme and its translation stream, I have two roles: the information literacy instructor and the community partner with a project for students to complete. For example, a translation project of benefit to the University of Alberta Libraries involved translating online video tutorials meant for educating students in basic information literacy skills from English into French. Although the tutorial clip to translate was short (around 3 minutes), the pedagogical objectives were numerous. The objectives might include understanding the information literacy concept achieved by the tutorial, effectively communicating a new concept (information literacy) in a second language (in this case French), understanding the issues around translating for an online video medium, translating effectively by taking into account the oral and visual components, and learning to use video editing software (in this case Adobe Captivate). A focus on information literacy and complementary literacies (digital, media, and visual), allows translation students to go beyond a simplistic understanding of translation (ie. focusing solely on the linguistic), but to achieve competencies that enrich the translation act and “address the role of the student as content creator,” which is a role that the Association of College and Research Libraries is acknowledging in its Competency Standards for Higher Education. This is the type of information literacy that Mackey and Jacobson describe as (&Iquote) “metaliteracy for the digital age because it provides higher order thinking required to engage with multiple document types through various media formats in collaborative environments” (endofquote) (70). Furthermore, issue number 37 of the Joint Information Systems Committee journal, *JISC Inform,* presented “students as producers” at various British universities.

The University of Alberta Libaries’ Strategic Plan makes a commitment to citizenship, connecting communities, building local, national, and international partnerships. Together with the mission to be a Library of Record, focusing on preservation and collecting unique and a wide-variety of information sources, the UA Libraries help create on campus and throughout the world, what we call, “communities of practice”(University of Alberta Libraries, 27). The immediate communities are those of students and faculty who collaborate with librarians and interact with the Libraries’ services and collections to produce as citizens unique works that benefit not only their academic communities, but also their local civic one. In addition to community service learning projects, the UA Libraries began working with faculty on a project entitled Edmonton in Translation, which will be implemented in the fall in a graduate course on translation theories. The project, inspired by Sherry Simon’s *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory*, will consist of determining the role translation plays in the city of Edmonton: how do multiple languages and cultures interact spatially and where do they interact. Information literacy will enable students to strategize and manage their multidisciplinary research project by considering various research tools along with the management and evaluation of information and its effective and ethical use. A portion of the project will involve mapping out the multilayered multilingual/multicultural civic landscape using geographic information systems or GIS and the University of Alberta Libraries’ renowned maps and digitized Canadiana collection.

The development of information literacy competencies in translation students is a collaborative effort that requires the synergy of teaching faculty, librarians, and community partners. The presence of the University of Alberta Libraries at the heart of the translation studies programme strengthens the students’ abilities to become better translators as they learn to think critically about the information they use and produce. In turn, students can effectively navigate to the peripheries of translation studies while remaining anchored to the principles of good research. Libraries and librarians, like translation itself, mediate between the translator’s information need and the sources of information, from the source need to the target information. Information literacy allows translation students to move beyond the utilitarian use of information to thinking critically and socially as participants in the translation discourse.

Thank you for your attention!

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