

## IMPLEMENTING A LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING APPROACH IN THE FIELD OF PHILOLOGY

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**Abstract:** With the shift from the traditional approach to the functional approach to teaching many disciplines, teaching in the field of philology nowadays is also experiencing a shift from the traditional ways of teaching to a more innovative functional approach to teaching. In other words, applying a functional approach in the field of philology goes beyond the classical lecture-and-note approach and is mainly centred on interaction in the classroom and on creating a cooperative learning process. This is particularly applicable in translation studies which, inter alia, involve foreign language learning, translation, specialised terminology, cultural studies, etc. Translation studies is a discipline predominantly centred on practical experience as one of its fundamental pillars, where the application of an innovative and practical approach to teaching and learning is of crucial importance. The subject of research in this paper is the application of a learner-centred teaching approach in the higher education process in the Republic of Macedonia, with special emphasis on the field of philology, through practical implementation of innovative collaborative techniques in the classroom. The end results in this paper show that this approach, on the one hand, abandons a teaching style of excessive relying on the professor's feedback and opinion (which is unproductive and more typical for the traditional approach), and, on the other hand, enables learning through real-life experience as well as through forming critical thinking and conducting research outside of the classroom. By implementing a learner-centred approach in the higher educational process the focus is put on student involvement and student cooperation, whereas the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that its specific application in the field of philology is aimed at applying new methods of interactive and cooperative teaching and learning inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, this paper suggests creative classroom activities that contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to (practical) learning, high level of direct student involvement and interaction, cooperation among students, student autonomy and motivation, and much needed hands-on experience, thus avoiding an unproductive and passive classroom. The results and conclusions at the end of the paper point out a need for replacing old and traditional methods of teaching and learning, and implementing more dynamic techniques and activities that stimulate active student involvement both in the process of learning and in decision-making about the way of learning and the course content. One of the fundamental conclusions presented in this paper is that interaction in the classroom is a two-way process that does not only involve collaboration with the professor, but above all collaboration among the students, whereas interaction is a key factor contributing to motivation and autonomy of students in the process of learning and research. Correspondingly, by applying specific inventive techniques analysed in this paper, students gradually start to see the process of learning as a bidirectional process as they become increasingly aware that knowledge should not only come from the professor, but that learning must also happen among students.

**Keywords:** learner-centred approach, teaching methods, translation studies

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years many disciplines have experienced a shift from the traditional approach to a functional approach to teaching. Similarly, teaching in the field of philology nowadays is also experiencing a shift from the traditional ways of teaching to a more innovative functional approach to teaching. The purpose of applying a functional approach in the field of philology is to abandon the classical lecture-and-note approach and to put emphasis on interaction and collaboration in the classroom, thus contributing to process termed by Kiraly as "collaborative learning".<sup>7</sup>

The subject of research in this paper is the application of a learner-centred teaching approach in the higher education process in the Republic of Macedonia, with special emphasis on the field of philology. This approach is particularly applicable for translation studies, considering their interdisciplinary nature, as they blend together foreign language learning, translation, specialised terminology, cultural studies and computer-assisted translation tools. Translation studies is a discipline which foundations are laid on practical experience, in addition to

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<sup>7</sup> Kiraly, D. *From Instruction to Collaborative Construction: A passing fad or the promise of a paradigm shift in translator education?* Baer B. and Koby G. (eds.) *Beyond the Ivory Tower. Rethinking translation pedagogy.* American Translators Association Scholarly Monograph Series. Vol. XII. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, (2003).

translation theory, where the application of an innovative and practical approach to teaching and learning is of vital importance.

## 2. TOWARDS A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH IN PRACTICE

Some of the dangers of a traditional approach to teaching is unproductive learning, passive students, lack of classroom interaction and lack of research inside and outside of the classroom. Professors of interdisciplinary studies strive to improve interaction with students and among students, and to create a stimulating environment for productive discussions and knowledge sharing, thus avoiding excessive teacher-reliance. Similarly, the translation classroom applying traditional methods has often been criticised.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that by implementing a learner-centred approach in the higher education process, through examples of application in the field of translation studies, the focus is put on the student and his/her involvement. In other words, the focus is shifted from solely theoretically-based lectures to student involvement and cooperation. Table 1 below compares the main characteristics of the traditional and functional approach to teaching, and shows their opposite nature. On the basis thereof, relevant conclusions and recommendations can be made in this paper.

*Table 1*

<b>Traditional methods of teaching</b>	<b>Functional approach to teaching</b>
Classical lecture-and-note approach	Student involvement and interaction
Excessive relying on teacher's answers and feedback	Relying on independent research and critical thinking by students
Strict following of teacher-prepared course content (teacher-centred approach)	Asking for students' personal opinion on subject areas to be included in the course content (through identifying students' weaknesses and areas they would like to improve)
Uni-directional communication on a teacher – student basis	Bi-directional communication involving collaboration among students
Traditional learning from course books	Learning through practice (in addition to theory)
Unproductive classroom	Hands-on experience
Passive role of students	Student autonomy
Read-and-translate <sup>9</sup> approach	Implementation of projects
Preparing for a classical exam	Self-assessment
No feedback from students	Receiving students' feedback through questionnaires and other methods; the teacher is influenced by students' opinion

Considering the above, a need arises for applying new methods and techniques of interactive and cooperative teaching and learning (that extends outside of the classroom) in the field of interdisciplinary studies. This means that the focus is not only put on theoretical knowledge, but also on a number of communicative competencies. This is particularly applicable in translation studies having regards that translation students must possess a range of interdisciplinary abilities and competencies. These techniques contribute to the development of diverse abilities, that extend beyond linguistic competence, such as:

- *ability for independent critical thinking* (acquired through developing analytical skills, as well as through self-confidence and acquiring in-depth knowledge in various specialised areas tackled in the translation process);
- *ability to conduct research* (acquired through researching specialised texts and materials in complex areas, both inside and outside of the classroom);
- *student autonomy* (implies an ability to perform independent work, self-training, independent research, and to create personal databases of documents, terminology, etc.);
- *self-motivation* (involves a number of skills, such as organisational skills, awareness of the socio-political developments in the country and globally, etc.);
- *acquiring specialist knowledge* (ability to acquire subject knowledge in up-to-date topics, as well as complex and specialised areas);

<sup>8</sup> Colina, S. *Translation Teaching*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, (2003).

<sup>9</sup> González, M. *Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Translation Library. John Benjamins Publishing Company, (2004)

- *emotional intelligence* (involves communication skills, interpersonal skills, social skills and other skills contributing to effective communication);
- *computer skills* (implies everyday use of computers, internet, translation memories, various specialised tools and applications inside and outside of the classroom, as well as networking skills);
- *practical learning* (through real-life experience and practice, which implies involvement in project creation, group work, internship).

### 3. IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE AND COOPERATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE TRANSLATION CLASSROOM

Implementing a learner-centred approach in the translation classroom basically means going beyond a classical lecture-and-note approach, whereas it shifts the focus from solely relying on theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge which implies learning through experience and practice. This paper further points out specific collaborative and cooperative techniques that are successfully implemented in the translation classroom, and that contribute to the creation of an atmosphere and environment conducive to (practical) learning, high-level active student involvement and interaction, collaboration among students, student autonomy and motivation, and much needed hands-on experience, thus avoiding an unproductive and passive classroom. Based on multiannual research in this field and practical implementation, the following activities and techniques of student involvement inside and outside of the classroom can be pointed out, which prepare students for the challenges of their profession:

- **Independent work:** involves a number of activities (such as homework, individual assignments, etc.) aimed at developing self-knowledge and identifying students' personal needs and values. These types of activities should be tailored in such a way so as to help students become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as well as to become aware of their (future) professional interests;
- **Peer-assessment:** involves critical thinking and analytical skills applied for the purpose of assessing other people's work, especially fellow students' work. These specific activities should be focused on performing analysis, identifying errors, providing strong argumentation to justify their personal views in subsequent discussions, etc.;
- **Simulation of group projects:** involves working with other students and simulating a real professional activity (for example, project simulation). Students should be given freedom for independent decision-making on the work method applied in the project, on the content of the work, on setting deadlines, on distribution of work among team members, etc. This enables a glimpse of reality, such as dealing with conflict resolution, problem solving, exercising social skills, etc. and allows for integrating various emotional intelligence-related activities by tackling and applying specific skills that are considered useful in a real professional environment;
- **Self-assessment:** involves exercises that would allow students to identify their own mistakes (both on written assignments and in oral presentations) and to examine whether they are ready to assess their translation work and competence in terms of grading;
- **Internship:** involves compulsory or optional internship in a relevant institutional or professional setting with the purpose of learning through real-life experience, and acquiring a basic form of out-of-classroom practice.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Translation studies is a discipline predominantly centred on practical experience as one of its fundamental pillars, where the application of a learner-centred teaching approach proves to be useful and adequate. By comparing the opposite nature of the previously analysed traditional and functional approach, a need is identified in this paper for replacing old and traditional methods of teaching and learning, and for implementing dynamic techniques and activities that stimulate active student involvement both in the process of learning and in decision-making about the way of learning. This involves a need for applying innovative methods and techniques of interactive and cooperative teaching and learning (that extends outside of the classroom) in the field of translation studies. This means that the focus should not only be put on theoretical knowledge, but on a number of communicative competencies that extend beyond linguistic competence.

A learner-centred approach to teaching is achieved by stimulating active student involvement and interaction in the classroom, collaboration among fellow students, student autonomy, project implementation and acquiring real-life experience. Useful activities in this direction include individual work and assignments tailored to individual needs of students, performing peer-assessment, involvement in simulation of group work and projects, making efforts for possible self-assessment as well as internship and practice. Ultimately they result in a change of students' perception as they help students to get a different perspective about the teaching process and

attending lectures. It can be observed that students no longer perceive teaching as a process of giving instruction but rather as sharing knowledge.

Therefore, one of the fundamental conclusions to be drawn in this paper is that interaction in the classroom is a bi-directional process that does not only involve collaboration with the professor, but above all collaboration among the students, whereas interaction is a key factor contributing to motivation and autonomy of students in the process of learning and research. A passive classroom is an unproductive classroom, and this is reflected in the level of progress achieved by students and competencies acquired.

Correspondingly, by applying the above-discussed techniques and exercises that were emphasised in this paper, students' perception is gradually changed over time in terms of what learning is and in which forms it occurs. In particular, students gradually start to see the process of learning as a bi-directional process as they become increasingly aware that knowledge should not only come from the professor, but that learning must also happen with and among fellow students. Furthermore, undergraduate students become aware that their own decision-making about the methods and the level of their personal involvement in the classroom in turn greatly influences the final outcome and achieved results.

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