

The Challenges of Designing a Textual Corpus to Develop

Translation Students' Academic Literacy

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Abstract

This work discusses the progress of Research Project J031, *Alfabetización Académica y Tipologías Textuales en la Enseñanza del Inglés para la Traducción* (2018-2021), whose aims are the compilation of an English-language authentic-text corpus for the design of didactic materials to advance translation students' academic competences in English. The theoretical-methodological framework of this work, like that of the Project J031, is anchored in Academic Literacy (AL) studies (largely Bazerman's *Writing Across the Curriculum* movement), Genre Theory, and the conception of teaching English in translator training as *English for Specific Purposes*.

A discussion of the findings so far accounts for the benefits of the elaboration of a corpus of authentic texts for the development of learners' AL and translation competence; and presents two elements for the analysis of the corpus: a classification tool and a taxonomy for text annotation. As preliminary conclusions, it is hoped this work contributes to the enhancement of students' translation strategies and to the strengthening of links between theory, practice and research in AL and translator training.

Key words:

Academic Literacy - corpus design - Genre Theory - translator training - English for Specific Purposes

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Resumen

Este trabajo presenta el avance del proyecto de investigación *Alfabetización Académica y Tipologías Textuales en la Enseñanza del Inglés para la Traducción* (2018-2021), cuyos objetivos son elaborar un corpus con textos auténticos en lengua inglesa y proponer materiales didácticos que favorezcan la alfabetización académica (AA) de los estudiantes en la L2. Tanto el proyecto J031 como el presente trabajo se encuadran en el marco teórico-metodológico de la alfabetización académica (principalmente en los aportes del movimiento *Writing Across the Curriculum*), la Teoría de Género y el enfoque del *inglés con propósitos específicos* para la enseñanza de inglés en el traductorado.

En cuanto a los resultados obtenidos hasta el momento, la discusión se centra en los beneficios que ofrece la utilización de un corpus de textos auténticos para el desarrollo de las competencias académica y traductora de los estudiantes, así como en la presentación de dos elementos para el análisis del corpus: una herramienta de clasificación y una taxonomía para la anotación de los textos. Como conclusiones preliminares, se espera que este trabajo contribuya a incrementar las estrategias traductorales de los estudiantes y a consolidar los vínculos entre la teoría, la práctica, la investigación en AA y la formación de traductores.

Palabras clave:

Alfabetización académica - diseño de corpus - Teoría de Género - formación de traductores - Inglés con propósitos específicos

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, research on Academic Literacy (AL) conducted in Argentina and Latin America has suggested that the most effective training for the acquisition of discipline-specific forms of writing is one that caters for the singular needs of each academic or professional discipline (Carlino, 2004, 2013; Navarro, 2012; Parodi, 2010). This type of training involves the use of authentic discursive practices- that is to say, those with unabridged texts, as opposed to texts that have been manipulated for classroom use. These practices encourage *enculturation*, defined as the learners' acquisition of tools for social interaction which happens at the same time as they are taking part in it (Prior & Bilbro, as cited in Carlino, 2013).

This work presents the advances of Research Project J031, *Alfabetización Académica y Tipologías Textuales en la Enseñanza del Inglés para la Traducción* (2018-2021), whose

main objective is to promote the development of Academic Literacy of Translation Program students at Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional del Comahue (UNCo), Argentina. Specifically, our project aims at designing a corpus of academic texts in English- used for teaching the English language and Translation- in order to create pedagogic guidelines and didactic materials for classroom exploitation. In order to achieve this objective, this project has been divided into different stages; the corpus design is expected to be completed by 2020, and the analysis and systematization of the data obtained, together with the didactic materials production, should be concluded by 2021. Additionally, these activities will be accompanied by surveys to students and teachers about the importance of AL, as well as transfer activities to engage teachers across the curriculum to make use of these materials.

Rationale and Methodology

Along the lines of Project J031, this work considers Academic Literacy (AL) as the core concept around which its theoretical and methodological framework is built, following two approaches it encompasses. The first one is *Writing across the Curriculum*, put forward by Bazerman (2013), which favors the development of academic writing, along with all the competences related to it, across the subjects of the curricular design of a course. The second one is Genre Theory (GT) (Swales, 2004), which involves the analysis of texts according to their function within their target community. It should also be noted that language learning in the context of the Translation Program at *Facultad de Lenguas* is understood as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which implies the inclusion of methodologies and techniques related to the field of specialization under study (in this case, translation), and the adaptation of the language and activities included to the grammar, lexis, register and skills specific to such field (Basturkmen, 2006). Thus, this investigation also focuses on identifying some points of contact between AL, ESP and GT. Finally, a classification tool for corpus analysis that considers the communicative, socio-cultural, formal and cognitive aspects of discourse (Ezpeleta Piorno, 2008) will be proposed for the subsequent design of the didactic materials.

WAC and ESP: antecedents

Project J031 adopts the research criteria of Project D-100 “*La comunicación académica: estrategias para el análisis y la producción textual*” (2014-2017) , which dealt with reading and writing practices and the dissemination of knowledge at different faculties of Universidad Nacional del Comahue and had as its main aim the development of oral and written discourse in academic and professional contexts. This project performed a comparative analysis of AL

in Argentina, based on its most relevant authors, and in Latin America and Spain. Some authors, such as Carlino (2004, 2013), Navarro (2012) and Parodi (2010), have drawn attention to the importance of encouraging situated practices as part of an enculturation process (Prior & Bilbro, as cited in Carlino, 2013). Moreover, Carlino suggests that AL development should be included in university programs as part of their curricula, and teachers' participation and training should be sought. This author also argues that students should exploit the epistemic possibilities of writing and address their potential audience- not only their teachers- in a real-life situation. Likewise, Navarro (2012) explains that it is necessary to remedy the deficiencies of previous stages in the educational system in Argentina, and encourages the implementation of new and more complex discursive practices based on textual genres.

A further contribution of Project D100 was the development of a differential model, called the sample/process-product/assessment [SPPA] model (Massi & Liendo, 2016) for students of the Teacher-training Program in the light of the competences and strategies that such students need to develop. This didactic model is divided into two stages. The first one –the *sample/process* stage– starts with the analysis of *sample texts* which are thematically related to a specific subject. The texts are further deconstructed into their linguistic, textual, paratextual and contextual components; and these are analyzed and categorized for the creation of a linguistic and textual *reservoir*. This process positions the students within the communicative events and allows them, in turn, to identify the rhetorical features of the text type that is being analyzed. The second stage –*product/assessment*– focuses on the product, which is the students' final output. This stage involves revision work to assess thematic progression and redrafting, if necessary, leading to a final feedback from peers and teachers.

As for advances in AL in the English-speaking world, Bazerman (2005, 2012, 2013) is one of the most noted authors. He puts forward the *Writing across the Curriculum* approach, which encourages the exploitation of the rhetorical and epistemic potential of writing in every field of knowledge and subject at university. Bazerman sees writing as multidimensional – including linguistic, logical, rhetorical, emotional, personal, social and referential aspects– and sustains that genres and identity (both disciplinary and personal) are closely linked and mutually dependent. He claims that we, as writers, resort to both of these for the dynamic organization of the world.

Nevertheless, the development of AL in translator training poses further challenges, like the relatively recent acceptance of translation as a scientific discipline and the lack of pedagogic

literature on language learning for translation students (Coelho & Fujihara, 2009; Liendo & Massi, 2017). Thus, it is relevant to delimit language learning for translation as ESP and, at the same time, identify points of contact between Linguistics and Translation Studies (TS). In the early years, ESP teaching was thought of as a *linguistic repertoire* of a specific discipline; now, it implies that students acquire a *communicative repertoire* for various situations related to the discipline as well as the concepts that enable them to develop the *underlying* competence (Basturkmen, 2006).

Basturkmen (2006) adheres to Stern's three lines of research for the analysis of the foreign language teaching-learning process. Stern (as cited in Basturkmen, *ibid.*) claims that this analysis should be based on the preconceptions held about the language, about how that language should be taught/learned and about the function of learning and teaching that language- that is to say, what the language is taught/learned for. Basturkmen explains that Stern considered that every language teaching approach has four basic concepts that underlie its rationale: perspectives about language, learning, teaching and context. In other words, teaching styles and educational policies will be shaped as a result of whether you consider language as a system of rules or in its sociocultural dimension, for example- or the teaching learning process as the passing of knowledge from teachers to students or as a social construction. Therefore, when teaching ESP, with a specific discipline and communicative repertoire in mind, language learning is conceived as a means to perform more efficiently in a given professional or academic context. Likewise, the syllabus should be based on the needs of the students, which implies a higher motivation on their part but also a compliance with certain time constraints. This situation makes it mandatory to carefully select the linguistic and extralinguistic items that best satisfy students' needs before including them in the curricular design.

As a result, English teaching for the specific purpose of translation training requires, on the one hand, the development of techniques and strategies related to the areas of specialized translation (legal, commercial, technical, scientific, literary) as well as expertise in the management of textual resources as linguistic input. On the other hand, ESP practices demand the analysis of the state of the art of Translation Studies (TS) as a field of investigation and professional development. In other words, translation programs should consider the development of a *translation competence*, which, according to PACTE group (as cited in Ezpeleta Piorno, 2005), is made up of the following competences:

- Communicative Competence in the two languages: it includes the textual sub-competence, for writing texts, and the sociological sub-competence, which implies the correct understanding and production of texts in different sociological contexts;
- Psycho-physiological Competence: it involves developing cognitive skills (process of creativity, logical reasoning, etc.) and psychological attitudes (intellectual curiosity, self-confidence, etc.);
- Instrumental- Professional Competence: it is composed of different abilities, such as using parallel texts as a documentation source and the contrastive analysis of texts;
- Strategic Competence: it includes strategies to improve textual comprehension; and
- Transfer Competence: it enables the translator to understand the source text and its paraphrase into the target language.

It can thus be said that translator training involves a high level of specificity not only as regards linguistic, textual, metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge but also extralinguistic knowledge, according to the complexity of the given source text. Therefore, many authors stress the importance of identifying contact points between Linguistics and TS and argue that Genre Theory may provide for such convergence.

Genre Theory and Translator training

Swales' definition of the academic discourse genre as a communicative event (1990, 2004) is grounded on the analysis of some frequent features and patterns related to the macrostructure of a text (including, for example, the analysis of context and the author's purpose) and its microstructure (which comprises the thematic progression, the grammatical and lexical choices, and the register of the text, among others). Bhatia (as cited in García Izquierdo, 2005) further develops Swales' theory and suggests the idea that GT makes it possible to determine the circumstances of institutionalized communication situations, by means of the study of linguistic cues that allow for the identification of different linguistic patterns in their contexts of occurrence. Bhatia (ibid.) outlines the importance of the communicative purpose as the ultimate identification criterion, and acknowledges the fact that some features, such as the speech community and the choice of tone, can result in a change of genre or in the appearance of a sub-genre, irrespective of the communicative purpose.

In her assessment of Swales' contributions to GT, Devitt (2015) highlights Swales' role in bringing together Linguistics and Rhetoric by establishing links between the distinctive linguistic patterns of a genre, the discursive community that uses them and the rhetorical moves. This author adds that the main aim of genre analysis is to offer a new approach for

teaching English for Academic and Research purposes. She also favors the study of different texts within a genre in order to discover textual conventions, interpret them and eventually identify rhetorical strategies. In addition, Devitt acknowledges that this methodology has prevailed in the teaching of AL in recent years, particularly to non-native speakers of English. However, she sustains that this approach falls short when students have to apply the conventions to their own written products. Thus, she puts forward the concept of *genre performance*, taking formal linguistics' definitions of competence and performance (Chomsky, as cited in Devitt, *ibid.*). The author defines *genre performance* as ways of producing texts which are adequate to the tasks students have to complete. For its realization, the author highlights the centrality of metacognition (Artmeva and Fox, Beaufort, Nowacek, Reiff and Bawarshi, as cited in Devitt, *ibid.*), that is to say, reflection over the singularity of each communicative act of writing, the importance of making the text adequate to the communicative situation, and the decisions that must be taken as a consequence.

With respect to Translation Studies, many authors have highlighted the relevance of GT. For instance, Hatim & Mason (as cited in Coelho & Fujihara, 2009) define genres as conventionalized text structures; Kress (as cited in Coelho & Fujihara, *ibid.*) subscribes to this notion and suggests that these structures are at the same time hybrid and dynamic. Similarly, Reiss & Vermeer (as cited in Coelho & Fujihara, *ibid.*) introduce a translation model that includes the idea of genre, as it is based on the concept of Skopos or target-text purpose- even though they propose a text-type taxonomy that is not convenient for cases in which the text function is difficult to recognize. Nord (as cited in Coelho & Fujihara, *ibid.*) introduces a model that leaves aside the concept of text type and highlights the notion of genre, proposing the analysis of intratextual and intertextual features since these should guide the translator's decision-making process. This model for textual analysis applied to translation is based on the assumption that the source-text and target-text functions may be different according to the initiator's needs and the translation purpose.

Discussion: Corpus Design

As stated above, the aim of this work is to share the progress of Project J031, whose final objective is the design of didactic materials for the advancement of translation students' academic competences. The project is currently at the stage of corpus design. Therefore, this section begins with the identification of the benefits of designing training materials based on the use of a corpus, within the theoretical and methodological framework defined above. In addition, this section discusses the characteristics required of a textual corpus for the purpose

of creating didactic materials for translator training and the methodology applied in its compilation to suit such needs. Finally, a preliminary application of a classification tool is analyzed, together with a proposed taxonomy for the annotation of texts, which will need further discussion and assessment in subsequent stages of the research plan.

Benefits of using corpus-based training

Scholars like Pym and Hatim, among others, have highlighted the importance of arguing against the separation of theory and practice in translators' education (as cited in Arhire, 2015). Pym believes that “translators themselves are theorising”, while Hatim proposes a reassessment of the “unhelpful dichotomies” of theory and practice. Hatim suggests that the best way to do this is by considering the dialectical and mutually enriching relationship that exists between research and action; and argues that the so-called theory-practice cycle should be considered as “the research cycle of practice-research-practice” (as cited in Arhire, *ibid.*: 163).

Along the same lines, it is believed that the design of a corpus will favor class discussions about the discursive features of texts of various types and genres, providing useful materials for the analysis of authentic language, which traditional English textbooks do not seem to cater for (Tolchinsky, 2014). As for translator training in particular, the pedagogical use of corpora may also breach the gap between theory, practice, training and research, as well as raise learners' awareness of the benefits of using corpora and acquiring user-friendly corpus-construction and access tools (Bernardini and Castagnoli as cited in Arhire, 2015). In addition, two further benefits of using a monolingual corpus are the avoidance of SL influence (Laviosa and Bernardini & Castagnoli as cited in Arhire, 2015), and the fact that it may be a valuable source of both linguistic and cultural knowledge for back translation training (Laviosa as cited in Arhire, *ibid.*). Corpus-based translator training may also raise learners' awareness of professional translator strategies (Pearson, as cited in Bernardini, 2006) and train them to produce more naturally-sounding translations (Zanettin, as cited in Bernardini, *ibid.*), in a context that closely reproduces their future work environment (Bernardini, *ibid.*).

Corpus definition and design methodology

In this work, a corpus is understood as a collection of pieces of language text in electronic form, selected according to external criteria to represent, as far as possible, a language or language variety as a source of data for linguistic research (Sinclair, as cited in Tolchinsky, 2014).

Tolchinsky (2014) also identifies the following parameters to characterize corpora: the percentage and distribution of texts; their specificity (whether they are general or specialized corpora, and whether a specific linguistic variety is considered); the length of the texts and whether they are fragments- belonging to one or several text-types- or complete pieces; and whether any specified coding or annotation system is used. This author defines an annotated corpus as one containing texts to which some kind of linguistic information has been added. In other words, an annotated text contains tags with morphological, semantic or syntactic information- an unannotated corpus, on the other hand, only includes the linguistic material without any added text. In addition, it should be considered whether there are any further documents accompanying the texts included in the corpus.

Following the characterization proposed by Tolchinsky (2014), the corpus discussed in this work has been designed according to the following features:

- it is a set of written texts in English
- they are full texts, of a maximum length of two pages
- they are specific texts (texts used in different subjects of the Translation Program at FadeL, UNCo)
- they include annotations (tags with linguistic information)
- they are accompanied by a purposefully-designed classification tool (Fig. 1)

TITLE/ HEADLINE	DATE	SOURCE	ST/TS	GENRE	SUBGENRE	MAIN THEME	SUBTHEMES	COMMUN. FEATURES	SOCIOCULT. FEATURES	FORMAL FEATURES	COGNITIVE FEATURES

ST/TS: potential Source Text/academic text about Translation Studies

Commun. Features: Communicative features

Sociocult. Features: Sociocultural features

Figure 1 – Classification tool

It should also be pointed out at this stage that, for the creation of the classification tool in Figure 1, several aspects of the theoretical and methodological framework discussed in *Rationale and Methodology* have been taken into consideration. In terms of Academic Literacy (AL) development, this tool will be used for the classification of texts that can be encountered by students in their professional environment, either as ST or as TS materials

read for professional development. Additional AL aspects such as the *enculturation* (Prior & Bilbro, as cited in Carlino 2013) of students into the target culture they intend to belong to will be considered. Moreover, the epistemic and rhetorical potential of these texts will be discussed, as well as their thematic and linguistic similarities and differences with other texts across the curriculum (Bazerman, 2005, 2012, 2013) and their possible use as samples for analysis and assessment (Massi & Liendo, 2016).

By the same token, several aspects of Genre Theory have been involved in the elaboration of this tool, as its use implies carrying out a macro- and microstructural analysis of the texts (Swales, 1990), and the identification of genre-specific linguistic patterns (Bhatia, as cited in García Izquierdo, 2005). For the classification of the distinctive features of each text, Ezpeleta Piorno's categorization (2008) has been used, as it allows for the identification of both the prototypical features of each genre and those particular features, typical of hybrid texts, which account for the uniqueness of each communicative situation- and therefore challenge translators in their decision-making processes (Nord, as cited in Coelho & Fujihara, 2009)

Overall, this tool has been designed with the didactic needs of the different subjects taught in our Translation Program in mind. The final goal is the use of the corpus in the creation of pedagogic materials that favor the development of learners' *translation competence*, specifically the communicative (textual and sociological), instrumental-professional, and strategic competences (PACTE, as cited in Ezpeleta Piorno, 2005).

Application of classification tool and proposed taxonomy

As discussed above, the classification tool in Figure 1 aims to analyze the distinctive characteristics of the texts in the corpus, following a GT approach and considering their communicative, sociocultural, formal and cognitive features (as defined by Ezpeleta Piorno, 2008). So far, the classification tool has been applied to three different texts- one essay contributed to a newspaper, one news article and one criminal complaint. Some preliminary conclusions to be driven from this first stage of analysis are related to the limitations of the tool. This kind of research is of the qualitative type, and there are many potential subcategories to be considered in the parameters defined for the classification of some of the features. For example, microstructural features, within the category of formal features of the text, may include level of formality, different lexical choices (presence or absence of specialized terms, use of phrasal verbs, idioms, words of Latin origin and nominalizations) or

syntactic choices (simple or complex sentences with coordination or subordination, inversion, fronting and focalization), to name just a few.

These findings have given rise to the discussion over the need to narrow the scope of the parameters to be taken into account when using the classification tool, particularly considering that the inclusion of different genres, and within these, diverse text types, might result in the discovery of new subcategories that might not have been originally contemplated and may well be relevant to the rhetorical analysis of a text. As a consequence, a taxonomy has been defined for the categorization of certain parameters in the classification table (Figure 2).

MAIN THEME	COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES			MACROSTRUCTURE	FORMAL FEATURES			COGNITIVE FEATURES
	PURPOSE		POWER RELATION I/A		MICROSTRUCTURE			
	MAIN	SECONDARY			DEGREE OF FORMALITY	LEXICAL CHOICES	GRAMMAR CHOICES	
POLITICS	GIVE AN OPINION	GIVE AN OPINION	EQUALITY	NARRATION	FORMAL	SPECIALIZED TERMINOLOGY	SIMPLE SENTENCES	PARALLELISM
RELIGION	PERSUADE	PERSUADE	INEQUALITY	ARGUMENTATION	SEMI-FORMAL	PHRASAL VERBS	SUBORDINATION	ADDRESS TO THE READER
ECONOMY	INFORM	INFORM		DIALOGUE	INFORMAL	IDIOMATIC/ FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE	COORDINATION	USE OF FIRST PERSON
LAWS AND REGULATIONS	GIVE INSTRUCTIONS	GIVE INSTRUCTIONS		CITATION	COLOQUIAL	WORDS OF LATIN ORIGIN	FOCALIZATION	MODULATION
LIFESTYLE	EXPRESS FEELINGS	EXPRESS FEELINGS		INDIRECT/REPORTED SPEECH		OLD-FASHIONED/ DATED TERMS	UNGRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES	REPETITION
HEALTH & NUTRITION				FACTS AND FIGURES		CONTRACTIONS		EUPHONIC EFFECTS
EDUCATION								
NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT								

Power relation I/A: Initiator/Addressee

Figure 2

Taxonomy for text classification

The use of this taxonomy is expected to prove useful in the upcoming stage of text annotation. The process to be followed with each text will involve its analysis with the classification tool and the subsequent inclusion of annotations on each text, following the taxonomy in Fig. 2. In other words, the *tags* used as annotations on each text will be labelled according to the categories established in the taxonomy above. Subsequently, these tags will be grouped in *families* and *subfamilies*, and this grouping will be the starting point for search activities that will lead to the design of didactic materials. To mention just one example, the identification of a cognitive feature like *parallelism* across texts can be used to design activities for students to compare different texts which contain the same feature, and analyze whether these texts belong to the same genre, deal with the same themes and subthemes,

fulfill the same main and secondary purposes, share other microlinguistic (formal) features, such as the use of specialized terminology or subordination, among many other possibilities. It is also relevant to mention that several IT tools are being studied and tried out to decide which will satisfy the needs of the research team more successfully. This presents another challenge to the research team members, as technology is beyond our field of expertise and demands long hours of research and trial and the support of staff who, so far, have not been incorporated to the team. Nevertheless, two applications have been shortlisted and it is expected that either of them will be deemed useful for the purpose of the research under way. Further challenges are expected to be identified once the taxonomy is applied by means of the selected IT tool. As stated before, neither the taxonomy nor the classification tool are believed to comprehensively cater for the needs of classifying a text. It is foreseen that, as these tools are effectively employed, new potential parameters will appear. These new parameters will, therefore, have to be included by means of upgrading or modifying the tools.

Conclusions

As stated in previous sections, this work presents the progress of a research project, which is to be completed in 2021, and therefore only preliminary conclusions can be reached. However, it is foreseeable that there will be some difficulties when dealing with the data collection. Databases can be very useful for students and for teachers as well, as a means of consulting text models or creating activities related to search and assessment. However, the fact that there are many aspects to consider when analyzing a text, and the possible limitations the tool may have, prove the complexity of the task. For example, when analyzing texts under certain criteria, new unpredicted aspects might appear and it might be difficult to classify them or to identify their specific linguistic patterns. Finding the appropriate technology that will help in collecting and crossing data is another challenge for this project. As stated, some programs are being analyzed for this purpose.

As regards the continuity of this research project, in terms of the use of textual corpora in the classroom, it is expected that it will enhance students' autonomy and contribute to a better use of collaborative learning. This type of learning will develop *proactive, learner-centered learning strategies* (Kiraly, González Davies, and López & Tercedor, as cited in Arhire, 2015), which are essential in translator training. The following learner-focused activities, suggested by López and Tercedor (as cited by Arhire, *ibid.*: 167), may be considered when designing the tasks for the exploitation of the corpus: "(i) students' becoming familiar with

corpora and their annotation; (ii) content and text-type knowledge acquisition; (iii) identifying problems in translations; (iv) establishing translation strategies; (v) assessing the solutions emerging from class (peer- and self-assessment)”.

Overall, it is hoped that the expected final outcome of this project- the corpus-based didactic materials and transfer activities- may help future translators and their trainers in the development of their AL and enculturation. It is also the desired aim of this work to pave the way for further lines of research in AL and translation in order to strengthen the links between Genre Theory and translator training.

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