INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DONALD C. KIRALY

Entrevista com o Prof. Dr. Donald C. Kiraly

Marileide Dias Esqueda*

(Interviewer)

This interview was carried out in September 2019, via e-mail, with Donald C. Kiraly, Professor at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität School of Translation, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, located in Mainz, Germany. Donald C. Kiraly studied Political Science at Cleveland State University in Ohio, obtained his M.A. in International Relations at Florida State University, and a Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, in the United States. He was a visiting professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, and from September 2008 to August 2012, he held a visiting professor's position at the Ecole Supérieure d'Interprètes et Traducteurs of the University of Paris III, in France, where he taught French-English, Spanish-English and German-English translation. Among his main works dedicated to translator education are Pathways to translation (1995), Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education (2000) and Towards Authentic Experiential Learning in Translator Education (2016). Professor Don Kiraly provides several important contributions in the following interview on the topic "evaluation of translations".

1. Interviewer: Prof. Kiraly, first of all, thank you very much for giving this interview to the Journal *Letras & Letras*, of the Languages and Linguistics Institute of Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, Minas Gerais State, Brazil. This special issue of the journal has the main goal of grouping together contributions on the topic "Evaluation of

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Translations", with great emphasis on the translation teaching and learning setting. To get started, could you please tell us about your professional and academic background on the Translation field?

Prof. Kiraly: *I have been a translator since 1983 and a lecturer (and most recently a professor) of translation studies since 1985. While I have never actually studied translation, I did focus on translation theory and translation teaching in my doctoral dissertation. I worked for many years as a freelance translator, primarily in the areas of finance, economics, wine-growing and public administration. The languages I use for professional purposes are English (my mother tongue), French, German, and Spanish.*

2. Interviewer: We have been following some of your works on translation teaching, which not only deal with possible didactic and pedagogical approaches for translation classrooms, but also with an array of important issues devoted to the translator education, as it is the case of your books *Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education* (2000) and *Towards Authentic Experiential Learning in Translator Education* (2015). We consider these books of special importance because they are designed to help teachers and students on the way to an effective teaching and learning, far from demotivating transmissionist-based teaching. What inspires your research on translation teaching and learning processes?

Prof. Kiraly: *My research on translation teaching and learning processes have been (and continue to be) inspired by a wide range of scholars in a number of fields that are far too numerous to go into here. Suffice it to say that the thinking that has inspired me most has focused on the themes of collaboration, practical experience, ethics, professionalism and authenticity in learning in general and translator education in particular.*

3. Interviewer: The number of university translation programs has steadily increased in the last three decades. This increase has encompassed investigations not only related to the translator's training, but also to the training of teachers and researchers in

Translation Studies. If, on one hand, we can celebrate the creation of new translation programs, on the other, we need to learn about current and prospective classroom practices related to the teaching and learning of both translation theory and practice. Assessment of the learning process is one of these practices that deserve special attention. When one decides to investigate the topic in Translation Studies, mainly assessment practices and approaches, a certain dearth of works on the subject is perceived. However, teachers are required to evaluate their students' learning processes and their acquisition of translation competence. Teachers have the social responsibility of ensuring society that the new professionals have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver a professional translation. Regardless of the configurations of translation programs or in-class methodologies, all teachers need to be sure, through the process of assessment, that students' learning has taken place. Teachers need to check that students are progressing according to the program's objectives. Could you please share with us your experiences and concepts of evaluation of translation specially focusing on translation teaching and learning setting?

Prof. Kiraly: *Basically, I am not at all in tune with the assumptions or foregone conclusions upon which this question is based. For the past 35 years, my research has focused on a view of education (including assessment) that does not prescribe an authoritarian role to the teacher. Instead, in my view, it is the individual learner (alone and in teams) who must assume responsibility for his or her learning and progress towards academic goals. This view reflects the works of a wide range of thinkers including Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Donald Schön and John Dewey. For the first 20 years of my career as a lecturer in Translation Studies, I accepted the authoritarian role imposed upon me (and my students) by the institutions that employed me. Over the past 15 years, however, I have managed to take a proactive role in changing the structure and the very nature of evaluation at these institutions, shifting from teacher-centered (top down) to learner centered (bottom up) assessment of learning. This specific change has been a cornerstone of my teaching approach and the*

value of which is confirmed in my students' evaluations of my courses semester after semester.

4. Interviewer: In your opinion, what is the role of translation students in the evaluation process of their translation projects?

Prof. Kiraly: *In the professional world of translation, the final arbiter who must be sure of the quality of a translation job prior to submission is the translator him or herself. By analogy, and specifically to prepare students to assume this responsibility (for handing in excellent work), I ALWAYS have my students assess and evaluate their own work. The initial surprise and frustration of taking on this responsibility has almost universally been accepted and welcomed by generations of my students.*

5. Interviewer: Should different translation practices (literary, specialized, legal, commercial, audiovisual, etc.) require different evaluation systems, criteria, and rubrics?

Prof. Kiraly: *I am a firm believer in a "holistic" view of Translator Competence (a term that I coined many years ago). The term that may best express one's reaction to one's own translation work upon review I believe is "intuition". Systems, criteria and rubrics may indeed be useful heuristics to facilitate learning at different stages, but what I believe we are working towards is a holistic, gut feeling that our work is indeed of suitable quality to be submitted to the client. Hence, I make sure to take the time in every course I teach to work Socratically with my students to help them identify or devise tools for evaluation, whether it be for general or specialized translation or subtitling for that matter.*

6. Interviewer: Should teachers design different assessment instruments to evaluate the translation process and the final product produced by students?

Prof. Kiraly: *I believe that I have already answered this question above. Essentially, I strongly believe that teachers need to work together with students to design different assessment instruments that can then be applied to those students' work. This is an excellent way, in my view, to implement Donald Schön's concept of the "reflective practitioner".*

7. Interviewer: We can affirm that translation technologies, such as translation memory systems, machine translation technologies, systems for localizing software and applications, translation software for producing subtitles and dubbing for the audiovisual media, among others, have influenced the practice of translation inside and outside translation classrooms. However, during evaluation sessions, many students are forced to take their tests with pencil and paper. In your opinion, what could be the best evaluation practices to be used in today's digital world?

To be frank, I believe that "pencil and paper" tests are almost a complete waste of time when it comes to learning a complex, practical skill like translation. Such tests allow us to focus on "epistemic" learning (essentially book learning), but they have been proven time and time again in a variety of educational settings to NOT prepare learners to do creative, professional, high quality work that involves undertaking and completing a real project: e.g., authentic translation work. In my own institution, as the result of deep institutional thinking and learning about how to teach, we have long since begun to make the learning assessment a much more open process that teachers (and hopefully students as well) can adapt to their needs and the exigencies of the topics studied in their courses. I strongly believe in "formative" assessment, carried out by external revisors and followed up by self-correction by the students themselves as a way to focus on maximizing quality. This allows teachers to function as assistants and guides during the students' learning adventure at university, without at the same time being the authority (in the sense of designated source of knowledge and power) whose job it is to identify the students who do not meet some arbitrary standard. Clearly, this approach represents a distinct challenge to conventional approaches to assessment and

evaluation, and it may not make the assessment job easier. But I strongly believe that it does support the emancipation (empowerment) of our students, an objective that I believe I share with all of the scholars mentioned in my earlier answers.

8. Interviewer: Many teachers perceive that all efforts devoted to correcting and commenting on student exams and class activities are lost because many students are satisfied to look at the result of the evaluation (the grade) and pay little attention to the comments provided by the teacher. In your opinion, what initiatives can best contribute to making feedback more efficient in translation teaching classrooms?

Prof. Kiraly: *I definitely experienced this very problem during my first two decades (or so) of teaching translation at the university. I have managed to circumvent this problem (not always, but often!) by building peer correction into my authentic translation projects. I work with the students first to develop an understanding of how to revise another translator's work effectively, altruistically and efficiently, and the students then assess each other's work. The student revisors are brought to consider themselves as their peers' partners, with both the translator and the revisor in every pair being responsible for submitting a job that is of adequate quality to meet the needs of the client. (By definition, my authentic translation projects always have a client who provides feedback on the final translations). The most important feature that I believe needs to be incorporated in innovative assessment procedures is: authenticity. (This applies in particular to advanced levels of study, where the students already have an excellent grasp of the basics in terms of translation-related tools, translation theory, and linguistic and cultural knowledge of the languages being worked on). At earlier stages in the learning process (which I am no longer personally involved in), and where basic skills and knowledge are being acquired, I believe that conventional testing procedures can still play an important role. But universities, like schools, have always been good at conventional testing. At higher levels of expertise (towards the end of a terminal degree in translation, for example), authentic learning accompanied by authentic assessment procedures are, in my humble opinion, of the essence.*

9. Interviewer: What types of research could or should be carried out in Translation Studies in order to promote a more in-depth debate on evaluation practices for translation teaching?

Prof. Kiraly: *In my view, both quantitative and qualitative studies need to be carried out to determine just how valuable conventional and alternative evaluation practices are. Both the increase in quality of translations as the result of various evaluation techniques (presumably quantitative studies) as well as the study students' perceptions of the value of those techniques (presumably qualitative studies using questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, for example) need to be studied extensively and in depth.*

10. Interviewer: To conclude, and taking this final question to thank you once again for your participation in this interview, would you like to add any comments that we may not have included in the previous questions?

Prof. Kiraly: *Many thanks for the opportunity to participate in this asynchronous interview. It was a great experience to rethink my own views on a number of points related to assessment and evaluation.*

References

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