Situated learning in translation research training: academic research as a reflection of practice

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ABSTRACT
Situated learning has become a dominant goal in the translation classroom: translation didactics is being developed in a learner-, situation- and experience-based direction, following constructivist and participatory teaching philosophies. However, the explicit use of situated approaches has, so far, not been the centre of attention in translation theory teaching and research training. As a consequence, translation theory often remains unconnected to the skills learned and topics tackled in language-specific translation teaching and the challenges experienced in real-life translation practice. This article reports on the results of an exploratory action research project into the teaching of academic research skills in translation studies at Master’s level. The goal of the project is to develop and test possibilities for employing situated learning in translation research training. The situatedness perspective has a double relevance for the teaching project: the students are involved in an authentic, ongoing research project, and the object of the research project itself deals with authentic translation processes at the workplace. Thus, the project has the potential to improve the expertise of the students as both researchers and reflective practitioners.

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Introduction
University teaching is expected to be both research-based and research-oriented, with lecturers including the students in their continuous knowledge generation process and, thus, also preparing them for the changing challenges of the world outside education. Nowadays, both research and teaching practice alike are focusing their efforts on finding out how students can develop knowledge through collaboration. In the field of didactics, for example, the current focus lies on the emergence and establishment of collective fields of knowledge, their interaction with cognition at the individual level and the knowledge dynamics which result (see Risku and Peschl 2010).

One of the guiding principles in the explorative didactics endeavour described in this article has been to shift the focus onto the epistemic aspects of knowledge. Indeed, we have sought to depict knowledge as an epistemological process that is steadfastly embedded in a dynamic social context of action.

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Since our investigation is essentially a case study in didactic action (cf. Parsons and Brown 2002) or real world (cf. Robson 2011) research, its findings can only be generalised to a limited extent. The actual learning methods which should be applied in a given situation depend both on the learning styles of the individuals in question and on the type and focus of the actual organisation.

The study presented in this article was originally inspired by a discussion with students in a Master's level research seminar regarding the different cognitive approaches that are relevant to characterising the translation process. The students had been given an introduction to the situated cognition approach and the associated didactic approach of situated learning. As a thought experiment, they were asked to explain how the present research seminar would have to be organised to best meet the didactic consequences of these two approaches. The inspired discussion that ensued sparked a vision of an ambitious seminar concept, which would not only provide students with insights into the lecturer's current research activities but would also allow them to play an active role in this research. A corresponding course plan (see the Chapter 'Cooperative development of a test course' below) was implemented in the following semester, during which the students' learning experiences were also investigated. The objective of this investigation was to develop learning methods that would strengthen the academic footing of a translation studies degree (an aim also supported by Vandepitte 2013, 126) and to spark in the students a fascination both for research and for the discipline.

The project was carried out in the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Graz and concentrates on the experiences of those students who were enrolled in the seminar which served as the test case. This advanced seminar course is designed to teach students how to do research in a specific area of translation studies, and the ethnographic study of translation (as) work was the course topic for that specific semester. The students on this course already have initial experience in writing theory-based papers and doing empirical research.

This article draws both on prior research into the teaching of research skills in translation studies as well as on cognitive science literature on situated learning. It begins by discussing translation research training as an object of study and follows this by outlining a theoretical framework of situatedness for pedagogy in which the situated learning approach receives particular attention. It then goes on to describe a pedagogical project carried out. The attitudes, experiences and needs of the students in a test seminar were identified by conducting qualitative interviews with a total of six students. Based on the results, an attempt will be made to identify the relevant challenges faced in implementing principles of situated learning in translation research training.

Translation research training as an object of study

The main topics addressed by didactics research in the field of translation studies are the teaching of the art of translation and translation-relevant language teaching (see, for example, Kelly 2005; Kiraly, Hansen-Schirra, and Maksymski 2013). Other didactic research in the translation context focuses on the teaching of language-independent aspects like terminology work (Bowker and Marshman 2009) and translation ethics (Baker and Maier 2011). However, little attention has so far been paid to the topic of
translation research training. Yet according to Vandepitte (2013, 126), two developments, namely the ‘modernization of the training for a profession which has become more complex than ever’ and ‘the so-called academization of the education of future translators and interpreters’, have brought some key changes to translation didactics since the Bologna Declaration. The second of these developments clearly extends to the role of translation research training, which has now become an established element in translation and interpreting curricula. Nonetheless, research training still only tends to feature in translation didactics research at a doctoral level. Indeed, a 2009 special issue of The Interpreter and Translator Trainer on ‘Training for Doctoral Research’ presents various elements and examples of such research training in doctoral programmes.

Pym (2013) offers further reflections on training for doctoral research in translation studies. He asks if there are some particular research skills that are specific to translation studies or whether general scientific and methodological principles essentially suffice in this field. He reaches the conclusion that there are indeed some specific skills which apply and identifies several issues which require particular attention in translation research, for example its position towards ‘the bugbear of quality’, ‘relativity’, ‘hiding the position of the researcher’ and ‘externality’, which Pym understands as ‘the opposite of subjective involvement’ (2013, 8). This is also the underlying assumption adopted in this article: it is not enough to send students to cross-disciplinary courses on general scientific research methodologies, they also have to be introduced to the specific research questions, research models, prototypical research designs within these research models (as discussed in Marco 2009), and methodological issues in their own particular discipline.

Vandepitte (2013, 142) draws attention to a peculiarity in translation studies research training: ‘There is a considerable amount of overlap between translation competences and research competences in general: translation and interpreting classes can be expected to train many a research competence indirectly.’ If it is true that ‘all research stages require competences some of which translation students have already practised in their translation work to a certain degree’ (142), then it would be sensible to draw explicitly on such existing competences in research training. Indeed, in my own scientific methodology classes, I have discussed the similarities and differences in quality criteria for journalistic and scientific research, a point which I have observed to be clearly valuable for many students.

Vandepitte also answers the reverse question (‘Do research activities prepare students for translation?’) in the affirmative, but with a different focus to that of the present article. When she writes that ‘students describing and analysing source and target texts will reinforce the competences for their own translation activity’ (Vandepitte 2013, 142), she seems here to be referring to product-oriented translation research with an emphasis on different forms of text analysis. The focus of the present study, in contrast, lies on the ethnographic study of translation processes at the workplace. Nonetheless, the conclusions remain essentially the same, and we share the basic assumption that research activities can allow students to gain an insight into concrete translation processes.

The research project described in this article corresponds in this respect to Koskinen’s (2012, 1) starting point and goal, namely ‘to introduce fieldwork methods and to bring the students’ lived experiences into the classroom’. Koskinen uses
Burawoy’s public sociology approach as the starting point for an approach which she refers to as ‘public translation studies’: ‘Public translation studies is similarly engaged with extra-academic audiences, but rather than serving commercial businesses or political leaders, this subfield aims at direct contact with those involved in translating and interpreting at the grassroots level’ (Koskinen 2012, 6). The ethnographic approach covered in the seminar described in this article is particularly suitable for this purpose, since it also ‘entails an embodied immersion in the activities’ (Koskinen 2012, 6). However, in contrast to public translation studies, it is targeted primarily at an academic audience and does not ultimately seek to initiate a debate with the general public. Nonetheless the insight into a real work situation could also ‘enhance the students’ awareness of the dialogic possibilities of research to engage with different publics’ (Koskinen 2012, 1). Analysing and discussing real work situations and contexts should raise awareness of, and encourage critical reflection on, existing work settings (see also Koskinen 2012, 7; Abdallah 2011) and train a new generation of reflective practitioners and critical academics.

**Students as researchers and reflective practitioners**

The above discussion relates primarily to university teaching as seen from a lecturer and university perspective. So how do we stand when it comes to student interest and motivation to learn about translation studies theories and methods and to do research of their own? Vandepitte (2013, 126) and Koskinen (2012, 2) tend to be pessimistic in this regard, assuming that students will frequently show no great interest in scientific (theory and method) subjects and prefer instead to focus on acquiring actual translation skills – an assessment that is undoubtedly realistic. However, towards the end of a Master’s degree course, practical and theoretical motivations can balance each other out: while students might well be thinking in practical terms about their future careers, they still face the immediate academic hurdle of having to write a Master’s thesis. Accordingly, one objective of the seminar described in this article was to use a didactic concept that would positively influence student attitudes to scientific research by combining practical and scientific reflection, thus activating both as motivational factors.

**Situated learning as a didactic concept: learning as cooperative knowledge creation**

The last few decades have been a turbulent period in the fields of learning and teaching. According to Paavola, Lipponen, and Hakkarainen (2004), the traditional approach to didactics – based on a view of learning as ‘knowledge acquisition (the acquisition metaphor)’ – is now being complemented by a view of learning as ‘participation in a social community (the participation metaphor)’ and as ‘knowledge creation (the knowledge-creation metaphor)’. Two initial principles of situated learning as a didactic concept can already be identified here: **collaboration** and **construction**. In the following, we will identify the further principles (as also discussed with the students in the first seminar; see Introduction) and describe how these were implemented into teaching practice in the subsequent seminar.
In translation studies, some didactic concepts which rely on collaboration and construction have already been developed e.g. by Kiraly (see e.g. 2012) and Stewart, Orbán, and Kornelius (2010). The didactic revolution, however, had already begun at the start of the 1990s: Kiraly (2012) refers to Vienne (1994) and Mackenzie and Nieminen (1997) as examples of first project-based approaches to translator education and shows that the seemingly new emphasis on teamwork, authentic translation commissions and autonomy as a main objective of learning was already described by Ammann and Vermeer (1990) in their ‘draft of a curriculum’. His own search for alternatives to what he calls the ‘chalk-and-talk approach in translator education’ (Kiraly 2012, 123) and what Nord (1997) refers to as the ‘who will take the next sentence?’ method led him to develop a ‘social constructivist approach to translator education’ (2000).

It is to be suspected that the reason for the need for didactic reorientation lies in a fundamentally new understanding and conception of knowledge. According to the core hypotheses of the new approaches in the fields of cognitive science and epistemology, knowledge as integrated patterns of expectation and information in behaviour and activities is created in the actors. This leads us to a third principle of situated learning, namely self-organisation. From an epistemology and cognitive science perspective, it seems plausible that knowledge is always based on existing knowledge, and that it is our own experience which we integrate in our knowledge structures – not the structures of the reality as such (see e.g. Maturana and Varela 1980; von Foerster 1972). Thus, knowledge cannot be something fundamentally new, nor can it depict reality.

The cognitive processes linked to the acquisition of knowledge do not occur solely in the brain but are instead shared with the individual’s interaction with others and the environment (Clark 1997; Suchman 2007; in the context of translation studies, see also e.g. Risku 2010; Muñoz Martín 2010; Kiraly 2012). Application in a social action context can thus be coined as a further (fourth) principle of situated learning: we do not just learn because we absorb ‘facts’ as ‘information’, but because we navigate with others in a given environment and so learn to act in specific situations. The object of education should therefore not be restricted merely to the imparting of information, but must instead extend to the use of this information in interaction with the organisational environment.

Papert (1980) based his didactic approach of constructionism on Piaget’s constructivist developmental theory and underlined the meaning of the creation of real objects for learning. Later didactic approaches, such as cognitive apprenticeship (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989) or legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991), and their subsequent use and development, e.g. by Goodwin (1997), who speaks of ‘embodied apprenticeship’, place even stronger emphasis on the social aspect of learning: they suggest that cooperative forms of learning are a primary source of new knowledge.

In the approaches mentioned above, learning is dependent on authentic situations in which learners can assume a legitimate role and are thus integrated socially into the situation and the cooperation. Creating, simulating and reflecting on such roles and activities is the goal of the research project presented in this article.
Universities as spaces of dialogue and participation

With reference to sociological studies of scientific knowledge, Goodwin (1997, 187) points out that ‘like other domains of activity, scientific knowledge is constituted through the deployment of a range of socially organized practices’. Universities and other social organisations are being increasingly viewed as learning units, whose shared knowledge and potential require a deeper level of understanding (Risku and Peschl 2010). New knowledge is generated not only in individual employees and students, but above all through group interaction. A special part is played here by the products of our own cognitive activities or those of others (artefacts; see Clark 1997), such as texts, instruments and other aids. These have the potential to accelerate and extend the learning process – from simple checklists through to complex theoretical structures and technological applications. The fifth principle of situated learning identified can thus be seen as the use of shared artefacts. The notion of the ‘extended mind’ postulated by Clark and Chalmers (1998) serves here as a guiding principle, if not the actual basis and foundation.

Learners gain competence especially when they take part in a dialogue and can assume a meaningful role in an authentic situation. This applies just as much to the university education sector as it does to corporate contexts, and is an aspect of learning that is far from being fully exhausted in our universities. Indeed, the research project described in this article is an attempt to take precisely this cooperation and collective knowledge creation dimension into account in a university setting.

Practice alone does not make perfect: critical and informed action knowledge can only be formed through the subsequent feedback obtained. Accordingly, appropriate feedback can be identified as a sixth principle of situated learning. In this respect, the situated learning approaches of cognitive, embodied apprenticeship and legitimate peripheral participation (see above) share a characteristic of the deliberate practice approach to acquiring expertise (Ericsson 2000), an influential psychological model that is also now being applied to describe expertise in interpreting and translation (see e.g. Shreve 2006). The deliberate practice model emphasises feedback as one of the characteristics of domain-related training activities which lead to expertise as consistent and reproducible superior performance on a task (Ericsson 2000).

Theoretical reflection, which allows us to determine the limits of validity of knowledge gained or the possible uses for newly acquired competences, is a primary source of such feedback. It seems apt in this regard to increase the metacognitive activities (reflections on our own cognitive processes) that are also emphasised as characteristics of translation expertise, e.g. by Shreve (2006, 33) and Muñoz Martín (2014, 25). Consequently, the seventh (and last) principle identified is reflection. In the research project described in this article, it is assumed that theoretical reflection on translation practice is a motivating factor for students: if their original – and greater – motivation lies in learning the profession and in translation practice, then the knowledge of this practice and profession that they gain through research could, in turn, also make research seem meaningful and motivating.
Case study and methodology

The research project described in this article was carried out in the context of a seminar given as part of the MA in Translation at the University of Graz in Austria during the 2013/14 winter semester. The institute offers several similar Master’s seminars each semester covering, as stated in the curriculum, ‘selected translation studies topics with particular focus on methodologies’. The title of the seminar studied in this research project was: ‘Ethnography in Translation Research: Interaction Processes in the Field’.

The format of the first three classes was designed to introduce the students both to scientific research in general and to the actual topic of the seminar. In the subsequent classes, a group of students gave a literature-based presentation on a relevant sub-topic. Each class was rounded off by a Q&A session with the presenters and a discussion on possible topics, methods and formal aspects of the required seminar papers.

The seminar paper, which took the form of a short empirical research paper, gave the students an opportunity to acquire specialised knowledge, test their ability to formulate goals, define a research question, select methods, systematically carry out research and report on their findings (see Vandepitte 2013, 128f, 143 for similar competence-oriented goals).

Cooperative development of a test course

As already mentioned in the introduction, the rough outline for this seminar was developed in conjunction with the students who took this course in the previous semester. The result was a didactic concept based on the seven principles of situated learning described above: collaboration, construction, self-organisation, application in a social action context, use of shared artefacts, feedback, and reflection.

(1) **Collaboration**: the students in the research seminar assume a legitimate – albeit peripheral (see Lave and Wenger 1991) – role as junior researchers in a real research project (‘Extended translation: socio-cognitive translation processes in the workplace’) and work on one of the actual case studies in the project. They produce seminar papers on different topics and with different theoretical bases in the fields of sociological, network and translation process research, all of which are based on the same empirical material from the same workplace study.

(2) The subject matter of the seminar in the semester studied brought with it an additional emphasis on this particular dimension, namely the collaborative team research that is typical of process research. Marco (2009, 23) notes that collaboration in research teams is typical for the cognitive research model: ‘Experimental research, rather than being individual, is an essentially collective enterprise’. Although our case focused not on experimental but on ethnographic translation process research, this also applied: prior to the involvement of the students, a total of three researchers and two student research assistants had been working on the project.

(3) **Construction**: knowledge is actively constructed by the students and not prescribed by the lecturer. In this particular case, the lecturer accepts that the students will not finish the seminar with a unified knowledge base: they will all
gain different levels of knowledge about different aspects of the subject matter. Ultimately, it is to be expected that the shared knowledge base will be restricted to the overall context of ethnographic translation research and to experience with defining and realising a scientific study.

(4) **Self-organisation**: we only start to acquire knowledge and competence when we link them to our own worlds, i.e. to our existing actions and contexts. Accordingly, the students in this course each selected their own seminar paper topics. They were only given an introduction to this topic by the lecturer along with an overview of the ongoing research project. She also provided them with her own initial analysis of the case study to serve as an example of how to formulate a research question and go about designing a research project.

(5) **Application in a social action context**: the students act and navigate independently in their capacity as learners, but they do so in the context of the project as a whole and thus gain experience of scientific research as a social activity. This social activity takes place in the team (with the project leader – the lecturer for the seminar – as mentor) and with their peers, who meet regularly, swap experiences, work on their own sub-projects, generate new findings and thus contribute to the research project.

(6) **Use of common artefacts**: it is important to make use of the existing products of cognitive activities. In our case, the students worked with materials from the ongoing research project, which uses qualitative interviews and participatory observation as its primary data collection methods. The materials included:
- a brief description of the research project,
- an article on the corresponding case study for the research project (Risku 2014),
- the 28-page transcript of a semi-structured, qualitative interview (1 hour 20 minutes) with the client in a specific translation project,
- the 22-page transcript of a semi-structured, qualitative interview (1 hour 8 minutes) with the translator in this translation project,
- the interview guidelines for the above-mentioned interviews,
- the transcripts and notes for two observation sessions (each around 2.5 hours in length; transcripts of nine and 13 pages) in which the same translator was observed at work in her office,
- the transcripts of other conversations with the translator relating to the observation process,
- a photo of the translator’s workplace showing the tools she has available.

(7) **Feedback**: the students received feedback on the subject-related aspects of their work and on their presentation skills both from the lecturer and through the questions and comments from their classmates during the seminar. Each student also received written feedback on his/her seminar paper concept and on the actual paper as well as oral feedback in meetings with the lecturer.

(8) **Reflection**: to ensure the contents of the seminar and presentations are bound into a larger context of meaning, they are reflected on in the group. For example, the origins of different concepts deriving from different disciplines and theoretical frameworks as well as their consequences for the portrayal of translation practice were discussed. The subject selected for the seminar – ethnographic
research in translation studies – also brought with it the typical reflection on the role of the researcher in the research process. The role and influence of the observing and describing researcher is a central topic in ethnographic research: ethnographies are always partly dependent on the researcher’s own position. In this sense, the expectations and research interests of the researcher are always explicitly addressed in ethnographic research. Pym (2013) views this form of critical self-reflection as an important skill in any kind of research (for a similar view, see also Tymoczko 2007, 11).

Data collection and analysis

The findings of this study are based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews with students. The aim of these interviews was to gain feedback and learn about the students’ experiences in taking part in such a seminar. In addition, the more specific research questions behind the interview study relate to the integration of the students into the ongoing research project and to the practical relevance of the seminar: (1) Did the students feel they were taking part in the research project, and if so, in what way? (2) Did they feel that the seminar and the translation studies issues it dealt with were relevant (also) for their understanding of translation practice and, if so, in which respect? In order to gain feedback and answer the specific research questions, an interview guideline was prepared.

The rationale behind the interview guideline was to begin with general questions that help the students recall their seminar experience and give them the opportunity to define the relevant topics before moving on to more specific questions regarding their relationship to the research project and the practical relevance of the seminar.

The interviewee acquisition process was organised as follows: The students were all asked in class if they would like to volunteer to be interviewed about the seminar. They were told that these interviews would form part of a research project, and that the results would be used in a subsequent publication. In order to preserve the authenticity of the answers, the actual object of the research behind the interviews was, however, not made known to them. The students were also unaware that this seminar was being used to test a new didactic approach.

The interviews were conducted and anonymised by two research assistants to ensure that the identity of the participating students remained anonymous to the lecturer. Six (five female, one male) of the 20 (13 female, seven male) students who participated in the seminar volunteered to be interviewed. Given the small number of interviewees, the results cannot be considered representative for the whole group. Instead, they have to be seen as exemplary. Since the data sources were not randomised or balanced, the possibility of a bias also has to be considered. Despite the fact that the number of students reporting on a specific experience has no statistical value in the present qualitative study, we have still chosen to refer to the concrete number of students in the presentation of the results in order to allow us to document these in a precise manner. The interviews lasted between 8 minutes 50 seconds and 15 minutes, 30 seconds, and were held in German.
The interview transcripts were analysed using the qualitative content analysis method proposed by Gläser and Laudel (2010). This method allows the relevant information to be identified both through pre-formulated research questions and through the formulation of new areas of interest that had not been anticipated during the planning of the study or the preparation of the interview guidelines.

Results

In line with the two specific research questions mentioned above, the results of the interviews have been divided into two parts: those relating to the integration of the students into the ongoing research project and those relating to the practical relevance of the seminar.

1. Integration of the seminar and the students into an ongoing research project

The collaborative approach, and in particular the research project brought into the seminar, was considered by all the students to have been a positive experience. S1 talked, for example, about the good combination of ‘wading through’ everything on your own but then ‘discussing it as a group and thus really coming to understand it’. Likewise, the students felt that working together on the same case study using the same transcripts gave them deeper and more comprehensive insight into the topic and the material: ‘It was very good […] and we didn’t have to do everything on our own. It was really comprehensive and there was a lot of detail in it’ (S6). Ethnographic case studies were described as ‘something totally new’ (S6): ‘I would never have thought we would be capable of making so much out of such a small thing’ (S6).

Only three of the students felt that they had been involved in the actual research project to some extent. Those who felt they had been integrated into the project said that this was because the material was up-to-date and/or because of their own potential contribution to it. S2 felt he was part of the project because ‘it gave us real insights into the way the translator in the case study works, and it was up-to-date because it was a relatively new study’.

Five of the six students felt they had profited from working with methods that were new (to them), especially the analysis of the interviews and observation transcripts. They assumed they would be able to apply these new competences when writing their Master’s theses. They also repeatedly mentioned their interest in the topics that had been handled (cognitive aspects, ethnography), since these were new in a translation studies context: ‘The topic interested me because ethnography in particular is not something you’ve heard a thousand times over in a translation studies context – it’s something new’ (S4).

On the whole, however, the answer to the question of whether the students had felt like members of a research team has to be ‘not really’. Three of them felt they were not involved because their own contributions lacked scientific relevance: the analysis they had done for their seminar papers had not produced any ground-breaking insights that were of real significance to the research project. Two (of the three students who had not felt that they were integrated) also said that they had had the feeling that the project had
already been completed and that their contribution would therefore no longer be relevant:

I had the feeling we were just repeating something that had actually already been done. And if one of us were to have discovered something interesting by chance, then it might be used, but I basically saw it as a dry run or as something that was already done. (S1)

The analysis showed that the students placed an extraordinary amount of significance on the quality of the communication and interpersonal contacts both within the group and with the lecturer. Indeed, this point was mentioned in all the interviews. They appreciated the congenial atmosphere and trustful setting: ‘I had the feeling that you could say whatever you thought’ (S5). They ‘talked to one another’ and ‘explained things to each other’ (S4). Without any prompting, two of the students commented that they had found it important that the lecturer did not restrict her feedback simply to the seminar content.

The interactive presentations by the students were a key aspect of the joint learning process. Nonetheless, the students’ opinions of the preparation work and individual presentations differed greatly. Three of them felt that it had been ‘good that there were different presentations’ (S3) and considered preparing their own presentation to have been a good experience: ‘I liked preparing my own presentation’ (S3). The other three, in contrast, described the presentations as inadequate or ‘boring’ (S2) and the students as ‘out of their depth’ (S1) or ‘confused’ (S4) by the complexity of the topic, which made the presentations all the more difficult to understand. However, the subsequent summary and contextualisation of the presentation by the lecturer was seen as helpful.

The results also indicate that the self-assessment of one’s own language skills has an effect on whether students consider themselves to be members of a research team. Both the German native speakers and the non-German native speakers viewed mastery of the German language as a particular challenge for those students with a different mother tongue. S4 stated that this was another reason why the (non-native speaker) students were ‘confused’ (S4) in their presentations. S6, a non-German native speaker, said that her ‘scientific language […] was more simplistic than scientific language actually should be’ and that for this reason alone she could not be classed as a member of the team. She reported that it also made a big difference for her that the lecturer was not a native speaker of German and therefore had more understanding for non-native speakers. In addition, the results indicate that organisational factors (e.g. the timing of the deadlines) can have an influence on whether students experience themselves as legitimate contributors to a research project. Five of the students criticised the early submission date for the seminar paper concept. Since not many classes had actually been held by this stage, this early submission date meant that they had difficulties in identifying potential topics for their papers and in the subsequent drafting of a concept:

You somehow found yourself standing there with nothing. (S4)

The concept should essentially have been in place by the middle of November, but you got so much input and so many theory models over the course of the seminar, and you found yourself thinking that would actually also have been interesting. (S5)

In short, while the students valued the collaborative aspects of the seminar and the actual topic, they also had some suggestions for improvement: more input in the early
phase of the seminar (also from the lecturer) to give them more ideas for possible seminar paper topics, a later submission deadline for the concept and more inclusion of the real research material in the individual seminar units.

2. Practical relevance of the seminar

All the interviewees commented positively on the use of real research material from translation practice. This provided them with insights into the way a translator works and allowed them to establish a link between theory and practice, which they felt was generally lacking in science. S5 described the seminar in this sense as ‘truer to life’ and ‘taken from real life’. None of the students made any mention of being strongly motivated by scientific interests; on the contrary, they were more interested in the practical side of translation: ‘Well, what I really found very interesting about the seminar was that these are being linked – practice is being researched. What I am perhaps less interested in is translation theory itself, i.e. the purely theoretical structure’ (S1). This was reiterated by S5: ‘while I actually – as I said – normally don’t work or like to work so scientifically, I did enjoy it in this case’. She also mentioned that she would like to write her Master’s thesis as part of this project. S2 usually views the scientific aspects of the degree as a real ‘burden’: ‘I really have to force myself to actually sit down and write a seminar paper.’ But the reflection on practice made this seminar different: ‘I liked doing this seminar paper. I found it quite refreshing to bring the practical side into it’ (S2). He also mentioned the potential relevance of this knowledge for his own Master’s thesis.

The way ethnographic research is done and the use of authentic materials from actual practice was clearly a motivating factor for all the students. The following statements by S1 and S4 reflect the general mood and attitude well: ‘That you really gained some insights into actual practice, into how things work between a translator and her client’ (S1). ‘Because you almost have the feeling that you are getting to know the two people’ (S1). ‘I found some of the things the client and the translator said interesting because they were a little, well they were a bit like the things you experience yourself when translating’ (S1).

In short, it can be said that – as assumed – the Master’s thesis and the additional practical relevance of the seminar are clear and explicit motivating factors for participation in a translation research training seminar.

Discussion

Returning to the aims of the didactic design, we can say that the students did not consider themselves to be members of a research team to the extent that had been intended. While the work on a common research project and its material was experienced as positive and motivating, some of the students felt that the real research had already been done elsewhere. It can therefore be concluded that it is essential to communicate to students in such seminars that research data is always supposed to be documented in a way that allows it to be used both for many different research questions and for checking the reproducibility of the results. The results of this study also suggest that it is important to address the fact that non-native language proficiency
level does not automatically rule researchers out as legitimate and productive members of a research team. Likewise, care must be taken to ensure that the students have a sufficient level of domain knowledge before deciding on the topic for their own seminar theses.

With regard to the students’ assessment of the practical relevance of the seminar, we can conclude that they not only experienced the seminar as relevant for their understanding of translation practice, but that the authentic workplace data also inspired them to reflect on their future work on their Master’s theses and as translators.

In the following, these findings are considered in the context of the seven principles of situated learning mentioned above. However, a word of caution is needed here: due to the small number of interviewees, no rigorous conclusions can be drawn, and the individual reflections of the students can only be seen as indications of potential consequences.

(1) **Collaboration:** the visionary image of having the whole seminar group as part of the research team remained just that – a vision – albeit a guiding and thus didactically meaningful one. The handling of individual research questions with different theoretical bases using the same material and as part of the same research project allowed a comprehensive, in-depth discussion to take place which addressed different aspects of the case study in the research project. The interviews convey the strong sense of a collaborative knowledge-generation process.

(2) **Construction:** a translation research training seminar can be viewed as a process in which individual, yet interconnected, constructions are formed. The lecturer’s understanding develops hand-in-hand with that of the students. As Koskinen (2012, 10, with reference to Tymoczko 2007, 1–3) notes: ‘Rather than posing as the omniscient deliverer of known truths, the lecturer can also indicate the gaps in her own knowledge, and reflect on her own perspective on the topic, embracing weaknesses as well as strengths’. Given its practical relevance, this introduction to group learning is motivating for students, although it is also a great challenge.

(3) **Self-organisation:** workplace studies are ideally suited for linking research to the contexts of meaning occupied by (predominantly practice-oriented) students. Reflecting on practice can open up and encourage an interest in translation-studies research among students. However, it does take some time until students feel secure and comfortable enough to select their own topic and design their own project – more than they were granted in the course described in this article. They essentially had to propose a topic based on insufficient information and with a lack of knowledge of all the possibilities – and hope that it would be both meaningful and feasible. This stressful condition is far from ideal: as emphasised in the deliberate-practice approach to acquiring expertise (Ericsson 2000), a positive emotional quality in the learning situation and an appropriate level of difficulty in the tasks are beneficial for improving performance. Thus, we have to concede that less stress and uncertainty would in this case have been conducive to learning.
(4) **Application in a social action context:** planning and carrying out research projects is always very challenging. In our case, the students were uncertain about several different aspects of translation research, including their understanding of the content, the selection of their topics for their own seminar papers, giving a presentation or writing the seminar paper. On a positive note, five of the students who saw science and research as a burdensome or difficult task came to view working on their own project as a positive endeavour – once their topic had been approved, and they were able to begin with the analysis of the data.

(5) **Use of common artefacts:** working together on current research data in a seminar setting can generate a basis for discussion even in a large group, and even if the students have only limited prior knowledge of the specific field of research. One aspect that was short-changed in this seminar, and that was criticised by the students, was the incorporation of authentic research material into the individual seminar units. The material was always explicitly used as an example, but all the students also had to work through the entire material on their own. Longer workshops in which the material could be analysed by the group as a whole might have been useful here for providing the students with a chance to experience the 'art' of qualitative content analysis at first hand.

(6) **Feedback:** the students attached considerable importance to the quality of communication in the classroom and showed sensitivity to the feedback relating to such personal aspects. This could be seen as an indication of the view held by the situated-learning approach that learning is a social experience: the mutual appreciation, the open atmosphere and the explicit recognition of the students’ potential proved essential in motivating learning (see also Koskinen 2012, 17) and facilitating the interaction needed to learn.

(7) **Reflection:** the seminar seems to have initiated reflective, metacognitive processes on three dimensions: (1) awareness of understanding the seminar contents (i.e. realising in the discussion after the student presentations that one now understands the contents in their broader context); (2) awareness of the usefulness of the knowledge acquired for one’s own Master’s thesis and future career as a translator; and (3) awareness of one’s role and capacities as a student. Thus, individual reflective processes relating to both scholarly content and personal self-development were identified.

To conclude, the practical implementation of a situated-learning approach to translation-research training remains a challenging didactic task. While the action-research project described in this article had only limited success in making the students ‘full participants’ in the 'sociocultural practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991, 29) of translation research, it can nonetheless be seen as one step in a development process. Indeed, rigorous planning is required to discuss new scholarly knowledge and, at the same time, strengthen student competence and confidence in carrying out empirical research within the tight schedule of a single semester.

The high level of signifcance and unprompted consideration placed by the students on the lecturer’s attitude towards them both as individuals and as a group is quite remarkable. According to Brown, Collins, and Duguid, learning includes ‘complex social negotiations’ (1989, 33) and students ‘can quickly get an implicit sense of what
is suitable diction, what makes a relevant question, what is legitimate or illegitimate behaviour in a particular activity’ (34). In a way similar to a craft apprenticeship (37), the lecturer is the practitioner of the domain the students need to enter. This lecturer defines and communicates to the individual students how near or far they are from full membership in a community of practice. Even if we as teachers might not always be aware of the fact, our statements, reactions and feedback are always also taken on the personal level – and this can create either distance or proximity, which in turn results in distance or proximity to the topic of learning.

Note

1. The interviews were held after the seminar grades had been published and the seminar had been completed to exclude the possibility of exam conflicts.

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