

Wikipedia in Academia

a cura di
Valentina Gallo e Corrado Petrucco

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Teaching translation via Wikipedia

Maria Teresa Musacchio

Università degli Studi di Padova

Abstract. The experience described in this paper combines the relevance of Wikipedia to enhance the visibility of translation studies within the European Society for Translation Studies (EST) with a project to teach second-cycle university students professional translation within the context of the University of Padua's project "Didattica con Wikipedia". Wikipedia can give translation students a chance to test and further develop their translation competence by carrying out a real world translation task i.e. translating Wikipedia entries on Translation Studies created within EST and to develop all other subcompetences and skills required by the translator's profession. We report on experience at the University of Padua, where we developed 'translatathon' activities on EST entries on translation studies in English Wikipedia to enhance our students' translation competence and knowledge. While challenging and rewarding at the level of practice, especially as an experience in cooperative translation (Al-Shehari 2017), the project can provide invaluable insights into some specific aspects of translation and knowledge dissemination in the self-contained ecosystem of Wikipedia (Shuttleworth 2017; 2018). This might deserve further investigation in research on the didactics of translation, especially from the perspective of constructivist approaches and cooperative learning (Kiraly 2014; 2006).

Translation, adaptation, Wikipedia, editing, revising

Background

Some years ago, the European Society for Translation Studies (EST) set up a project "to generate better-quality and more consistent information in

Translation Studies”. The initial idea was to develop a terminology wiki that would be hosted in the EST website and fed by EST members who volunteered to write term entries on their specialisms in Translation Studies. A committee was set up to supervise the writing of term entries and provide the necessary links between entries, but the project made little progress partly because it was difficult to get colleagues involved and partly because – it was soon realised – a termbase in the Society’s website could hardly give the project the visibility it needed. Discussion both within the committee and with the then EST president, Anthony Pym, and board led to the idea that visibility could be better achieved by writing encyclopaedic entries on Translation Studies for Wikipedia which – as the first port of call for general information on all sorts of topics – had a much wider public than the Est website ever would. Accordingly, project participants became part of the EST Wikicommittee, whose priorities included the creation of new articles to fill gaps in English Wikipedia, the improvement of existing articles, the tagging of articles of interest to the project, the provision of up-to-date information about concepts and terminology, the updating of bibliographical references and the translation of entries into more languages (<https://est-translationstudies.org/committees/est-wikicommittee/>). Participation was then open to all.

Figure 1. The EST WikiProject on Translation Studies

(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Translation_studies)



Entries on Translation Studies in English Wikipedia were then screened and classified as articles created or updated, articles needing improvement and articles to take care of. As members of the EST Wikicommittee we decided that we could use those entries in our translation classes to enhance our students’ translation competences. Activities could focus on editing entries – for example as part of a course on translation theory and methods – or on translating entries in other languages as part of translation practice classes.

Preparatory work

Recent approaches to translator education are profession and learner-centred and focus on the development of five sub-competences (PACTE 2011; Gambier 2015; Toudic 2015): bilingual, extra-linguistic, instrumental and strategic competence, and knowledge about translation. The connection of the world of Wikipedia to translation studies is clear, as the Wikipedia project as a whole is inherently multilingual. Translation is also a central activity to Wikipedia as witnessed by the “Translate us” policy (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Translate_us), and – for languages such as Italian, by the Wiki translators category (“Wikitradduttori”, <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Wiki-traduttori>). Moreover, it is a dedicated content translation tool, even for languages of limited diffusion such as Greek. Taking advantage of this, Wikipedia can give translation students a chance to test and further develop their translation competence by carrying out a real world translation task i.e. translating Wikipedia entries on Translation Studies created within EST and to develop all other subcompetences and skills required by the translator’s profession. This is line with Kiraly’s idea of a socio-constructivist approach to translator education (2006; 2014) with the addition of the necessary scaffolding to ensure the project’s success.

A decision was made to work on translating Wikipedia entries rather than on editing entries as a more suitable activity for students who had just started their education in Translation Studies. The problem remained, however, to find a kind of framework within which this project could succeed, especially in consideration of the numbers involved even in the case of first-year students of the second-cycle degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation. More or less at the same time, our university launched a project for teaching with Wikipedia, “Didattica con Wikipedia”, and the results of the first pilot courses using activities involving Wikipedia were shown at a local conference. Over time similar uses of Wikipedia for translation have emerged – cf. Gatto 2012; Al-Shehari 2017; Shuttleworth 2017, 2018), but at the time it was launched Padua’s was the only university-wide project which provided teachers and students with full support.

Figure 2. The Didattica con Wikipedia Project of the University of Padua
(Source: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progetto:Coordinamento/Universit%C3%A0/UNIPD>)



For the teachers who joined the project, there was the chance to plan activities with the help of one person from the e-learning staff who would also arrange pre-and post-learning questionnaires for students, besides training students in class on how to write entries for Wikipedia. The project included two lab sessions with the University of Padua's Wikipedia in residence, one at the beginning and one at the end of the activities. The class at the beginning was meant to acquaint students with Wikipedia's writing process and community – the five pillars, the need to quote sources to avoid plagiarism, the editing process in Wikipedia, and the use of the sandbox to create and edit entries. The meeting at the end was to provide students with feedback on their work and to give them a chance to ask questions on open issues that would allow them to finalise their translations of Wikipedia entries.

The next step consisted in developing activities that would prepare students for the task of translating Wikipedia entries considering the writing conventions of the genre (Clark et al. 2009; Luka and Gutounig 2016; Ray and Graeff 2008). Firstly, they had to become familiar with encyclopedic entries as a genre and with different writing conventions in English and Italian Wikipedia. For this purpose, students were divided into groups and were asked to check features of encyclopedias in four sources, *The Handbook of Technical Writing* (Alred et al. 2009), the English Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia>) and Encyclopaedia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/encyclopaedia>) entries on encyclopaedias plus a video on the web (https://penandthepad.com/write-encyclopaedia_7818608.html). They were then asked to look at features of popular science and its translation and finally discuss how popular science writing could be useful to write or translate encyclopaedic entries and make a list of their conclusions to post on Moodle, the elearning platform used for the course.

In the following activity students had to look up two entries on translation, one in English in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (the Translation section the "Language and culture" entry, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/language/>

Language-and-culture#ref665939.html) and one in Italian in the *Enciclopedia Treccani* (“Traduzione” entry, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/traduzione/>). After reading the entries, they had to describe similarities and differences in the two entries and then discuss whether it was significant that “Translation” was a section of a more general entry in the Britannica, while the Italian Encyclopedia Treccani had a separate entry. Through this activity, students learned more about writing conventions for entries in encyclopedias in English and Italian and were alerted to the role translation plays in different cultures.

Translating encyclopedic entries on translation: Britannica vs Wikipedia

The first activity on translation proper required students to translate the section on translation in the “Language and culture” entry of the Encyclopaedia Britannica into Italian. As a reference, they were given dictionaries on Translation Studies in English – *Key Terms in Translation Studies* (2009) and Shuttleworth and Cowie’s *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (2004) – and in Italian – *Terminologia della traduzione* (Ulrych 2002) – to check terminology and translation issues. As this was an instance of specialized translation, students had to refer to a translation manual on the topic and in particular to a chapter on the translation process (Scarpa 2008). They were also asked to simulate work in a translation company, where a project manager assigns tasks and provides the necessary background material, a terminologist supplies all the information on the terms to be used and a translator translates the text. Revision is then a joint activity of the whole group. Through translation, students had to reflect further on the content of the “Translation” section of Britannica and realize to what extent it was culture specific and could not be translated, but had to be adapted for the Italian readership. They finally had to compare the content of the Britannica entry with that of the “Translation” entry in Wikipedia to reflect on the importance of checking the reliability of sources regardless of their reputation for quality. Though Britannica is a time-honoured publication and has always been well-known in the English-speaking world for its quality, the fact that translation is not central to the English speaking world accounts for the presence of translation as a topic within the wider context of language and culture and for the many stereotypes about translation to be found in the entry. These include the idea that translation is more of an art than a science, the Italian epigram “Traduttore traditore” (lit. the translator is a traitor), the lack of complexity of technical and scientific translation when compared with literary translation and the presumed considerable advances of machine translation in the 1990s. Stereotypes about translation are highlighted in bold in the excerpt below:

At the other end of the translator's spectrum, **technical prose dealing with internationally agreed scientific subjects may be the easiest type of material to translate**, because cultural unification (in this respect), lexical correspondences, and stylistic similarity already exist in this type of usage in the languages most commonly involved, to a higher degree than in other fields of discourse. **Remarkable advances in automatic computer translation were made during the 1990s**—the result of progress in computational techniques and a fresh burst of research energy focused on the problem—while the spread of the Internet in subsequent decades transformed approaches to, and the ease of, all forms of translation.

Translation on the whole is, arguably, more art than science. Guidance can be given and general principles can be taught, but after that it must be left to the individual's own feeling for the two languages concerned. Almost inevitably, in a translation of a work of literature, something of the author's original intent must be lost; in those cases in which the translation is said to be a better work than the original, an opinion sometimes expressed about the English writer Edward Fitzgerald's "translation" of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, one is dealing with a new though derived work, not just a translation. **The Italian epigram remains justified: Traduttore traditore, "The translator is a traitor."** (Source: [https:// www.britannica.com/topic/language/Language-and-culture](https://www.britannica.com/topic/language/Language-and-culture))

By contrast, students found that the Wikipedia entry on translation provided an up-to-date, detailed description of translation, full of hyperlinks to other Wikipedia entries to get a better picture of the subject:

Figure 3. The entry on translation in English *Wikipedia*.

The beginning of the entry on translation in English Wikipedia provides students with a much more 'international' view of translation when compared to *Britannica* (Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Translation>)



For the final activity students kept working in groups and were asked to translate three entries taken from the EST list of articles created or updated: retranslation, indirect translation and fan translation. As a reference for content and terminology they were given four volumes on translation in Italian (Agorni 2005; Nergaard 2014a, Nergaard 2014b, Ulrych 1997). Through preliminary

activities students had become aware of the need to consider how relevant content was for an Italian readership. Accordingly, they only kept references to famous translations if they were well-known in an Italian context too. They replaced the translations into English with equally known translations into Italian – for example of Shakespeare’s works and Russian classics. They also adapted content concerning dubbing and subtitling, as English-speaking countries are typically subtitling countries while Italy is a predominantly dubbing one. An example of the changes and adaptations that were necessary can be seen in the following example from the English Wikipedia entry on retranslation:

Figure 4. The entry retranslation and its Italian version
Changes and adaptation in the ‘localisation’ of the English Wikipedia entry on retranslation for Italian readers



As can be seen, the English retranslation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe* has been replaced with a well-known case in Italy, that of the retranslations of Melville’s *Moby Dick* after Cesare Pavese’s acclaimed version in 1932. Translation of Russian classics and the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales into English are adapted by referring to equivalent translations into Italian.

While throughout the activities I as a teacher acted as field expert and facilitator in translating, for this activity two PhD students, Virginia Zorzi and Dario Del Fante, provided further support to help students solve their problems with the technicalities of compiling Wikipedia entries. Once translation and revision was over at group level, three groups were asked to volunteer to collect all translations of one entry each and come up with a final version that would include the best solutions and was then published in Italian Wikipedia.

Conclusion

Feedback on translating and editing Wikipedia entries was highly positive. Students enjoyed the real life activities they took part in and experimenting with teamwork in a translation company, said they learned a lot about writing and editing entries for an encyclopedia they use every day as reference and gained skills that would also help them when it came to writing their final dissertation. As part of a course in translation, this was a pilot programme to test the feasibility of activities with high numbers of students. The positive outcome of the pilot has led to another set of activities with a larger number of entries – one per group of students – within the framework of the same University of Padua’s project in the current academic year. Results of this second trial will be the subject of a forthcoming paper.

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