

A Genre-oriented Translation-based Instruction to Professional Communication

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This paper seeks to validate the use of translation as a methodological procedure that facilitates learners' interpretation of professional writing practices. We mainly contend that translation activities can become an adequate linguistic input in the teaching of professional written genres as regards the analysis of the linguistic, rhetorical and social components of these genres. Relying on the students' comparison of source text and target text, the paper discusses (i) how translation-based assignments reinforce the acquisition of lexico-grammatical patterns at a textual level, (ii) how L1 to L2 transfer foregrounds the way texts are organised and the way thematic elements are semantically connected within a rhetorical structure, and (iii) how translation-based noticing helps teachers raise learners' awareness of interpersonal mechanisms, epistemic positions and, more broadly speaking, of the construction and negotiation of social relations in the professional arena. As reported in the paper, teacher/ students discussion in an ESP classroom illustrate the role of translation as a suitable pedagogical means to raise students' awareness of those textual, rhetorical and social aspects involved in professional genres.

1. Introduction

Echoing the Bakhtinian postulates on the social nature of language usage (Bakhtin, 1986), research within the general framework of genre theory has focused on both descriptive and prescriptive accounts as regards the way lexical and grammatical resources of the language relate to the social context in which they occur. These accounts have primarily concentrated on how to approach such text-context interrelatedness to the domains of educational linguistics in general and to the teaching/learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in particular.

In 1990, Swales deepens into the concept of “genres” to refer to the different types of texts that a specialised community of practice makes use of and which comprise the following elements: a distinctive set of communicative purposes, a particular intended audience, a specific context of situation as well as recurrent discourse conventions and communication rules. More recently, Swales (2004) has articulated a sociorhetorical perspective of genre to describe the rhetorical frameworks that sustain the multiple forms of specialised disciplinary practices. Such perspective opens up discussion on those pedagogical procedures that ESP teachers should bear in mind when initiating students into the ongoing process of constructing meanings and understandings through social interaction. In a similar trend, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) have suitably defined genres as “responses to recurring communicative situations” and stress the sociorhetorical component of the genre repertoire in terms of the practicality of genres. From

a different angle, functional systemic theorists (e.g. Halliday and Martin 1993, Martin and Veel 1998, Rose 1998) also view language as construed by a social context. As regards pedagogical implications, Martin advocates a genre approach for the analysis of professional communication by arguing that “from the perspective of a functional model of language, genre-based researchers further contextualised the social-semiotic model with a layer of ideology” (1993: 158).

The outstanding influence of genre theory within the framework of applied linguistics has inevitably given birth to a major research focus on the pedagogical potential of genre analysis. Among other authors, Paltridge (2000: 1) acknowledges “the increasing attention to the examination of genres people use in professional communication”. John Flowerdew (1993: 305) outlines the advantages of a genre approach regarding linguistic variation across professional genres and states that, by raising awareness of such variation, learners identify functional aspects of disciplinary discourses and become proficient users of the different genre types. Lynne Flowerdew (2000) also recommends the use of a genre-based framework to teach organisational structure in academic writing as –she claims– it helps raise awareness of the rhetorical conventions and generic features, thus setting the grounds for more realistic genre-based methodologies in ESP teaching.

The important issue which stems from this theoretical background is, then, how to raise students’ awareness of how producers of professional genres resort to certain linguistic conventions, how they share both conceptual and contextual background knowledge with their readers that facilitates the encoding/decoding of information, and how writers project their social identities in the text either explicitly and implicitly.

At least within the European Union framework, it is more than evident that English has consolidated its status of *lingua franca* and has progressively developed into a vital instrumental vehicle for communicating in professional contexts across European countries. In tertiary educations in Spain, ESP students are aware that they need to receive adequate instruction in those textual types that they are expected to know and produce and, eventually, in the social structures within which professional writing operates. This linguistic demand serves as the breeding ground for a genre-based instructional approach to professional communication in English.

On these premises, this paper assesses the role of translation as a methodological procedure for developing a social awareness of the language through genre-oriented instruction. Our main contention is that genre-based translation activities can become an adequate input in the teaching of professional written texts to enquire into those linguistic, rhetorical and social aspects that these genres involve. Eliciting discussion on the learners' linguistic choices in translation activities, classroom observation proves to validate a cross-linguistic comparison of both source and target texts as a means to develop awareness of textual and contextual —interpersonal— meanings in professional communication.

2. Translation as a methodological procedure in a genre-based instruction

Although translation is often relegated to a secondary position in most teaching and learning routines, it none the less represents a valuable activity for practising and developing both linguistic and sociorhetorical competences among ESP students. Duff (1989: 7) provides several reasons for using translation as a valid activity in the classroom. First, because it serves to establish connections between students' L1 and L2, which involves establishing contrasts and similarities between the two languages and their corresponding lexicogrammatical patterns. The second reason concerns the usefulness of translation itself. Duff contends that translation tasks provide training in accuracy, grammatical complexity and flexibility of language. When engaging in translation activities learners need to “search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity)” (Duff, 1989: 7). The third reason, and most important for a genre-based instruction in the ESP classroom, is that the teacher can select real materials —a typology of real genres— to illustrate particular aspects of language usage as it is practiced in real professional settings.

In the same trend, well-known translation theorists Hatim and Mason propose a model that, though meant for trained translators and interpreters, goes beyond the textual meanings and foregrounds the pragmatic and semiotic implications of texts:

[...] Rather, we wish to bring out the importance of contextually determined communication strategies and the way they relate to the structure and texture of

texts, be they oral, written, literary, technical or whatever [...] both the *relation of utterances to the interpretation of their users' intentions* (pragmatics) and the way in which signs (from individual items to whole texts) *interact with a socio-cultural environment* (semiotics)” (1997: 10-11; emphasis added).

From a cognitive standpoint, Bell suggests that translation is a means of “developing familiarity with and competence in the use of psychological and psycholinguistic models of memory and information processing on the one hand, and linguistic models of meaning, including meaning beyond the sentence on the other” (1991: xvii), thus emphasising the communicative value of texts. He further specifies that translation entails two kinds of explanation,

[...] a psycholinguistic explanation which focuses on encoding and decoding [and] a text linguistic or sociolinguistic explanation which focuses on the participants, in the nature of the message and on the way in which the resources of the code are drawn upon by users to create meaning-carrying signals and the fact that a socio-cultural approach is required to set the process in context. (1991: 84).

As argued by these views, translation activities show pedagogical potential in eliciting learners' awareness of how certain cognitive mechanisms are responsible for actual linguistic processing, and how these mechanisms are enacted rhetorically, thus becoming an important component of the interactional nature of genres.

3. Research procedures

To carry out the present study, a small learner corpus¹ was created from the compilation of a total of 120 translations from three translation exercises (40 records per translation task). This corpus was used to assess the role of translation as a methodological procedure to train ESP students in understanding and interpreting professional texts. It was obtained from a technical writing course at

¹ For further details on the pedagogical implications derived from the use of linguistic corpora in general and learner corpora in particular, see Hunston (2002a), Granger (1998) and Granger et ál. (2002).

the School of Industrial Engineering, University of Zaragoza (Spain). This course was imparted to 40 students with an intermediate level of English during the second semester of the academic year 2004-2005. The research outcomes reported in the Results and Discussion section below reports on the instructional procedures that were followed in the classroom to teach linguistic models and conceptual elements of the language through the analysis, inference and deduction of students' L1 and L2 texts.

The use of learners' data was therefore intended to draw qualitative rather than quantitative interpretations as regards how to raise a social awareness of the language through translation activities. On the basis of the comparative analysis of the learners' source and target texts, we observed (i) how translation-based assignments reinforce the acquisition of lexicogrammatical patternings at a textual level, (ii) how translation can foreground the way texts are organised and the way thematic elements are semantically connected within a rhetorical structure, and (iii) how L1 to L2 transfer helped teachers raise students' awareness of the construction and negotiation of social relations in professional communication in both Spanish and English.

Before selecting the three translation activities on which instruction was going to be based, an initial survey on translation skills was carried out at the beginning of the semester. The survey revealed that all the students found it easier to translate from English into Spanish than vice versa and that, despite their intermediate level of English, they needed to use translation strategies when reading texts in English—that is—, they had to translate texts to fully understand them. Students also reported finding it difficult to translate technical texts into English, with their greatest handicap being a lack of knowledge of both specialised vocabulary and the typical grammatical patterning of writing practices in the engineering field. That said, neither awareness nor deeper insights into sociorhetorical and ideational components of professional communication were shown.

The following genre-based tasks² were then selected to engage students in translation and, through translation, progressively raise awareness of textual,

² We should note that the texts selected for the translation tasks are simply models that have been chosen to illustrate the classroom instruction procedures described in this paper.

cognitive, and sociorhetorical aspects of technical texts. The first task was an English into Spanish translation of an excerpt from a commercial magazine. Students' output was used to stimulate discussion on the identification of lexicogrammatical problems in translation and assess their linguistic competence in the areas of conceptual density, phraseological patterning and stylistic attributes. The second task was an English into Spanish translation of a technical report from a specialised journal in the field of electrical/electronics engineering. It was used to assess whether students were able to identify cognitive mappings and metadiscourse signposts entailed in the rhetorical structure of the text. The translation outcome also served to validate students' competence in information transfer and synthesising skills. The third activity was a translation exercise on interpersonal communication, and relied on the translation of a business letter from Spanish into English. The purpose of this activity was to observe the extent to which students were able to grasp the interpersonal meanings of texts and understand these meanings as linguistic realisations of writer/reader interaction. This activity was also intended to elicit learners' critical thinking skills (Cederblom and Paulsen, 2001) when understanding and assessing specialised texts.

Our initial hypothesis was that in an ESP course whose objective is to develop mastery in interpreting professional texts, translation tasks can represent an adequate instructional basis for teaching/learning through inferencing and deduction the professional genre repertoire, linguistic usage and linguistic variability across texts, recurrent encoding/decoding mechanisms in the construction of meanings, and the linguistic realisation of social identities in specialised settings. In short, by focusing on linguistic models and establishing links between the source language and the target language, we hypothesised that translation exercises make students better equipped to interpret professional writing practices.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Translation-based instruction in textual aspects of genres

In the first stage of the research a text from a commercial magazine in the engineering field, *Siemens Review*, was selected. Students were asked to translate it

into Spanish so that the resulting output was used to enquire into the extent to which genre-based assignments reinforce the acquisition of lexicogrammar patterns at a textual level. The text read as follows:

Carbon dioxide lasers are used for cutting, welding, drilling, treating surfaces, cladding and forming. These lasers offer substantial advantages over conventional techniques: they are not subject to wear and tear; they function rapidly and precisely; and they can easily be controlled by a computer.

A 600-watt laser with a beam of light the width of a pinhead produces over a million watts per cm², which is enough power to vaporize metal. By the same token lasers make it possible to easily join dissimilar metals, and to selectively harden surface areas by fusing a thin layer of a granular alloy with a softer metal base. For instance, a 5000-watt laser is used by one manufacturer to fuse a cobalt alloy on jet engine turbine blades in order to produce a high hardness wear surface.

Lasers are also ideal for cutting a wide range of non-metal materials. Because the precise heat input of a laser beam actually enhances cut edge quality, lasers can create fine polished finishes in acrylics, plastics and glass. Laser beams can seal the edges of cloth, carpet, and fibreglass; and they are able to contour cut virtually any pattern at a speed up of 1 meter per second.

Similarly, the ceramic substrates used in the electronics industry benefit from laser cutting. Because these items are extremely brittle, handling efficiency is maximized by the non-contact cutting and scribing capabilities of a 0.15mm diameter laser beam, which vaporizes the fired alumina and eliminates the stress cracking resultant from conventional diamond wheel processes. By varying power density and feed rates, vaporization depth can be precisely controlled, thereby making it possible to engrave intricate artwork and lettering on wood, paper, and even leather, with absolute repeatable results.

From the translation output, classroom discussion focused on the linguistic phraseology³ of the English and Spanish texts. Apart from providing students with adequate feedback on those linguistic problems raised in the translation task—word order, reference, verb tenses, nominal compounding processes—, both source and target texts were taken as models containing examples of generic features at

³ We understand phraseology here as the way “words tend to occur in more-or-less typical phraseologies” (Hunston, 2002b: 169), thus foregrounding the “link between lexis, grammar and meaning” (2002: 67) within recurrent linguistic units.

a sentence level. Taking as starting point students' translation assignments, classroom instruction approached the analysis of linguistic conventions in technical texts, such as the use of simple present tenses for descriptive functions (e.g. *lasers are used for [...], lasers offer...*), and the use of passive constructions and omission of agents for conveying objectivity (e.g. *efficiency is maximized, vaporization can be controlled*, etc). Other common linguistic patterns when reporting experimental procedures recurred in both the source and the target text. This was the case of cause-effect, reason-result and means-end relationships (e.g. *in order to produce [...], because the precise heat input [...], because these items [...], by non-contact [...], by varying [...], thereby making it [...]*), as well as defining relative clauses (e.g. *which is enough power [...], which vaporizes the fired alumina*, etc.).

Classroom instruction also geared towards two important register-related aspects, lexical density and stylistic simplicity. Using cross-genre analysis, the translation resulting from the first activity was useful to identify the degree of informativity used in this particular genre and later compare it to other less lexically dense text types of professional settings such as memoranda or other in-company types of communication. As for style, students recognised that both L1 and L2 texts comply with the canons of good technical writing, namely, "clarity, brevity and simplicity" (Scollon and Scollon, 1995: 98). At a textual level, the source and the target text recurred in simplified subject+verb+complement structures (e.g. *a 600-watt laser [...] produces over a million watts per cm² [...], lasers can create fine polished finishes [...], they are able to contour cut [...]*), parallel constructions (*they are not subject to wear and tear, they function rapidly and precisely, and they can easily be controlled by a computer [...], to easily join dissimilar metals, and to selectively harden surface*), and discourse cohesion signposts (*by the same token, similarly, for instance*, etc.). Students noted that this linguistic phraseology lessens the conceptual load of the text, conveys accuracy and provides maximum efficiency in the transmission of information.

By comparing grammatical stretches of language in two languages learners' attention was also drawn towards the way the writer selects the message and encodes it in a particular linguistic framework (c.f. Bell, 1991: 17) to achieve his/her intended communicative purpose(s). In this respect, a further activity stemming from the translation-based analysis of the language consisted in exploring the evaluative function of vocabulary taking into account the intended goals of the text (e.g. to persuade and convince of the advantages of the

product) and its intended audience (e.g. potential buyers of the product). Using the target text, students learnt to recognise that lexical evaluation was mostly enacted at a textual level through adverbial modifiers (*function rapidly* and *precisely, easily be controlled, virtually any pattern, actually enhances*, etc.), and verbal markers that implicitly indicated positive evaluation (*enhance, benefits, maximizes, eliminates*, etc.). In all, the outcome of the first translation-based instruction was students' awareness of how writers' lexicogrammatical choices in technical texts should aim at transmitting the maximum amount of information in the most effective way.

4. 2. Translation-based instruction in rhetorical aspects of genres

The second translation activity sought to concentrate on the way technical information is organised in a text, and the way thematic elements are semantically connected within a rhetorical structure (Lemke, 1993). The source text was taken from a specialised journal in the field of electrical and electronics engineering, *Eureka on Campus*. From a genre viewpoint, this text falls into the category of technical report developed within a problem-solution macrostructure, that is, introduction-problem-solution-evaluation (Hoeij, 1985):

New European guidelines on electromagnetic shielding are driving a search for cost-effective ways of meeting tighter standards in the shielding of enclosures of electronic equipment.

Until now available methods of achieving these standards have included several systems which currently require either intensive capital investment or are highly labour intensive.

However, a technology pioneered in the sixties and perfected in the seventies is now ready to change this in certain sectors of the computer and data communication industries. The technique involves plastic plating, a process in which a plastic is etched to create pockets in the surface. An electroless palladium coat is applied to this, followed by a coat of electroless nickel.

The component is then a conductive metal component able to be electro-plated in a conventional electroplating bath with copper. The tenacity of bond of the plated surface to the substrate is similar to that of metal plate to metal. The metal coating can then be flashed with chrome for aesthetics, or left as a copper or nickel coating.

The translation assignment displayed a similar organisational pattern both in L1 and L2 texts, most likely —students inferred— because it responds to the rhetorical conventions established in professional writing practices. Students were then elicited to discuss how technical information is encoded rhetorically for maximum information transfer efficiency. From a discourse standpoint, emphasis was placed on those strategic resources that writers use to organise texts logically and, similarly, that readers use to interpret texts successfully. As explained below, this second activity approached genres from a rhetorical perspective and focused on the identification of both macro-and micro-organisation of professional discourse.

By observing both source and target texts, students noticed that the four-paragraph source text followed a logical development: an introduction providing general information on the topic under concern, the statement of a problem, a solution to it and, finally, an assessment of the advantages provided by the solution —in this particular case—, a new electroplating technique for shielding enclosures of electronic components.

Classroom discussion on recurrent rhetorical functions of professional writing —definitions, descriptions and classifications (Trimble, 1987)— was also used to approach rhetorical aspects of the genre. The analysis of the target text raised awareness of the way speech is structured conceptually and of the way thematic elements are semantically connected within a rhetorical pattern. Students noticed that *until now* indicates to readers a transition from the introduction to the statement of the problem, that *intensive capital investment* or *are highly labour intensive* refer to the problems found in current shielding techniques, and that *however* marks the transition from the problem to the solution itself, *now ready to change this*.

At a micro-organisational level, classroom instruction paid attention to paragraphs 3 and 4 in both source and target texts. Students were asked to identify those techniques with which technical writers signal different rhetorical intentions (see Trimble, 1987): establishing comparisons and contrasts (e.g. *cost-effective ways of meeting tighter standards...*, *the tenacity of bond of the plated surface to the substrate is similar to that of metal plate to metal*), technical definitions and physical descriptions (e.g. [*plastic plating*] *a process in which a plastic is etched to create pockets in the surface...*), process descriptions (*an electroless palladium coat is applied to this, followed by a coat of electroless nickel*), and summary of contents and recapitulation of important

ideas (*the component is then a conductive metal able to..., the metal coating can then be flashed with chrome...*). All these rhetorical practices were then recognised by the learners as writer's interest in helping readers identify the logical sequence of ideas as well as the intersentential and interpropositional connections between parts of speech.

As far as cognitive processing of information is concerned, translation-based instruction helped students understand how text interpretation is facilitated through the presentation of contents within the problem-solution macrostructure. Taking the perspective of the potential reader of the text, teacher/learners discussion focused on the way in which linguistic expressions facilitate the inferential processes involved in utterance understanding. The analysis of both source and target texts made students able to make the distinction “between the process of decoding messages and the process of making inferences from evidence” (Blakemore, 2002: 60) —which is precisely the basis of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics—. As explained below, by recognising the rhetorical goal of the problem-solution pattern, learners understood that this patterns aims at facilitating the identification of intended meanings in the text and, cognitively speaking, enables readers to deliver a hypothesis about writers' informative intention(s).

Since the selected text refers to a state-of-the-art technical method and is therefore targeted at professionals in the field, evaluative marking in the last paragraph revealed that though the text had an informative purpose it also involved a clearly commercial purpose. At a discourse level, similar argumentation techniques were identified in both L1 and L2 texts. By mapping out cognitive schemas the problem-solution pattern displayed a clear metadiscourse function, as it allows readers to anticipate the organisation of the conceptual load of the text. As potential readers, students were encouraged to infer pragmatic meanings (f.i., those derived from statements like *high labour intensive, cost effective ways, intensive capital investment*, etc.) and to spot the potential capabilities of the reported technique (namely, *conductivity, tenacity and aesthetics*).

In all, this second translation activity elicited the observation of how technical genres are built rhetorically and, additionally, it paved the way towards the identification of those important elements that string together ideas and propositions —ultimately building up discourse texture. From a cognitive approach, raising awareness of rhetorical patterns in professional writing also foregrounded

the way rhetorical structures work as writers' inferential organising resources that facilitate readers' understanding of meanings.

4.3. Translation-based instruction in interpersonal aspects of genres

Hatim and Mason (1997: 39) pointed out that every translation based on a text linguistic approach ought to tackle the following areas: the linguistic patterning of the text, its rhetorical purposes and attitudinal meanings (writer's stance or explicit positioning within discourse). Keeping these premises in mind, the third translation activity served to approach the construction and negotiation of social relations in professional settings, as well as the linguistic enactment of interpersonal positioning or writer's stance.

Taking the target text as a linguistic model for analysis, classroom discussion was targeted at eliciting students' ability to understand utterances within a particular context or particular setting.⁴ Taking account of the contextual and social implications of professional genres, the third activity involved the translation of a personal letter from Spanish into English. Through this task, awareness was raised as regards the functional goals performed by the writer's choice of certain linguistic expressions and the way this functionality parameter responds to a particular communicative situation. The body of the letter reports on a technical engineer's assessment of the construction plan for a dam and its English translation read as follows:

I enclose with this letter the proposals for the construction of the new dam.
As you know, I am not completely happy with this plan, and I have decided to ask the construction company to revise the plan before the end of the month. I hope to send you the revised plan at the beginning of next month.
The plan was inadequate because the company failed to understand the importance of the project. Besides, we simply cannot afford to submit a second class

⁴ By "particular setting" we borrow Paltridge's (2001: 64) definition of what he calls "the social and cultural context of the text": the purpose of the text, the writer and his/her intended audience, the relationship between addressor and addressee, the expectations of the target audience, and shared understandings and particular background knowledge.

proposal for the project, as a great amount of money has been invested in it. I am confident that we will manage to find a satisfactory solution.

I look forward to hearing your comments on the present plan and my proposals.

As regards the functional behaviour of language in professional genres, the translation task raised students' awareness of the fact that the letter was not simply informative but rather highly evaluative, as it weighed up the development of an engineering project in both technical and economic terms. Different functional responses were traced down by the students in both source and target texts: sending proposals (e.g. *I enclose with this letter the proposals...*), expressing disapproval (e.g. *I am not completely happy with this plan*), informing of a course of action (e.g. *I have decided to ask the construction company to revise...*), anticipating future action (e.g. *I hope to send you the proposal*), judging or evaluating (e.g. *the plan was inadequate*), giving reasons (e.g. *because they failed to understand..., we simply cannot afford to submit a second class proposal...*), expressing hope as for future prospects (e.g. *I am confident that we will manage to find a satisfactory solution*) and requesting feedback (e.g. *hearing your comments on the present plant and my proposals*). These observations promoted learners' recognition that communicative intentions at a discourse level are multilayered and "more complex than originally envisaged" (Askehave and Swales, 2001).

The exploration of functional aspects of communication also elicited discussion, first, on the way technical texts tackle politeness strategies as the textual realisation of the social distance between writer and reader. In this respect, the audience parameter was approached in the class, and students' analysis of the target text opened up discussion on how writer/reader relationship directly affects the degree of formality as well as the writer's overt involvement in a technical document. For instance, this particular letter displayed a personal and direct style as opposed to the stylistic conventions of other professional genres in which objectivity and lack of authorial presence tend to be the standard rules of communication.

In this respect, teacher/students discussion focused on the analysis of the discourse role of the producer of the text, in this case, an expert in the field who has presumably been sent to inspect a construction project and assess the continuity of this entrepreneurial activity. Through the analysis of the target text,

learners identified how the writer of this particular letter openly expresses his opinion in response to a previous addressee's query.

The analysis of those regulatory mechanisms in discourse through which writers articulate their persona at a textual level raised the following question, how do writers establish and maintain interpersonal relationship with their addressees in linguistic terms? In this respect, it was interesting to see how students easily noticed the recurrent use of the first person singular and plural nominative pronouns (e.g. *I am confident, I have, I hope, etc., we simply cannot [...], we will manage*) indicating the writer's presence in the text. Students also commented on how the writer of this letter overtly expresses an opinion (e.g. *the plan was inadequate because the company failed to understand the importance of the project*), how s/he reinforces his arguments (e.g. *besides [...], we simply cannot afford to submit a second class proposal*) and shows that s/he is determined to send the best option when s/he explicitly suggests and supports his/her position on strictly financial reasons (e.g. *a great amount of money has been invested in it*). Other interpersonal features were also made salient from the analysis of the translation output. By way of illustration, when the writer explicitly expresses confidence (e.g. *I'm confident that we will manage to find a satisfactory solution*), s/he does so through the following features: first person nominative pronouns (*I/we*); an attitudinal marker in attributive position (*confident*) which is embedded in a *that*-grammar unit that allows the writer to thematise the evaluative statement; a verb presupposing the overcoming of difficulties (*manage*), and a positively evaluative adjective (*satisfactory*). By tracing the writer's textual presence and highlighting interpersonal elements of discourse, students learnt to understand stance as part of a socialisation process in which writers define and establish their social status.

Translation-based instruction was also helpful in developing awareness of shared background knowledge and shared understandings between the addressor and the addressee of the letter. Comparing L1 and L2 texts, students perceived that the writer gives suggestions and recommendations, because it was part of the communicative expectations of the intended addressee. Students also learnt to recognise those intertextual references —or, rather “pre-texts”, that is, texts that the writer has used before producing a piece of writing (see Plo, 1996). In addition to supporting the argumentative flow of the letter, classroom instruction made salient how these previous texts entail intra-translation processes of other texts (those that the writer of the letter has read before writing the letter,

as well as –possibly– previous spoken and written exchanges with other professionals). When engaged in translation, students learnt that it is important to take into account these intertextual references that writers use as initial source of information as they may affect the semiotic meaning of the new text. To sum up, awareness of interpersonal positionings, shared background knowledge and intertextual links helped to consolidate instruction in those social and ideational aspects of professional discourse practices.

5. Concluding remarks

The objective of this paper was to present translation activities as a suitable means to raise awareness of the fact that “contexts are themselves generated or even actively constructed” and that “this generation process —called contextualisation— can be linguistically traced” (Verschueren, 1999: 75). Accordingly, the perspective taken in this study thus regards translation as being situated within a larger environment that provides multiple sources of knowledge about written discourse practices of professional communities.

Firstly, by using both source and target texts as models of analysis in the ESP classroom, translation activities represented a valid source to expose students to the linguistic —lexicogrammatical— enactment of textual meanings, and to elicit discussion on those phraseological elements that are recurrent in professional writing. Secondly, classroom discussion showed that, L1 to L2 transfer paves the way to inferencing and deduction processes in language learning; put simply, students become aware that texts are cohesive in texture and that they exhibit a particular genre pattern for a given rhetorical purpose or purposes. More specifically, the exploration of the rhetorical aspects of the different genre typologies has proved to be an adequate instructional procedure to examine the textual phenomena derived from both rhetorical and cognitive purposes. By analysing their own translation outputs as linguistic models, students gained knowledge of how to conform to the organisational conventions of professional genres as regards an optimal interpretation of texts. Thirdly, translation activities showed potential for offering instruction in those social aspects that genre knowledge entails. As reported previously, translation-based analysis brought to the fore how writers

adopt postures, display stance, and indicate degree of engagement with their work —thereby constructing their social identities in professional communication.

Although we are conscious of the restricted scope of the present study and of the need to raise a social awareness of language through other pedagogical tasks that may complement translation-based input and noticing, the implications stemming from these classroom observations hint at the fact that a genre-oriented translation-based approach can suitably provide exposure to three important areas in professional communication: (i) how genres are enacted according to the particular circumstances of the text, (ii) how language use is always situated against a social background and (iii) how these genre conventions ought to be learnt and put into practice by the future members of the professional community. From a broader perspective, the implications drawn in this paper also evince that Swales's (1990) genre theory framework can represent a solid theoretical and empirical approach to the teaching of professional writing skills. By developing sensitivity to the textual, rhetorical and social dimension of texts in particular settings, ESP learners will be able to understand and communicate effectively in a range of genres and to do it "in socially acceptable terms" (Bourdieu, 1999: 506); to put it simply, they will become fully competent in English in their future professional activities.

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