

CHAPTER 35.

THE PLACE OF WRITING IN TRANSLATION: FROM LINGUISTIC CRAFTSMANSHIP TO MULTILINGUAL TEXT PRODUCTION

By **Otto Kruse**

Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland)

The School of Translation at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences is one of two Swiss institutions educating translators. The contribution describes the institute's literacy conception and the changes from linguistic parallelism to a model of multilingual literacy in which many forms of language interactions are reflected, not only translation. A first year writing program has been created that provides a variety of writing tasks focused on genre use in different domains (literary, academic, professional, and journalistic). The program places a strong emphasis on the connection of writing with linguistic knowledge acquired in the other parts of the study program. While the first part of the course may be characterized as genre training, the second one is devoted to creativity work leading to a group product in the form of a conjoint dossier. The program builds on a process approach, uses electronic portfolios, and places a strong weight on self-directed group activity. It is taught in three languages parallel.

THE INSTITUTION AND ITS GEOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC FEATURES

The Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW was founded in 1998 as an amalgamation of the once separate schools of business, architecture, engineering, facility management, and translation. As a result of this merger the schools acquired university status, not only providing them with generous state

funding but also extending their mandate to include research and continuing education alongside teaching. The legal framework for this development was provided by a federal law introducing the new type of a university of applied sciences in addition to the traditional universities. As a consequence, the formerly independent schools became departments of the new university, within which various institutes and competence centers were founded. The former School of Translation thus became the new Institute of Translation and Interpretation within the Department of Applied Linguistics. One of the newly founded competence centers within the Department was the Center for Professional Writing.

In the transition period from a vocational school to a university, faculty had to react to several challenges. They had to cope with the new standards of academic teaching and had to re-engineer the curriculum in accordance with the new laws of the Canton Zurich as well as within the framework of the Bologna Process that Switzerland had joined. Connected with this change was a reduction of the length of the study program from four to three years, which actually meant that the compulsory one-year period of study abroad had to be cancelled. Another change that had to be coped with was the transition from a collective leadership system to a hierarchical one, as required by Swiss law. Management became more flexible, albeit at the expense of transparency and collegiality in decision making.

Adaptation to the standards of university teaching demanded that the school-like teaching and learning procedures had to be changed to more independent, self-directed learning, which included seminar teaching, project-oriented learning, and thesis writing. These changes, however, were introduced in a tentative step-by-step process, as the guidelines for the reform process were anything but well defined. Research-oriented teaching and learning was one of the clear requirements imposed, but it was left up to the schools to find the discipline-specific ways of implementing this.

This new type of applied university proved to be very successful in Switzerland. Student numbers were and are still rising, and study programs were able to become highly selective. In 2007, new departments of Health, Applied Psychology, and Social Work were introduced. Today, the ZHAW hosts nearly 6,000 students and about 40 study programs at the bachelor and master level.

The cultural context of the School of Interpretation and Translation cannot be properly understood without considering the language situation of Switzerland. There are four national languages, French, German, Italian, and Romansh, each with a different weight. The dominant language, German, is spoken by about two-thirds of the Swiss population, French by about 20%, Italian by 6.6% and Romansh by only .5%.

All four languages are anchored in defined language regions and every canton has one or two official languages. Only a minority of cantons are factually bi- or multilingual (Wallis, Graubünden) and only some cities along the German/ French border are bilingual (Biel/Bienne, Freiburg/Fribourg). The public impact of the dominant languages German and French, however, is higher than that of the smaller languages, which seems to be the fate of all minority languages. This unbalanced situation has given language politics a high priority in Switzerland, which, throughout its history, has managed to prevent “language wars” by taking care to prevent the open dominance of one language over the others. This defensive attitude, however, led to multilingualism being considered something of a burden that blocks national unity. Only recently has the seeming disadvantage of multilingualism turned into an advantage for Switzerland as an economic and educational location (Dürnmüller, 1996).

Today, English is considered a fifth, unofficial national language, being used in the economy, tourism and higher education. In several cantons, English has now replaced one of the national languages as the first foreign language at school. Alongside English, many other languages are also present as a result of the high numbers of foreigners (20%) in Switzerland. The long tradition of well-managed multilingualism makes Switzerland an interesting model for the study of cultural differences in education. Multilingualism, however, does not mean that translation is obsolete. Quite the opposite is true. All public documents have to be translated into several other languages and the web sites of public institutions and business enterprises are usually maintained in three or four languages. This situation provides an excellent labour market for translators.

LITERACY AND WRITING IN THE TRANSLATION STUDY PROGRAM

The significance of literacy in a translation study program has received little attention, in spite of the obviously close connection between the two. Thinking in translation studies has a long tradition of stressing the independence of languages and the respective national or regional cultures. Translators are seen as mediators between these cultures; they need excellent knowledge and language skills in each. Both language skills and cultural studies are traditionally the main subjects of translation study programs. Even if translation is considered one of the oldest professions pursued by mankind, translation has only recently become a discipline in its own right (Snell-Hornby, 1988).

Before the School of Translation was remodeled, the objectives of the study program were mainly defined in terms of professional language and translation

skills. Students had to acquire proficiency in two or three foreign languages (L2-L4) and received intensive training in translating from each of their foreign languages into their mother tongue and from their mother tongue into their first foreign language. “Literacy” in the study program was implicitly defined as linguistic knowledge and language proficiency.

Today, this has changed in several ways. First, all students are required to attain proficiency level (C2) in English, no matter which L2 and L3 they choose. Second, translation is now mainly seen in the framework of a communication model. Language skills are now seen as part of communication processes within/ between cultural systems or professional environments. To meet these communicative and professional demands, three specialisations have been recently defined:

- Multimodal communication: Management of the intercultural and interlingual transfer of information with different media
- Multilingual communication: Management of multilingual settings in business, education or culture
- Technical communication: Management and translation of technical content in multilingual fields.

Literacy is now seen as a matter of language use in social and institutional contexts instead of a matter of “pure” language skills. There is also a shift from a model of distinct, language-specific literacies to a model of multilingual literacy, in which the co-existence of different languages with their correspondent language practices is seen as the norm for individuals as well as for communities.

Although students still receive intensive language training separately in their own languages, courses with comparative approaches have also recently been included, such as one in comparative text analysis. Translation is usually performed from L2 and L3 to L1. Students do have to write, however, also in their L2 and L3 classes, at least for the purpose of language learning, and may, for the same reason, also translate from L1 to L2.

WHAT DO “LITERACY” AND ESPECIALLY “WRITING” MEAN TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS?

That writing is part of translation or—even more—that translation is a writing profession, was always taken as a fact, but a fact not rooted in a writing or literacy theory. The only course connected to writing on the translation programme was “Text Redaktion,” a course that taught text revision skills based on linguistic knowledge about grammar, text linguistics and style. “Text Redak-

tion” seemed to be the natural domain of translators’ literacy, as they do not usually have to concern themselves with the first stages of the writing process: planning, the creation of ideas, text structuring, etc. In translation, the ideas, structure, audience, etc., are already in place and it therefore seemed unnecessary to teach them—in other words to make students actually work on their own texts. Consequently, the main kind of writing students had to perform was writing translations of published texts. The second was writing as a means of learning foreign language. The third form of writing consisted of the final thesis, an extended translation with annotations.

The kind of literacy standards typical for translation students was their high proficiency in two or three foreign languages and their highly developed reflective abilities in their mother tongue, principally in all normative aspects of language use. On the other hand, students had hardly ever written a text of their own beyond the school level. Finding ideas, structuring a text, expressing their own point of view, connecting to the texts of others, etc., were not required and never taught. In a writing workshop with translators, all of them alumni from the school of translation, I learned that they found even the most basic kinds of narrative or argumentative texts hard to write. They were skilled in producing perfect translations and delivering them in an accurate, error-free state to their clients. But they were not used to developing their own ideas or to writing as a means of communication. Literacy in the translation study programme meant educating language specialists (in several languages) without giving them their own voice or making them the authors.

Used to teaching academic writing in the sciences and social sciences of German universities (in which writing is traditionally a core element of teaching), I found that teaching writing to translation students posed a whole set of new challenges. When I taught my first writing course in this programme, I did not know how to legitimize writing and I did not know which genres to teach. The students expected to learn about correct writing, which meant polishing the surface until it shines. Language correctness was the dominant criteria for all kinds of student performance on this study programme. The focus on the writing process and on writing creativity which I initially offered did not seem to contribute substantially to this.

Moreover, I noticed that for students specializing in language skills a writing course that does not relate to their previously acquired knowledge of grammar, style, rhetoric, text analysis, etc., must indeed feel empty. For them, it is important to use writing not only as a means of producing some kind of message, but also as a way of integrating their different kinds of language skills. Creative writing exercises were especially hard for them to understand, as creative exercises often displace the writer from language norms in favor of enhanced expres-

siveness. I had to find a way of teaching writing that connected their quest for correctness with my ideals of process and creativity.

A third obstacle to introducing writing to the translation programme was the choice of the domain. Teaching writing at university level, as I had done before, meant teaching academic writing. Was this what translation students needed? Academic writing was important for theses and seminar papers, but as long as these were not an integral part of the curriculum, academic writing was not really needed. In addition, the writing competences of translators cannot easily be tied to a single domain. Translators need to be highly qualified as text specialists in different domains like business and law, technical writing, journalism, etc. It seemed impossible to prepare them in their core domain as this is done, for instance, on journalism study programmes, where students receive training in the dominant genres of news reports, comments, columns, features, or reportages. Focusing on the genres of a single domain would not apply to translators. They have to become generalists, able to understand and reproduce a great number of genres—that cannot be specified exhaustively. They need the skill to explore genres and genre systems in several domains and in several languages. This demands meta-linguistic abilities that do not follow the usual learning process of mastering genres, but need a deeper understanding of what genres are and how they may be examined.

WHERE AND WHAT DO STUDENTS WRITE IN OUR INSTITUTION – DISCIPLINES, GENRES, ASSIGNMENTS?

The transformation to a research-oriented institution with its respective teaching methods resulted in new developments, of which the following are worth mentioning:

- Research-oriented teaching: University teaching and learning demands a closer interconnection of teaching and research. This not only represented a change for the faculty, who were encouraged to carry out research projects themselves, but also for teaching, with translation no longer being considered simply a craft but a discipline comprising its own body of knowledge based on translation research. As a consequence, seminars were introduced to teach research skills.
- More self-directed learning: A second demand was the change from a school-like teaching arrangement to one with more student responsibility and self-directed learning. Less teaching in class and more independent work were required. In many classes, writing became the dominant mode of learning, for instance in translation projects, and of assessment,

where papers replaced multiple choice or gap-filling tests. Translation projects replaced translation exercises as the dominant form of learning.

- Bachelor thesis: The introduction of a bachelor thesis as a requirement for graduation started a long debate not only about the kind of writing expected but also about the kind of preparation necessary during the study programme. The thesis traditionally required was more a demonstration of craftsmanship than of the ability to understand ways in which the discipline creates knowledge. By contrast, the new bachelor thesis calls for a contribution to translation studies or to any of the other disciplines involved in the study programme. The introduction of the bachelor thesis made it necessary to offer seminars where students can learn what research means and how it is done.

WHO IN OUR INSTITUTION “CARES” ABOUT STUDENT GROWTH IN AND THROUGH WRITING? HOW IS THIS CONCERN—OR ITS LACK—SHOWN IN FUNDING, REQUIREMENTS, ATTITUDES AND ACTION?

The ZHAW Centre for Professional Writing was founded as a centre of excellence for research and continuing education. Coordinating writing within the study programme or providing tutoring for students has never been its mission. Plans for a student writing centre were discussed but were not realised, mainly for financial reasons. There is no lack of concern about writing, as writing is now a well-established field of teaching and learning, but the responsibility for student writing rested with the study programme directors and was not passed on to a writing centre.

The members of the Centre for Professional Writing were asked to add several new writing courses to the curriculum. Innovation came not only from the Centre itself but also from the other divisions, especially the English section, which soon used a variety of writing assignments in their courses. The different kinds of writing, however, were never co-ordinated.

Writing was introduced to the study program mainly by inviting the Centre for Professional Writing to offer writing courses. The first course was a two-semester offering on academic writing for the second-year-students, which was initiated in 2006. In groups of twenty, students were first introduced to the principles of academic writing and then, in the second semester, wrote a research-based paper in groups of four. In addition to the author, Gerd Bräuer and Michaela Baumann were involved in this course. After the second run it was decided to change this course to a research-oriented seminar in which writing

instruction was reduced in favor of content. The first half of the course now follows the traditional way of seminar teaching, introducing students to a research field before making them, in the second half, choose their own topic and carry out a small research project. The second part consists basically of one-to-one tutoring of the students, directing their research and their writing processes. The course was no longer carried out by writing teachers but by faculty who, in turn, were able to develop their own skills in teaching research and writing.

A second innovation was the introduction of a new kick-off procedure for the bachelor thesis. Instead of leaving the students to choose a topic and a person to guide their writing process on an individual basis, a study week is organised in which faculty are invited to present their research fields and students asked to choose one of these as the subject of their own thesis. During this week, students have the opportunity to attend several workshops on methodology and to participate in colloquia and consultations with their future supervisors. At the end of the week, they submit a proposal for their thesis, which is then discussed with the supervisor. The third innovation was the construction of a new first-year introductory writing course to better support the transition from school to disciplinary writing. This course will be described in detail below.

WHEN AND HOW HAVE GROUPS OF TEACHERS MET TO DISCUSS AND PLAN WAYS TO HELP STUDENTS GROW AS WRITERS? WHAT HAS RESULTED?

The groups which discussed the writing issue consisted of those persons with the mandate to offer writing courses. To provide students with a learning-to-write experience specific to translation studies, a new course was designed for the first-year students. The course was to be offered for German-, French- and Italian-speaking students in their respective L1s. A group of five teachers developed the course in close coordination with the head of the study programme. In addition to myself, those involved were Michaela Baumann, Gerd Bräuer (both German), Vittorio Panicara (Italian), Christian Treffort (French) and Gary Massey (study programme director). The writing course that resulted from this collaboration is specially designed to meet the needs of a translation study programme (see Figure 1).

Three things were initially decided upon:

- The course was designed to give students enough time to take part in self-directed learning and to prevent school-like teaching. We therefore agreed to give lessons only every third week (in groups of 20) and have students work in small groups (of five participants each) in the two re-

maining weeks. After the first run, however, we changed this to a two-week rhythm, thus alternating classroom and small-group learning.

- Process-oriented teaching was used as the focus of the first semester, although this was interlinked with the teaching of genre norms and genre forms. This, we hoped, would help bridge the gap between writing and the linguistic or translation courses elsewhere in the curriculum.
- The course was to be genre-oriented in the first half and directed towards creative products in the second. The genre-oriented part was managed by means of an electronic portfolio. The creative product submitted after the second part was to be a “dossier,” a collection of texts on a defined topic suited to the use of certain media (a brochure, newspaper, web site, etc.) and selected by the students themselves. Each student has to contribute at least two personally signed texts to this dossier.

In the first half of the course, the learning platform provides individual electronic portfolios, which here is defined as a forum to which students can upload their texts. They are encouraged to upload several versions of any text they write during the course. After one semester, students have usually posted between 15 and 25 texts to their portfolios, most of them in different versions and most of them commented on by their fellow students. Feedback is first provided in the small-group sessions and later, in electronic form, on the learning platform.

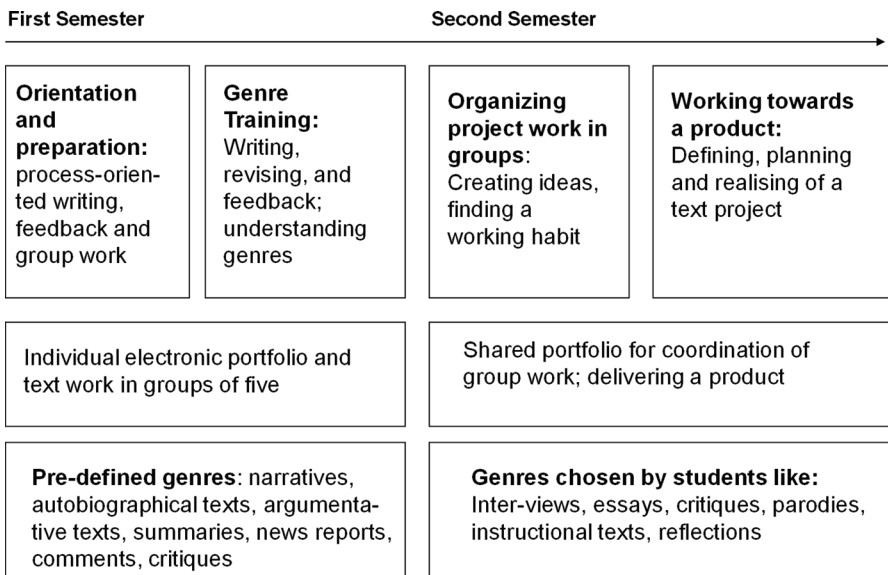


Figure 1. Course design for a translations study programme.

The first half of the course principally takes the form of genre training. A four-hour block is assigned to this every two weeks. Each block is usually devoted to introducing a domain (academic writing, creative writing, journalism, rhetoric) and certain genres (or genre families), together with some model texts, and to setting a defined writing assignment. All questions arising from the assignment and all theoretical issues can be discussed in the autonomous student groups. All written texts are instantly posted to the portfolios so that the lecturer can read them and respond to them before the next lesson. In this way, students are immediately informed about their products and given feedback on the level of comprehension they have achieved. Every training block begins with collective or individual feedback on the texts submitted. As seven 4-hour blocks are available, some of the trainings blocks are extended over six or even eight hours.

BLOCK 1

Introduction, process-oriented writing and feedback: This part gives students the chance to reflect on what writing at school is and what they have learned there, and to contrast this with their new tasks at university. It also contains an exercise in which they write a text in several steps, proceeding from the initial idea to structuring, drafting, receiving feedback and revising (a procedure taken from Ruhmann, 1997). This allows a discussion of relevant process aspects of writing to take place. In the last part of this four-hour block, students are instructed in the use of the learning platform and in the tasks they must perform in their small groups. The instructions for small-group work are very detailed at first, with students successively being given increasing autonomy (and responsibility) in organising their group sessions.

BLOCK 2

Narrative approaches: In the second block, students have to write an individual “literacy biography,” exploring their family literacies, a procedure we have borrowed from Foster (2006, pp. 142 ff.). As an experience in creativity, they write a five-minute narrative text on a picture (from Allen, 1997) and then record a scene from their own experience of literacy or from a fictional story. This is supposed to introduce them to a few basic issues of creative writing: introducing characters, writing with all the senses, creating a setting, etc. The second teaching block is also used to introduce them to feedback and to increase their motivation to revise texts.

BLOCK 3

Knowledge reproduction: Writing summaries and reflecting on knowledge constitutes the third block. Students are briefly introduced to the specifics of academic writing and the necessity of reproducing other texts. They perform an exercise in class called “text reproduction in slow motion,” in which they reduce a text to its core elements and write their summaries on the basis of these (the procedure is described in Kruse & Ruhmann, 1999). This procedure allows all questions about quoting, understanding texts, reproducing texts, plagiarism and writing discursive texts to be discussed

BLOCK 4

Argumentation: Writing arguments and critical essays is the focus here. Students are introduced to the traditions of rhetoric and the importance of argumentation. They are introduced to argumentation theory on the basis of a model provided by Booth et al. The text they write is a Plädoyer (a genre that has no exact correspondance in English; it might be translated best as “plea,” an open text form that allows one to speak in favor of or against a statement).

BLOCK 5

Journalism: Writing news reports and commentaries. The last block introduces journalism as a field of writing with highly regulated text norms. Participants learn to understand several journalistic genres like the news report, commentary, squib, and column, and have to produce a report and a commentary.

The second part of the course is mainly directed towards looking at text systems and at texts in context. The topics for their classes are as follows:

BLOCK 1

Introduction to the course programme and to the task to be performed. The dossier they are to produce is explained and they are instructed that they can write on anything that is connected to writing or language and to our university. They may, for instance, write a dossier on writing in architecture, on foreign students studying at our university, or on the travel experiences of students going abroad. They receive some information on group creativity and use a brainstorming procedure to develop initial ideas.

BLOCK 2

Each group prepares a presentation about the first ideas they have generated for their dossier. They are encouraged to visualise their ideas in order to optimise their understanding and subsequent discussion of them.

BLOCK 3

Each group prepares a presentation about the most important genres in their dossier. They are instructed to look for descriptions or linguistic studies of the genre, to collect some good examples and to explain how the genre “works.” Typical genres used for presentations are interviews, instructions, commentaries, overviews, introductions, summaries, reports, reportages, various narratives, satire and parody.

BLOCK 4

Each group presents its first texts and receives feedback on them. The relationship between the texts and their context (dossier, media) is discussed. Issues of stance, voice and audience are discussed.

BLOCK 5

Again, an integrated concept is presented (either in consultations with the supervisor or in plenary sessions with the other groups). Issues of structure, cohesion, media-specificity and text quality are discussed.

ON WHAT MODELS, THEORIES, AUTHORS AND PRINCIPLES HAVE COURSES OR METHODS BEEN BASED?

The principles the course is based on are manifold. The general directive was to create a space open to imparting new experiences in the use of written language. Unlike in other writing courses, we did not focus this course on a major domain like academic, creative, journalistic, technical, legal or business writing, but tried to use it to raise awareness of the differences among these domains. Translators may work in any of these fields but usually specialise in one. The most important principles the course is based on are the following:

- Independent, self-directed learning: The course should contain a high degree of autonomous learning and place as much responsibility for

learning success on the shoulders of the students as possible. This is a general prerequisite for academic learning but also the main ingredient of writing courses. In the German-speaking countries, the principles of this kind of learning in connection with writing are traditionally rooted in seminar teaching (Foster, 2006; Kruse 2006) and are outlined in many student handbooks for successful writing, such as Kruse (1994, 2007), Bunting, Bitterlich & Pospiech (1996), Frank, Haacke & Lahm (2007), Gruber, Huemer & Rheindorf (2009).

- Creativity development: As writing is always a process involving creativity, we had to make sure that the teaching of linguistic knowledge and of writing creativity was kept in balance. An important aspect of writing instruction is that students learn about keeping and breaking norms (see for instance Gardner, 1984, on creative writing). Writing creativity can develop only when text norms are not interpreted as laws. It also follows a developmental model of writing competence involving cognitive, aesthetic and social growth. Creativity is not an elementary or basic competence but an “emergent” feature that always involves a multitude of factors (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996, Kruse, 1997).
- Process-oriented text production: Understanding cognitive processes in writing and building up meta-cognitive awareness of writing are essential to produce effective writers. All kinds of training in writing have to be oriented towards integrating the sub-skills outlined in cognitive research and organising them in a sequential writing process that connects with learning, exploring and reflecting on a topic (Bräuer, 2003).
- Genre theory: We see genre as the interface between linguistics, context and writing. As genre is also a major field of instruction in linguistics, students are provided with knowledge on genres from several fields. In this area we rely on genre research and theory from Bazerman (1988), Swales (1990), Bazerman & Prior (2004) and Russell (1997).
- Collaboration and feedback: Several pedagogical theories of academic learning stress the importance of collaborative and learning communities as prime factors for successful learning (Bruffee, 1999, Miller, 2003). Understanding feedback is the most important prerequisite for collaboration in writing. Therefore, each writing course should contain some training in feedback and should connect writers through feedback. In addition, various form of collaboration such as group work, cooperative writing, writing projects, etc., should be offered. The most important goal of the first part of the writing course is simply to make students publish their texts early and overcome their fears of being exposed. This opens their minds for feedback.

WHAT HAVE BEEN OUR INSTITUTION'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES IN TEACHING WRITING/STUDENT LITERACY?

Looking at the overall writing curriculum on the translation study programme, it is fair to say that writing has become a central concern. It has to be seen in the context of other innovations that needed to be introduced, such as independent learning and research-based teaching. A special issue in any translation programme is the presence of students with different mother tongues as well as of bilingual students who speak several languages at a native or near-native level. What has not yet been accomplished is a closer interrelation of writing and multilingualism. At the moment, writing is still performed separately in each language. Writing in L1 and L2 has still not been linked with translating and multilingual publishing. The creation of such a learning environment would be helpful not only to gain a better understanding of how language-related literacies may be interconnected but also to develop new forms of writing instruction.

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