

Washbourne, K. (2015). Learning to Fail: Unsuccessful Translations as Pedagogical Resource. *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E*, 2. 285–320.

# **LEARNING TO FAIL: UNSUCCESSFUL TRANSLATION AS PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE**

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## **Abstract**

This study considers the pedagogical usefulness of failed translation. ‘Constructive failure’ and other instructional design techniques postulated in learning theory are considered in light of the utopian subtext that has accrued to translation, and a more expansive role for translation as a heuristic of trial and error, as iteration – to borrow a term from design and manufacturing – is assigned. True process-orientedness carries several entailments, among them the promotion of a growth mindset. The translation classroom is re-imagined as an environment for fail-safe learning. Ultimately, a case is made for failure in the creative process, as a necessary component of the information loop inherent to all writing, and as a prompt toward the student’s tolerance of ambiguity, resilience-building, and the self-correction necessary toward failure management and maturity as an autonomous translator.

Key words: constructive failure, adaptive learning, interactivity, translation error, failure management

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Instead of valuing failure, rewarding innovative efforts that fail, and learning from failure, we often ignore failure and, at worst, punish people who try innovative things that fail. (Surry et al, 2004, p. 1421)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This conceptual study has its origins in the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS) conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, at which I gave a talk on translation ethics (Washbourne, 2013). In the question and answer period that followed, attendees noted that they wanted to explore further the role of unsuccessful outcomes in intellectual growth, and in particular the implications of a passage by Simone de Beauvoir I had quoted: “Ethical development accords perfectly with Becoming in the philosophical sense, as ethics presupposes discordance between natural law and moral law” (1980, p. 10, following Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*); de Beauvoir’s idea is a bold one:

[T]he most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasizing the element of failure involved in the condition of [humanity]; without failure, no ethics; for a being who, from the very start, would be an exact co-incidence with himself, in a perfect plenitude, the notion of having-to-be would have no meaning. (ibid.)

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Questions followed about student perceptions of failure, and about failure's role both in educational psychology and in the translation classroom. Those questions now open the way to considerations of translation's inherent trial-and-error methodology. Failure is even explicitly built into the open-ended learning environments (OELEs) common in such contemporary orientations as constructivism, in which learners must generate and test hypotheses in constructing personalized paths of understanding complex, authentic experiences. The father of constructivist thought, Jean Piaget, posited the idea of *accommodation* (1952), reframing input based on violated expectations, or in other words, *learning from failure*.

This idea joined with another that has long uneased me, namely that untranslatability should be taken as a stopping point rather than a challenge. Many have looked to Ortega and Gasset's utopianism as a translational guide for the perplexed. In "The misery and the splendor of translation", the reader will recall, the Spanish philosopher ascribes the many "divine illnesses", including melancholy, to humanity for its pursuit of unrealizable tasks (1992, p. 94); the "bad utopian", for Ortega, equates his own desire to possibility, while the "good utopian" believes only in approximations, but has one hope: the possibility of "bettering, refining, perfecting: 'progress'..." (ibid., pp. 98–99). Is this not the pedagogical cornerstone of human improvability, a school stretching from Rousseau to Dewey and to our own day?<sup>1</sup> Could the good

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utopian not serve as a beacon of best practices, signaling both the inevitability of temporary failures and the imperative to overcome them? After de Beauvoir, we may hypothesize: *without failure, no translation*. A first principle, then: Translation drafts are failures.

## 1.1. Translating as iterativity

Translation products are not revealed truths but models developed via purposive actions across multiple drafts. Richard Pevear argues (Jones, 2007) that “[t]he translator, [...], has to do consciously what the author did instinctively.”<sup>iii</sup> The drafting process in translation proves that temporary failures and corrections are the nature of the art: *all writing is iterative*. Global revision is an integral part of any translation process. As drafting constitutes the coming into existence of all translations, translations therefore are tentative constructs. As translator novices in their maturation process are guided by a ‘having-to-be’, so too are their products.

## 2. THE GROWTH MINDSET

Let us place our discussion in the context of teaching and learning. Process-oriented approaches have rightly come into focus in recent years in our profession, though they rarely or incompletely theorize mistakes as part of end-directed progress, or else they serve to warn prescriptively about error avoidance. Recent research in education highlights the fundamen-

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tal divide between learners' two different kinds of belief (or what Dweck [1999] calls *self-theories* or *mind-sets*) in learning, *incremental* and *entity*. Whereas those who subscribe to the entity theory hold intelligence to be fixed and innate, the incremental theory attributes better awareness, repair, and self-monitoring – and better learning – from mistakes. Learners who adhere to the incremental theory are task-involved rather than ego-involved and place growth ahead of performance. Konnikova observes:

From the data, it seems that a growth mindset, whereby you believe that intelligence can improve, lends itself to a more adaptive response to mistakes – not just behaviorally, but also neurally: the more someone believes in improvement, the larger the amplitude of a brain signal that reflects a conscious allocation of attention to mistakes. And the larger that neural signal, the better subsequent performance. That mediation suggests that individuals with an incremental theory of intelligence may actually have better self-monitoring and control systems on a very basic neural level: their brains are better at monitoring their own, self-generated errors and at adjusting their behavior accordingly [such as] noticing mistakes as they happen, and correcting for them immediately. (Konnikova, 2012)

A learner orientation that is fundamental to the process of incremental improvement is that of *resilience*, which Kayes and Kayes define as “the ability to adapt

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in the face of adversity, stress, crisis, and error. It involves recovering from challenging experiences and setbacks” (2011, p. 92). Students strategize according to their comfort level with such events. Mintz (2014) cites the advent of the concept of *regulatory fit* from the science of learning; he writes: “Students with a *prevention focus* are especially sensitive to negative outcomes and seek to avoid errors, while students with a *promotion focus* are more sensitive to positive outcomes. Learning is enhanced when there is congruence between the activity or assessment and the students’ goal orientation.”

Recent research on failure in learning is abundant and varied. Kapur (2012) notes several avenues of inquiry: *cognitive strain and disfluency*; *theory of communicative failure* (Clifford 1978; 1984); *desirable difficulties*; *impasse-driven learning* (Van Lehn, Siler, Murray, Yamauchi and Baggett, 2003); *assistance dilemma* (Koedinger et al. 2008); and *preparation for future learning* (Bransford and Schwarz 1999; Schwartz and Martin 2004). Kapur’s own work (2008) has included experiments in delaying instructional supports; this study in the learning design known as *productive failure* determined that students generated more representations for solving ill-structured problems and ultimately a “hidden efficacy”: deep understanding and better transfer after students performed poorly as a group. Some of these types of learning or problems are engineered to create obstacles but they are not obstacles to learning; the obstacles *set the scene* for the learning.

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Let us consider one of the most important of these lines of research: Clifford (1984) was an early advocate of what she called the ‘failure experience’, underscoring that our goal is not to perpetuate learned helplessness but to recognize that to foster successful attainments, “success may at times be ensured by failure experiences” (1984, p. 108). She uses the term *constructive failure* to refer to performances producing “effects such as increased persistence, task interest, task preference, task initiation, task resumption, free time devoted to task, and an eventual – though not necessarily immediate – increase in task performance” (ibid., p. 109). One of Clifford’s contributions is having posited a strategy explanation for performance failure, rather than another attributional dimension such as effort or ability. Clifford’s insight shifts the onus from the failing individual and his or her self-perceptions to the search for a better strategy (ibid., p. 112).

Another approach is that of Hung et al. (2013, p. 5), who call for what they term learning environments conducive to *breakdowns* in “thinking, understanding of conceptions, and assumptions. It is these very breakdowns (failing within a ‘safe’ environment) that encourage what has been variously described as play (Prensky, 2002), meddling (McWilliam, 2005) and tinkering (Ito et al., 2008).” The authors are writing specifically of environments in which learners “edit reality” such as games and other digital media, and discourse and performance are negotiated toward

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what they call a Literacy of Adaptivity (ibid.), in which contextuality, activity, identity, and sociability are situated and “afford a trajectory of identity ‘becoming’” (ibid., pp. 7–8).

Davis (2008, p. 88), following Rohrkemper and Corno (1988, p. 296), points to the instructor’s role in “monitoring the frequency, timing, placement, magnitude, and aggregation of social and academic failure” of their students. I should be absolutely clear, however, that the pedagogical goal under discussion is student success; what I wish to explore is a single generative idea: the paradoxical utility of failure as a process goal in translator training and education, and indeed the centrality of failing to learning- and learner-centered shifts in approach.

### **3. FAILING LESSONS: THE ERROR IN OTHER INDUSTRIES AND FIELDS OF PURSUIT**

Every creative process passes through various phases: it may involve false starts, trial and error, and a series of successive approximations along the way to the finished work. The educational value of creative work lies as much in the process of conceptual development as in the creation of the final product. (Robinson, 2011, p. 278)

From business start-ups to software development, a well-known mantra of “fail fast”, that is, deliberately making problems visible early, has taken hold. Farson



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and Keys (2002) argue that “‘failure-tolerant’ leaders are an essential piece of successful risk-taking organizations” (Damodaran, 2008, p. 364). Prototypes in marketing are often used to elicit negative reactions (Seymour, 1995, p. 135); failed products are used as *demonstrations of what does not work*. Rapid prototyping in product design and development elicits feedback from users on a mock up, showing where revision is needed. Seymour further operationalizes this method by asserting the value in *explaining failure* (ibid., p. 136), a step supported by double-loop learning (ibid., pp. 136–137), Argyris and Shön’s (1978) term applied to organizational learning, whereby the reason behind failures, the underlying values of the system, are examined, and the error itself is not merely corrected, as in the case of single-loop learning. What these approaches have in common is tentativity, the making visible of error, and their understanding of knowledge as a point in a succession of missteps. Petroski (1994, p. 22) argues that

the form of made things is always subject to change in response to their real or perceived shortcomings, their failures to function properly. This principles governs all invention, innovation, and ingenuity [...]. And there follows a corollary: Since nothing is perfect, and, indeed, since our ideas of perfection are not static, everything is subject to change over time. There can be no such thing as a ‘perfected’ artifact [...].

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Design changes, and by extension textual changes, are driven by “the coincidence of a perceived problem with an imagined solution” (ibid., 27). Analogously, a new or refined translation presupposes a problematic translation preceding it, or a new ‘problem situation’ or audience.

In the field of design, iteration presupposes the principle of *ordered complexity*. Lidwell et al. note how iteration brings about complex structures through testing and tuning, accretion of knowledge and experience (2010, p. 142). Feedback from audiences is frequently involved in these processes to provide information about project specifications. We can liken this kind of phasing of the development of a translation to *user-centered translation* (see Suojanen et al., 2015), whereby, for example, mental models of the user, and notions of readability, are formed through feedback.

Errors can even be embraced – or forced – as a deliberate means of altering and challenging customary processes in order to innovate. Frank Barrett (1998) introduces us to several characteristics of jazz bands that improvise coherently. Prime among them is what he calls *provocative competence*, the deliberate effort to interrupt comfortable habits; a coordinate precept, the embracing of errors as a source of learning and innovation, allows performers to respond productively to unforeseen situations. This improvisational responsiveness is a skill for any classroom where creative problem-solving is the goal.

## 4. THE ERROR IN TRANSLATION THEORY AND PEDAGOGY

The error in translation, of course, has a decades-long history in the criticism, stretching back to at least Gouadec (1981). From a certain perspective, the error is inscribed in at least some translation pedagogy not as something to be avoided but as a step toward meaningful learning:

What trainees really need is the opportunity to abstract *their own guiding principles and routines* from actual instances of behavior, with the help of responses to their performance which are variegated as possible. Thus, during the training period, the pedagogically most appropriate key concepts are those associated with experiencing, exploration and discovery, involving as they do a considerable element of trial and error. (Toury, 2012, p. 291)

The learner or trainee first may learn to recognize the discovery of the *frisson* that errors provide. A flawed target text offers a concrete instantiation with which to test one's mental model of a given text, and the expectations one brings to the text. Some translation textbooks (e.g. Baker 2011) show unsuccessful translations not only as example-based learning prompts for analysis but as authentic realia: in actual practice, after all, we find not model translations so much as functional but defective ones. The translation error,

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particularly in such learning events as retrospective error analysis, affords the possibility of meaning, of making possible meanings more visible:

Meaning making (resolving the dissonance between what we know for sure and what we perceive or what we believe that others know) results from puzzlement, perturbation, expectation violations, curiosity, or cognitive dissonance. (Jonassen and Land, 2000, p. ix)

In this light, the error is a provocation, a learning aid or incentive toward sense-making, toward deeper understanding or awareness.

The strategic *translation error*, often distinguished from the more mechanical *translation mistake*, has been predominant in the language of certification exam assessment instruments and in pedagogical contexts. Yet not all theorists find the absence of error to be the most fundamental mark of quality. Nord (1997, p. 73), for example, finds that inadequacy, or non-functionality, rather than translation mistakes, characterizes failure in our task. Moreover, when ‘translation error’ is used to cover widely divergent sources of inadequacy – for example, misunderstanding of a source text, inconsistency in target terminology, and improper usage – the usefulness of the word as a critical discriminator is jeopardized. In the language services, errors may even reflect discrepancies in expectations about preferences and usage (see “What Are Translator Style Guides?”, 2013). This insight suggests that

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while the absolute error may occur, writing as a social practice entails preferences related to specific usability parameters rather than to truth values, the relative rather than the absolute. The boundaries of the term ‘error’ quickly blur: Is it an error to reproduce an anomalous item in an organization’s own term list or faulty MT, or a literary author’s misstatement of fact? Can one speak of errors if the client places no precise constraints other than the largely hypothetical “neutral Spanish” as the desired target language variety?

Recently, the idea of *sway* has been proposed for translation contexts. Doug Robinson (2011) looks to sociopsychological factors in the construction of ‘error’. Sway is perhaps a variable in conceptualizations of the translation error inasmuch as it recognizes the group “forces or impulses that sway the translator: [such as] those of which we disapprove – biases, prejudices, leading to translations that we believe to be incorrect – failed, inappropriate, misleading, awkward or perverse – but may originally have been conceived as [norm-governed and successful]” (ibid., pp. 12–13). If norms occupy the positive pole, the error falls on the ‘dark side’, in Robinson’s view. What sway allows us to consider at length is the social context in which we translate, which is in part constitutive of translation felicity or infelicity.

One realistic error model of note is Catherine Way’s Achilles’ Heel system of self-criticism and self-assessment. The aim is to avoid “any reference to errors or problems (psycho-physiological competence) as

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students are made aware that even professional translators may experience a weakness in a specific sub-competence at some time” (2008, p. 94). On a succession of record sheets, students and instructors make an honest reckoning of both strengths and weaknesses in both students’ work and professional samples, analyze the reasons behind errors, and suggest remedies. This intervention provides a pathway not only towards better self-awareness with respect to unsuccessful choices, but successful ones as well. Assessment methods tend to ignore this component, to the detriment of learning, as reinforcement of success is a long-term error-prevention strategy. The system also allows for differentiated learning and individual training needs that follow (*ibid.*, p. 98), as each student’s error ‘fingerprint’ will be unique. The Achilles’ Heel system points to the error as an inevitability, and profitably seeks to harvest failings and their etiology as feedback data.

#### **4.1. The error, the failed translation, and the revised translation in the literary domain**

Let us turn briefly to the special case of literature, in which ‘error’ and ‘failure’ become harder to quantify though perhaps are no less common. Aveling’s (2003) query of whether “equivalence, adequacy, accuracy, etc.” are apropos in an era in which the idea of “multiple readings is well established”. The criterion, he argues, ought not to be right or wrong but why a par-

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ticular translator made a given choice. Translation itself has been described as an access to ‘wrongness’ (Hoving, 2006, p. 31, in Lathey). Hoving asserts that mismatches between illustrations and cultural categories taught her *style*: “something seemed to be wrong: reading these translated books was like squinting, and adopting double vision... Everything was lopsided, twisted...” That is, what is wrong for some is the very hybridity, the writing against the grain that representing the foreign perhaps demands. Style here may be understood to be features that often violate discursive norms. And often interpretive stances, rather than departures, are at work under the surface: “An apparent error or deviation may turn out to be an apt rendering of a provocative or anomalous passage in the source text; just as significantly, it may be an artifact of the translator’s decision to rephrase, reorder, condense, or expand...” (“Evaluating Translations as Scholarship”, 2015).

The construct of the ‘error’ in literary translation, properly speaking, may be said to have its uses, but is limited. Let us consider Viaggio’s orders and types of error in literary translation (2006, p. 305). He distinguishes the translational error (representationality to source), the mediational error (comparability to target), and the aptness error (adequacy in target system). The error does not extend, for example, to those cases in which the text has not fulfilled its potentialities as a text in the target polysystem. Weak literary effects can result from any number of procedural, aesthetic, or cognitive missteps, including miscues (reading errors)

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or textual myopia (failing to account for intra- and inter-textual clues). Failing at routine transfer issues may be categorized as a different failure than failing to produce innovative solutions where they are called for. In literature, too, expectancy norms (e.g. Chesterman, 1993) will often prevail over ‘correctness’. Al-Qinai (2005, p. 519) notes: “Names of institutes, fictional, non-fictional and biblical characters that have gained a translational form will usually force the translator to adopt the established form *regardless of whether it is correct or not*” (emphasis mine). Readers may favor a familiar error over an unfamiliar correction.

‘Translation failure’ or the ‘failed translation’ are far from axiomatic in the domain, in part because the error is more easily characterized, whereas a failure may result from a translation having no errors in the usual sense but employing a misguided or inconsistent macrostrategy. The failed literary translation and its criteria may vary from work to work, and may be disguised under various euphemisms: ‘dubious’, ‘unsuccessful’, ‘flawed’, etc., many of which are critical without explanation, or else tersely dismissive, such as ‘stilted’. Emily Apter (2013, p. 9) writes: “Translation failure [...] invites elaboration alongside other iterations of the non-translatable: ‘lost in translation’, the mistranslated, unreliable translation and the *contresens*”. Paradigmatic cases of failed translations may be more useful to posterity than they ever contributed as creative works: much may be learned from the De



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Onis translation of João Guimarães Rosa's masterpiece, *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*), which was shifted from avant garde in Brazilian Portuguese to 'spaghetti western' in English, in Haroldo de Campos' damning phrase (Jackson, 2005, p. 114). Pedagogically useful failures may include translator footnotes in which a translator opts out of the responsibility to translate, such as the case González-Davies relates (2004, p. 53) in which a Spanish translator of *Alice in Wonderland* missed out all passages involving wordplay so as not to provide 'false equivalences', and Louis Carroll's poems as well, as they involved inter-textual references that would thus hold no charm for the translation's reader.

In any discussion of literary translation failure, the literary subgenre of *the revised translation* plays a role. Revised translations, and retranslations, implicitly or explicitly are aligned with the idea of an unsatisfactory first translation. Gorfée (1994, p. 228) posits a model in which 'falsity' is worked out of texts through a species of 'genetic propagation', in Chesterman's term (1997, p. 192). Chesterman, quoting Gorfée, writes:

In the endless game of translation-through-time, "bad" translations "represent falsity and will be lost in the game", while "good" translations "will engender other, 'better' translations which will again engender other translations", so that eventually what emerges ideally from this flowing series of

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semiosis is a “translation fulfilling the conditions of truth”. (ibid.)

*Are* ‘bad’ translations overcome by ‘good’ ones? Johnston neatly expresses the idea that the text does not exhaust itself; translation, he argues, “posits an infinity of possible extensions and completions”, and “the full range of meanings of any text are dispersed across time and space” (2008, p. 68). A text’s conditions are never fulfilled all at once, if we can say they ever are: in literary translation, as Viaggio notes, the “‘felicity conditions’ [set] an admittedly fluid limit between a felicitous and an infelicitous translation” (2006, p. 305). Thus, a translation would have to establish its own conditions for success, its acceptability thresholds, not from any universal principles but from the specificities of that text for that context. A presupposition that ‘good’ translation is always recognized and incentivized underlies Gorfée’s Platonic conception, as does the idea that ‘better’ is a fixed quantity, unchanging across time and space. Complicating the received wisdom that the translator succeeds invisibly, then, he or she also often fails invisibly: unexamined failures can masquerade as successes. For this reason, we must build in ways to recognize failure and then ‘fail better’, for we are not working, like computer scientists (see Krebs 2012), with a program that either will or will not run. Our failures are often partial, temporary, subjective, and elusive.

## **5. REVISION**

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Revision is not failure but opportunity.

Donald M. Murray (2007, p. 381)

Ortega's good utopianism finds expression in the revised translation, the retranslation, and the failed literary translation, which all have revision or the need for revision as their common denominator. Revising in any writing context acknowledges that recursivity underlies textual products, that thought and writing are not commensurate or simultaneous. Editing and revision in training must be approached as complex decision-making processes that do not simply eliminate error, but prioritize improving at the macro-level of text and purpose. The resistant student will frequently see revision as an unnatural disruption of what he or she perceives to be a spontaneous occurrence. Students sometimes imagine writing to be the transference of preordained meanings rather than the construction, search and discovery of them (Bean, 2011, pp. 37–38). In translation, the same naiveté deepens this problematic assumption: that a source text is something discrete, corresponding part for part with a preexisting counterpart elsewhere, rather than transforming through a new language and cultural prism. When we consider closely why some students dislike revision, we find an unexamined philosophy that links thinking to self-expression rather than to a communicative purpose, and in translation's case, to the voice of another.<sup>iii</sup> Another hypothesis, derived from Piagetian theory, suggests that revision means students have to 'decenter' (Kroll, 1978), and to see the product from the reader's point of view rather than the writer's or

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their own as translators. The complexity of writing's goals and constraints – purpose, audience, genre, subject matter – further place the burden on the student to gain awareness of different conventions (Bean, 2011, pp. 34–35). Quality assurance today, moreover, emphasizes revision. Standards, such as the European Standard for Translation Services (EN 15038), call for including translation service procedures that entail checking (self-)revision, third-party review (optional), proofreading (optional) and final verification (Biel, 2011). Biel (2011) reminds us that the standard is consistent with professional realism approaches to training. The standard, moreover, reminds learners of two eventualities: being a reviser and having one's work revised.

## **6. PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS**

Key questions emerge, then, in identifying our role in supporting learner success:

Does making and correcting certain errors offer access to translation insight unavailable to those who avoid the error?<sup>iv</sup> How can we offer support so that process errors prove maximally learning-conducive? If *studying process is studying failure*, how can instructors and designers operationalize failure, and how can students benefit from their own and others' errors? And how can we reward challenge-seeking behavior and high-risk innovation that fails?

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We also seek to know what flexibility students gain by *planning for failure* and responding to it, and what the motivational payoff is for students' overcoming temporary translation failures.

To this end we would do well to:

### **create a space for failure**

- articulate fail-safe conditions – not safe from failing but safe to fail – of the classroom, without lowering expectations of final performance
- condition the classroom as an experimental lab in which principled risk taking and a trial-and-error heuristic are prized
- incorporate play as a purposive and generative activity

### **theorize failure**

- pursue attention-raising of the role of failure in success, and particularly between creativity and risk
- attend to the role of risk in the classroom, assigning some projects in a two-fold way: to produce a conservative translation, and a second, ungraded, daring one
- introduce risk management (ISO 31000) to translators not only to reduce risk but to reinforce that

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project failure can include events within or beyond one's control

- foster *risk propensity* as part of the trainee's self-concept; “translators as risk takers” (Williams, 2013, p. 109)
- investigate how even successful translations may fail at some points or by some alternate measures, or after the passage of time

### **analyze failure**

- define types of failure in translation: interpersonal, systemic, textual, strategic, etc., and introduce non-binary types of failure, partial failure, etc.
- leverage two sources of errors for learning: others<sup>v</sup>, and the student's own, and consider the reflection on errors (portfolio) a source of evidence of learning
- stress the impact, or “implication feedback” (Blair, 2009) of unsuccessful translation, not merely the mechanics
- model failed translations in history as case studies for critical analysis
- demonstrate, using error-tagged learner corpora archives of translator drafts and correspondence, interactions and iterations that led to successful translation decision-making via unsuccessful translation

### **proceduralize failure**

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- illustrate how the divergent thinking necessary for problem-solving inevitably produces many unworkable solutions en route to a functional one
- train for a balance of *classic expertise* (efficiency) as well as *adaptive expertise* (the non-routinized, flexible development of applied knowledge and innovation)<sup>vi</sup>
- promote conscious competence of error-spotting and correction
- design more investigations into causes of failure, and into preventive, proactive and reactive measures

### **repair failure**

- build constructive criticism techniques (Way, 2008) into assessment in order to foster the meta-language of (self-)critique
- allow rounds of revision based on timely corrective feedback (direct, indirect, and metalinguistic; see Ellis, 2009)
- teach the tenets of self-revision and peer revision as intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary to failure management

## **7. CONCLUSION**

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This study considers the importance of failure from the pragmatic perspective of industry and the developmental focus of learning theory, and argues for bringing unsuccessful translation into awareness as a learning opportunity and for spurring creative solutions through a supportive drafting and revision process. Why focus on failure in translator training? Subscribing to either of Ortega's utopianisms, even in their 'soft' forms, is predicated on a view of translation as an inexact science. His 'good utopian' presupposes a text needing improvement, just as we are good utopians about processes and even about learners themselves as developmental beings. The language of the promotion focus in motivational theory is one piece of the puzzle of building persistence in an environment in which failure is routinized and remediable; constructive failure and other techniques may provide others. Adaptive learning may be one way to increase responsiveness to the individual learner's errors, but the procedures must be accompanied by the critical reexamination of failing in our fail-averse education systems of today. Our reflections here are not exhaustive; in fact, we have only countenanced some of the received ideas ingrained in our cultural constructs of success and failure, and sketched a few past and potential avenues of approach for translation pedagogy. We must remind ourselves, in conclusion, that a process orientation in translation, in short, means drafting as *iterating one's way out of failure*. Helping translation students to fail better is helping them, ultimately, to succeed.



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<sup>i</sup> Doyle (2012) has ventured into the theoretical foundations of this connection.

<sup>ii</sup> Even Richard Pevear (Jones, 2007) seems convinced by the myth of original writing as a Wordsworthian “spontaneous outpouring” rather than a deliberate construct. William Butler Yeats’ “Adam’s Curse” contains verses that the reviser of translations knows first hand: “I said, ‘A line will take us hours maybe; / Yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought, / Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.”

<sup>iii</sup> A propensity toward deeper revision may also reflect differences in the translators’ individual writing strategies: “architects” and “watercolorists” self-edit minimally; “bricklayers” and “oil painters” self-edit deeply (see Mosop, 2014, p. 20, after Chandler 1993).

<sup>iv</sup> Some student success can actually be unreflective and unresponsive of learning: “Uninformative success, or success that occurs without increased understanding, does not further learning any more than does mindless failure... Meaningful learning has much to do with false starts, thwarted tries, and frustrated attempts” (Rohrkemper and Corno, 1998, p. 303).

<sup>v</sup> Errors of strategy (macrolevel errors of approach) or of tactics (microlevel choices) may be studied. One good source are *international marketing fails*, for example, Procter & Gamble Co.’s use of the image of the stork to sell diapers in Japan, a country in whose mythology babies are delivered by *giant floating peaches*.

<sup>vi</sup> Terms are those of Hatam and Inagaki (1986); see also Schwartz, Bransford, and Sears (2005).