

Chapter 6

Reviews in Translation: Building a Partnership Learning Community to Engage Language Students as Producers

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ABSTRACT

Active learning and the involvement of students as producers and partners play a key role in language teaching in today's UK higher education landscape. This chapter explores a "Reviews in Translation" project integrating "real" translations of online blog content into classroom-based teaching of Chinese and German in a UK university as part of a collaboration that sought to establish a "partnership learning community" across academic and professional service divisions. Drawing on qualitative data based on teacher reflections on classroom experience and student feedback, the chapter assesses the success of the project through two key lines of enquiry: the combination of pedagogical and real translation for language learning and engagement with students as active learners.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the ‘‘Reviews in Translation’’ project as a collaboration between the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Language Centre and the LSE Review of Books (LSE RB) blog that sought to develop a ‘‘partnership learning community’’ across academic and professional service divisions, with the goal of better engaging language learners and maximising language outcomes.

The LSE Language Centre provides English language support, foreign language teaching, linguistic courses, as well as teaching and learning support. Undergraduate students can choose one of the five languages on offer, namely, French, German, Mandarin, Spanish, and Russian as an outside option, which constitutes 25% of a year’s study. One distinctive feature of LSE Language Centre is that all language courses are for social science purposes. Students are encouraged to learn languages in social science contexts and apply language use to discuss and address real world issues.

The LSE Language Centre also engages in research focusing on language learning pedagogy, language teaching for specific purposes, technology-enhanced learning for language teaching, as well as multilingualism. This work is extremely collaborative and often LSE Language Centre teachers work together with other departments and divisions across the School, such as the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and, in this particular project, LSE RB, an open access academic book review blog housed in LSE Communications Division: an area of the School that strategically coordinates external and internal communications.

LSE RB is part of an extensive academic blog community run at LSE. Since 2010, when the first LSE blog was launched under the remit of ‘‘communicating social science research and commentary in ways that enhance public debate and understanding’’, they have become a highly successful digital knowledge exchange platform for academics, researchers, and students around the world (Booluck, 2017). In 2016 alone, the blogs collectively attracted 9 million readers (Arrebola & Mollett, 2017).

Sustained through LSE’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) since 2012, LSE RB encourages engagement with the latest research through open access book reviews of the most recent monographs emerging across the social sciences. Not only do book reviews enable productive dialogue across academic disciplines, but in making ‘‘often challenging, complex material accessible to a wider audience’’, book reviewing can also be viewed as a pedagogical act (Farrimond, 2018). In 2020, LSE RB reached, on average, more than 65,000 readers a month, with notable audiences in the USA and UK, followed by India, Germany, and Spain; the majority of contributors and readers are postgraduate students and early career researchers. Following a 2016 reader survey, one goal has been to develop new ways of engaging and expanding the blog’s global audience to better reflect the international nature of social science enquiry (Deller, 2016), making LSE RB an ideal partner for the ‘‘Reviews in Translation’’ project.

For ‘‘Reviews in Translation’’, language students in Mandarin and German translated book reviews drawn from existing LSE RB content into their target language (TL); the most accomplished translations were subsequently published on the blog and shared with internal and external audiences. The project sought to involve students as active partners in learning, producing real translations to be hosted and disseminated on digital platforms. This chapter will describe the implementation of the project and will explore its success through two key lines of enquiry: the engagement of students as active partners; and the use of translation for language learning. It will draw upon qualitative data in which teachers reflect on the classroom teaching and learning experience, as well as analysis of student feedback. It will conclude by assessing the success of ‘‘Reviews in Translation’’ as a ‘‘partnership learning community’’ seeking to benefit language students.

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