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Knowledge Re-production and Transfer: Translating Practice into Theory

Ahmed Alaoui, *Arab Soecity of English Language Studies*

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Ahmed Alaoui
Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Hamad bin Khalifa University, Qatar

Abstract:
This paper argues that cross-fertilization among translation academic researchers, practitioners and trainers is needed for all the actors involved in the translation enterprise. It calls for a practice-based research model to materialize the mechanisms needed for the interaction and collaboration of the three stakeholders, which would have positive impacts on the translation landscape. Given that this cross-fertilization can only be beneficial if it is structured and sustained, then it has to be formalized and institutionalized. A plan will be proposed as to how this can be materialized. It is a thesis of this paper that professional practice needs academic research (theories) to shape it, and theory can only have functional dimensions through professional practice; therefore, there is a pressing need to bridge the gap between "knowing" and "doing" in translation. To the extent that this position is valid the university is invited to play a leading role in materializing this objective, with a view to shaping the future of the translation profession and preserving translation education in Arab universities.

Keywords: academics, cross-fertilization, knowledge transfer, practice-based model, professionals, trainers

Introduction

The translation landscape in the Arab World is marked by the absence of an open, sustained and structured dialogue and collaboration among researchers, professionals and educators. There have been many calls for the "need for a cross-fertilization between research, training and practice, where the practice generates questions, the research takes them up and finds answers, the training applies the answers and generates more questions and the cycle continues" (Hale & Napier 2013, p. 20). The consequences of this deficiency are outlined from various perspectives in Mossop (2005), Chesterman and Wagner (2002), Alaoui (2015), En-Nehas (2017), El Karnichi (2017) Al-Qinai (2010) and Atari (2012), among others. Whether this shortfall is the cause or consequence, the size of the divide between theory and practice should be measured, explained and reversed for the benefit of the profession and the future of translator training at the university.

The objective of this article is to demonstrate that cross-fertilization among translation academic researchers, practitioners and trainers is both needed and beneficial for all the actors involved in the translation enterprise. It argues that a practice-based research model is required to materialize the mechanisms needed for the interaction and collaboration of the three stakeholders, which would have positive impacts on the translation industry. Given that this cross-fertilization can only be beneficial if it is structured and sustained, then it has to be formalized and institutionalized. A plan will be proposed as to how this move can be materialized.
Working towards providing such a model would serve four major objectives:

(1) It would encourage a much needed synergy between translation scholars and practitioners (including trainers),
(2) It would induce practitioners to engage in academia and serve as co-producers of knowledge,
(3) It would encourage researchers to be involved more in the professional practice of translation with a view to developing new translation research lines, and
(4) It would provide translation trainers with the much needed insights as to what and how to teach translation for trainees to develop the competencies required to translate to a professional standard.

It stands to reason that professional practice needs academic research (theories) to guide it, and theory can only be meaningfully tested and developed through professional practice; therefore, there is a pressing need to bridge the gap between "knowing" and "doing" in the translation landscape. To the extent that this position is valid the university is invited to play a leading role in materializing this objective, with a view to shaping the future of the translation profession and preserving translation education in Arab universities.

This piece of research is also informed by the outcome of inquiry carried out by some scholars in Europe on some aspects of this issue, such as Katan (2009), who concludes that academics are not doing enough to promote the translation profession and preserve translator-training in universities. It also draws on an informal small-scale survey geared to capturing the perception of the parties involved in the translation business in the Arab World as to the theory-practice interface in translation.

The problem

    The informal survey conducted (see questionnaire in the Appendix) indicates that the lack of synergy between research, professional practice and training involves a significant shortfall in the translation landscape. The aspects of the relevant perception can be seen along the following lines:

a) Practitioners do not seem to be interested in translation academic research because they generally feel that there is no straightforward way to use it to improve the quality of their day-to-day work. They tend to believe that workplace experience is the best way to solve translation problems.

b) Academic researchers tend to feel that research should be valued in its own right, regardless of its relevance to any practical aspect. This is because, inter alia, translation theory is an enlightening discipline that seeks the description and explanation of the various aspects of translation as a product.

c) Trainers, who may happen to be practitioners and/or researchers, are interested in the work of both practitioners and researchers, but they are confused as to what to include and how to exploit it in their training material and methods.

d) Students of translation, who in time would serve as practitioners, researchers and trainers, would show the same negative attitudes above. They would be confused as to whether they should develop their skills to study translators or to help solve their problems.

e) This divide deprives the profession from gaining the social status and visibility it deserves.

f) This divide deprives academic research from addressing topics that would benefit all the actors involved in the translation enterprise.

g) This divide hinders the design of translation programs conducive to innovative and dynamic training and teaching methods to ensure the development of professional competencies needed in the workplace.

h) In the absence of an open, sustained and structured dialogue and collaboration among researchers, professionals and educators, the desired solutions that have a direct bearing on practitioners' day-to-day performance, training methods and the value of applied academic research would be hard to achieve.

    However, the informants of the survey showed interest in the desired cross-fertilization, provided that the current situation is reversed. Accordingly, this article exposes what is being done, what can be done and what should be done to materialize this synergy between academics and professionals.

What is being done?

The working assumption of this article is that research in descriptive and applied translation studies should be geared to solving problems for practitioners and trainers, since it is the field which is supposed to provide the theoretical input required for the development of the skills necessary to perform communication tasks professionally in diverse settings of the translation landscape. In fact, both theoreticians and practitioners are responsible for moving research from applied translation research journals and academic conferences into the hands of professional translators and trainers to put it to practical use, in the form of a clearly defined process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and application of knowledge to improve the translation work delivered in the translation arena (Alaoui 2015).

Assuming, from a practitioner's point of view, that theory should serve and guide practice and vice versa, in line with all models of knowledge management in virtually all disciplines of human inquiry, users (practitioners) rather than researchers are supposed to serve as major initiators of research questions in applied translation studies, since they are in charge of identifying and formulating the needs required by the profession (Alaoui, 2015; Becheikh et. al., 2010; En-Nehas, 2017). Practitioners' contributions are significant because their interests lie primarily not in what should but in what does in fact happen when they are translating, what their output looks like and what challenges they face. The academic researcher is generally solicited to respond to the users' needs (Love 1985). To the extent that this view is valid, the issues relating to who is supposed to translate what and how should be raised and, at least partly, formulated by the practitioners, who are in direct contact with clients and deal with their reactions on a daily basis. As things stand now, this is not feasible because there are no well-defined formal linkages between knowledge producers in the realm of translation studies and potential users. There is overwhelming evidence that knowledge utilization is a result of repeated interactions between researchers and users in virtually most human inquiry (Huberman 2002). Translation practitioners (translators, revisers, trainers...) are supposed to play the role of co-producers of knowledge alongside with researchers. However, what happens in the translation landscape, at least in the Arab World, looks like the following:

1. Researchers formulate questions on translation issues (many of which have been raised in contexts outside the Arab World);
2. Researchers conduct research on such issues;
3. Researchers disseminate research results.

What should be done?

The stages listed above indicate that knowledge in translation is simply supposedly shared with other researchers, who may not include practitioners, rather than systematically transferred to professional users. Consequently, many practitioners tend to (explicitly or implicitly) ignore the knowledge produced by scholars, while the latter tend to disregard the concerns of the former. For knowledge to be translated into action (practice), it should not only be shared but transferred to users in a clearly systematic fashion. Therefore, at least three more steps are needed for translation knowledge to be transferred and implemented by practitioners:

4. Practitioners apply findings in different settings of translation practice, with a view to generating new context-specific knowledge;
5. New knowledge raises fresh translation research questions;
6. The cycle continues, by researchers formulating questions based on the issues raised by translation practitioners.

There should be a point in the cycle where practitioners are enabled to raise the questions relating to their concerns, for them to develop interest in translation studies and engage in producing knowledge themselves. Hence, while the transfer of new knowledge into practice proceeds through three stages, from awareness through acceptance to adoption, translation research seems to focus almost exclusively on the first stage, namely dissemination (Alaoui 2015). Liyanage et al. (2009) claim that the process of knowledge transfer is not a mere transfer of knowledge per se; it rather requires an additional type of knowledge, namely 'the knowledge about how to transfer knowledge'. Translation practitioners are hardly interested in researchers telling them simply "this is what I think", but they would like to hear them say "this is what my knowledge means for you, and this is how it applies to your daily work". Further, the purpose of knowledge transfer may very well be lost if knowledge is transferred from the source (theoretician) to the receiver (practitioner) without contextualizing the way it will be utilized by the latter (Hale & Napier, 2013). In the absence of a clearly defined cycle of knowledge transfer in translation, the misconceptions about various aspects of translation would gain ground and would be hard to shake off. A schematic representation of the suggested model of knowledge transfer in applied translation is given below (Alaoui 2015), to ensure the linkages needed for the transfer and reproduction of knowledge:

Figure 1 Preliminary model for the theory-practice interface

The author of this paper believes that this is the key point of departure towards initiating a practice-based model of translation research, with a view to upgrading the status of the profession and protecting the future of translator education in universities.

This model proposes a process whereby needs are identified by translation practitioners and then communicated to researchers through established communication channels. This indicates that the identification of a problem or issue emerges from users rather than being imposed or assumed by academic researchers.

For this model to be established and applied in the translation enterprise, two crucial requirements should be satisfied. Firstly, researchers in translation studies should ensure that the knowledge to be transferred to practitioners is intellectually accessible to them (Becheikh et. al., 2010). This knowledge has to be applicable and easily adaptable to the practitioners' specific local context and day-to-day concerns. To achieve this objective, they should strive to adapt, contextualize and disseminate their research results, maintaining sustainable interactions with professional translators. In order to improve the knowledge transfer process, they should also use a language that is simple and common to practitioners when adapting research results. Their adaptation efforts should lead to information presented in a synthesized, attractive and comprehensible way. This can only come to fruition if interactions between practitioners and theoreticians are promoted, which requires new channels of communication. Secondly, practitioners should not continue sitting on the fence. They should adopt and encourage a culture of critical thinking, questioning and debating within the practice sphere (Alaoui 2015). More specifically, for practitioners (professional translators) to be partners in the production of knowledge, they should be endowed with such qualities. It is also important to use multiple mechanisms when communicating and transferring knowledge with researchers and practitioners, as outlined in the section below.

The model proposed here shows knowledge transfer as a cyclical process, where the components of the models are linked via a stepwise progression, and at the same time the process operates in an interactive and ongoing fashion. This is compatible with Graham et al's knowledge-to-action model (2006), where aspects of the research, context, knowledge transfer intervention and evaluation lead to the identification of new problems.

Communication channels
We have always assumed that in order to share ideas and research insights, academics and practitioners should have interactions in seminars, symposiums, and conferences to learn from each other by seeking clarifications on issues of interest to them. It seems that this is not enough, as better structured platforms of interaction and collaborations should be devised, used and periodically evaluated. Also, interaction platforms should be established not only to ensure dialog between academics and professionals, but to materialize such a dialog on the ground. There have been many calls for interaction between academics and professionals, but no specific proposals for such interaction has been put forward (see for example Harding & Carbonell, 2018; Chestermann & Wagner, 2002; Gouadec, 2007, and Durban & Seidel, 2010). Below is a set of practicable

proposals that can be converted to consistent and institutionalized practice in the Arab World. They outline the collaborative platforms possible to materialize the synergy of translation actors for the benefit of all. They are also meant to materialize the "co-orientation" targeted by the model proposed in this article. "Coorientation" here is used in the sense of Newcomb (1953, p. 393), referring to the function of "enabling two or more individuals to maintain simultaneous orientation towards one another and towards the objects of communication." The communication platforms suggested in this proposal have been adopted in various settings of communication management, and have proved their efficiency (see, for example, Buhmann et. al., 2018).

Collaborative platforms

Academic scholars are invited to provide collaborative settings to define research problems of interest to practitioners and validate the research insights for their usefulness to practitioners. These settings are motivated by two considerations. Firstly, there have been many calls for establishing dialog between translation academics and professionals, but little has been said about the shape such dialog should take. Secondly, the collaborative settings proposed below not only materialize the desirable dialog, but also makes this continuous interaction as *the* dialog itself. This would make the stakeholders in the translation business aware that they are part of a co-orientation system benefiting all the parties, including the profession and the university. It should be noted here that for the communication platforms to operate properly, they should be both academically sound and professionally relevant, in order to ensure continued engagement of researchers and professionals. Here are some suggestions to materialize the desired synergy that this article argues for:

a) Interaction platforms

This setting, which can take the form of a seminar, workshop or round-table, would offer possibilities for academics to develop relationships with practitioners that can enhance the accuracy or credibility of academic research and possibly improve the academic field's ability to teach material that is both academically rigorous and professionally relevant. Such platforms would secure a relationship between academics and practitioners that would foster cycles of knowing and doing. Academic scholars may also test and validate various conceptual frameworks developed in the realm of academia with the practitioners attending these platforms and reacting to the ideas exposed by academics.

b) Consulting assignments

This is another form of collaborative interaction where the professionals of the translation service provider assist the academic consultant identify problems and remedy the inadequate practices, if any. This opportunity would, on the one hand, ensure that translation work is delivered in line with the required standards, and on the other hand would enable academics and professionals to debate solutions encountered by service providers.

c) Joint scholarship

Researchers and practitioners join efforts to co-produce knowledge, especially in action research or problem-solving research, which would enhance theory and practice in the translation enterprise. Activities in this endeavor would ensure both academic rigor and practical relevance.

Hence, the practitioners who are not trained in research methods would learn in the process, which would encourage them to develop the required metalanguage to engage in translation action research themselves.

d) Research outcome vetting

Practitioners would be invited to check academic findings for their utility and applicability in their professional settings. The ultimate goal here is to ensure that research is informed by and integrated with practice. This is because professionals are assumed to have practice-based knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values against which their perception of the research outcomes are formulated. Again, this would lead to participatory research involving practitioners in a positive and active fashion.

e) Ideas-into-action guide

For translation theory to be meaningful to professionals, it should be formulated in such a way that it would be accessible to professional users, for them to be able to diagnose their situation by themselves. Academic scholars are invited to translate research findings and insights into usable, actionable and implementable content. Therefore, researchers should not only produce knowledge, but they should also specify how to implement such knowledge in clearly defined professional settings.

The communication content should avoid abstract ideas and academic jargon so as to make it accessible and relevant to translation professionals. Perhaps a different vocabulary should be used to communicate research findings for practitioners, at least in the early stages of involving them in this endeavor. "Theories", for example, should be named "frameworks"; "research" should be termed "project" and so on. For this to happen, academic scholars need to develop the appropriate mindsets and attitudes, as well as the relevant communication capacities.

f) Relevance-based journal

There is no translation journal that emphasizes both academic rigor and professional relevance in the Arab World. An online journal, devoted to the theory-practice interface, could serve as an additional platform for academics and professionals to interact, with a view to materializing the dialogue defended here. This is because a two-way dialogue between practitioners and academics would drive professionals to feel more connected and more motivated to ask questions, present new ideas, develop innovative translation tactics, and even engage in action-research.

The proposed interaction platforms would serve as the dialogue marking the translation landscape. We will no longer be talking about establishing dialogue between theory and practice, but rather these components would constitute dialogue itself. This model would serve as a platform to organize, create, capture, or disseminate academic and professional "know-how" and ensure its availability for future generations of researchers and practitioners. Once these platforms are set up

and start operating, new generations of professionals and academics, including graduate students, would know about this synergy and can be part of it during their internship and during their studies.

The way forward

These platforms would ensure the missing linkage for interaction and dialog. However, for the desired goals to be delivered and to ensure sustainability, this interaction needs to be structured and institutionalized, and the university in the Arab world is called to play a key role in this regard. The university needs to play this role because of the following considerations:

Firstly, it stands to reason that the fundamental mission of the university is to discover, improve, and disseminate knowledge. Academics engage in this endeavor in a climate of free and rigorous debate, where ideas are challenged and refined or discarded, with a view to contributing to the education of democratic citizens. Therefore, the dialog materializing the synergy between professionals and academics would naturally be staged at the university. Also, translation professionals do not possess the logistics needed for the desired dialog to be initiated and sustained in any systematic fashion. This amounts to saying that it is the university that should initiate this dialog, providing the logistic facilities available to it for this purpose.

Secondly, this dialogue, if initiated and sustained properly, would redress many assumptions that we seem to have without any due verification. By way of illustration, we assume that professionals are not interested in theory and academics are not interested in professional practice, but the parties have rarely asked each other to spell out the reasons behind such attitude or perception. Another assumption is that the university makes is that it prepares students for the translation market. How come that the very students that the university train claim that the related academic work is useless foe the actual professional practice?

Another role the university in the Arab world is called to play is to mediate between professionals and the government in order to protect both the interest of the profession and the interests of the public. Unlike western countries, the translation business in the Arab world is hardly regulated, which affects both the translation profession and the public. Universities, in their capacity as public institutions, could serve to support the government to protect the public from incompetent or unethical practitioners, through regulation, and to ensure the effective provision and access to professional services. Concurrently, regardless of the level of regulation (registration, certification or licensure), the university should support professionals to forward the interests of the profession and its members, through professional development activities and the development of quality standards.

Conclusion

The arguments put forth in this article seem to be persuasive enough for academics to engage in the work of professionals, and integrate the relevant issues in their research endeavors. This would motivate professionals to participate in knowledge production, along the lines spelt out above. The interactive model proposed would serve as a platform to organize, create, capture,

or disseminate academic and professional "know-how" and ensure its availability for future generations of researchers and practitioners.

The practice-based model defended here should be supported by the role that the university is invited to play. For the university to preserve its role in translation training, the theory-practice interface should be specified and adopted as a research model. This would naturally lead to addressing many problems generated by the fact that the profession is almost totally unregulated in the Arab world. For translation to take on the status of a profession, it needs formal qualifications based upon university education. Also, the university should serve as a reference institution supporting Arab governments to establish regulatory bodies with powers to regulate the translation profession through legislation and a binding code of practice. If the university does not play this role, more value would be attached to individual, life-long learning, training and specialization gained through on-the-job experience, which, down the road, would make the university almost irrelevant.

About the Author:
Dr. Ahmed Alaoui is an Associate Professor at the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies. His research work focuses on translation pedagogy (translator-training) and theory-practice interface. Dr. Alaoui is also a confirmed professional translator, certified by the United Nations (Roster). https://orcid.org/0000-0001 9703-8352

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Appendix

Survey

This informal survey asks for your perception and judgment about the collaboration and interaction between translation researchers and professional practitioners. There is no right or wrong answers. Please respond based on your own judgment, regardless of what others would expect or what is socially acceptable. Your responses will be anonymous.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our questionnaire. Your answers are very important to the success of this study.

    I.   Practitioners
    a. *Obtain information about the perception and attitude of practitioners towards academic research* (**what is being done**)
    1. Is translation theory useful in solving your daily problems? Why?
    2. Does theory help you structure your approach and increase the quality of your work? How?
    3. Is it possible to translate without any translation training? Why?
    b. *Obtain information to specify the potential areas where theory can help practitioners* (**what can be done**)
    1. Can theory help transform research results into practical use in your professional everyday work?
    2. Is professional knowledge useful in developing better translation theories? In what way?

3. In what way can theory possibly help you increase the quality of your work?

c. *Obtain information to specify how practitioners should interact with theory* (**what should be done**)

1. What issues do you have that you would like academic research to solve for you?
2. Will collaboration among academics, professionals and trainers help the visibility of the profession? How?
3. Should there be joint communication channels that facilitate collaboration between academics and professionals? Why?

4. Should academic research help practitioners in transforming declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge? In what way?
5. Should academics conduct research into professional translation practice (market, briefs, clients and audiences, etc.)? Why?
6. Does translation theory provide you with a perspective on translation issues, and understanding of how translators should deal with translation challenges?
7. Would you think of writing an article about this topic? Why or why not?
8. Would you like to see a changed culture of researchers and practitioners, in which both speak a common language and appreciate each other's contributions? Why?
9. Is the language of academic research accessible to you? If not, what would you like to see done? Mediators? Translation into Arabic? New communication channels? Clear briefs? Guidance? Actionable reports?
10. Is university training needed for professional practice in translation?
11. Is university training efficient for professional practice in translation?
12. If you leave this profession one day, what would be the reason?
13.

II.   Researchers

a. *Obtain information about the perception and attitude of academic researchers towards professional practice* (**What is being done**)

1. Is translation professional practice useful for you to do research? Why?
2. Does professional practice provide any insights for you to increase the value of your research? How?
3. Is it possible to do research in translation without any reference to professional practice? Why?
4. Are you interested in the work of translation professionals? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever conducted research into the concerns of professionals? Why or why not?

b. *Obtain information to specify the potential areas where theory can help practitioners* (**What can be done**)

1. Are you interested in linking questions raised by practicing translators to your research? Why?
2. Would you like practitioners to contribute to knowledge production? Why?
3. Would you be interested in observing professional translators in their workplace? Why or why not?

c. *Obtain information to specify how academics should interact with practitioners* (**What should be done**)

1. Would practice-based research bring appreciation to academic researchers and upgrade their academic career? Why or why not?
2. Should the university be concerned about the status of the translation profession? Why or why not?
3. Should the university set the standards of the translation profession? Why?

4. Should the university play the role of a certification body? Why or why not?

III. Trainers

a) *Obtain information about the perception and attitude of trainers towards professional practice* (**What is being done**)
1. Are knowledge and expertise shared between your training institution and the translation industry? How?
2. Are there any collaboration linkages between your training institution and the translation industry? Please give examples.
3. Are any regular discussions held between your training institution and the translation industry with regard to student projects?
4. Do translation businesses communicate shortcomings in interns' knowledge and capacities to your training institution?
5. Is there any follow-up to the research results produced by students based on empirical field work?
6. Are the subject areas taught the same as the ones translated by professionals?

b) *Obtain information to specify the potential areas where theory can help practitioners* (**What can be done**)
1. Can students' projects be applied to the translation industry? How?
2. Can students' knowledge be used to improve processes and performance in a translation business? How?
3. Do you have any pedagogical questions that you would like to see researched by academics? What are they?
4. Is there a link between successful knowledge transfer and continuous improvement in students' translation competence? How?
5. Are there any mechanisms in your institution to track students' transition from university to the labor market? Why?

c) *Obtain information to specify how trainers should interact with academics and practitioners* (**What should be done**)

1. Would you like to propose research questions to be answered by professionals and academics?
2. Should there be joint communication channels that facilitate collaboration between academics, professionals and trainers? Why?

3. Should academic research help trainers in transforming declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge? In what way?
4. Should academics conduct research into professional translation practice (market, briefs, clients and audiences, etc.)? Why? What would the benefit be for you as a trainer?
5. Does translation theory provide you with a perspective on translation training issues, and understanding of how trainers should deal with pedagogical challenges?
6. Would you think of writing an article about this topic? Why or why not?
7. Would you like to see a changed culture of researchers, practitioners and trainers, in which they speak a common language and appreciate each other's contributions? Why?
8. Is the language of academic research accessible to you? If not, what would you like to see done? Mediators? Translation into Arabic? New communication channels? Clear briefs? Guidance? Actionable reports?