

## Investigating the impact of foreign language culture on translation

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### Abstract

*Translation has been used for centuries by foreign language learners to facilitate language learning, but translation has played various roles under different language teaching methods. While some foreign language educators may consider translation as a critical means to ensure students' comprehension, other teachers may totally forbid or discourage the use of the native language and translation in the classroom. Thus, translation has long been neglected in second or foreign language (FL) classrooms because it was considered an inadequate reminder of old teaching methodologies, especially those associated with (or derived from) the grammar-translation method.*

**Keywords:** translation, facilitate, methods, comprehension, forbid

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely held that translation needs the usage of most of the language skills; the students can also improve their language skills with the study of translation using different instructional types and materials. Duff (1994) states: "...professional translation is a specialized skill that requires specialized training. The goal of translation is more likely to provide learning opportunities in the process of creating translations as final products in order to develop language awareness. Translation activities should be used in the

*English classroom, and they should be supported by communicative, natural learning methods” (p. 50).*

Although the role of mother tongue in foreign language teaching has been neglecting by most of language teachers, many of language learners use their mother tongue in learning a new language (Hernandez, 1987). Therefore, during 1970s and 1980s, the use of learners’ first language was rejected in communicative methods. Because of such a reason, the association of translation with the language learning became less and less for centuries. Besides, the usage of L1 had gradually omitted in foreign and second language learning classes. However, recently the attitude toward the use of translation in language learning has shifted positively. Further, teachers and in a broad way, students have considered translation as supportive and practical strategy. Corder (1981) also emphasizes that students’ mother tongue is a useful resource for the learners to compensate their deficiencies in second language learning.

As regards the techniques, the issue, Weschler (1997) concludes, combining the good points of both “grammar-translation” and “communicative approaches” can lead to a strong method, which can largely be meaning-based rather than the form-based technique.

Despite the fact that language learning or acquisition an apparent requirement for translation, the role that translation might play in language learning and acquisition has been considered one of the most hotly debated issue in both Translation Studies and language pedagogy in the West as well as Arab world. Thus, translation studies have been taught in translation classes without being seen in normal foreign or second language (FL) classrooms. Some of the classical teaching methodologists have been looking at translation exercises as inappropriate activity for the improvement of the new language learning.

In spite of these and similar claims in opposition to make use of translation in the language classroom, current studies confirm that, far from being ineffective and counter-productive, translation can be an enormous assist in (FL) learning and teaching. Nevertheless, utilizing translation in language classrooms has long been an argumentative and hotly debated topic.

Some scholars consider that the result of the grammar-translation method was excessively trivial, that is, even though second language learners are mostly have been spending long time

studying the new language, but they were unable to speak fluently or even to write correctly. Thus, translation has been described as “uncommunicative, tedious, worthless, complicated, and inappropriate” (Duff, 1981).

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

With the rapidly development of the importance of learner-centered methods, researchers have attempted to reduce and alleviate the load of language learning, and have investigated what is helpful for learners to achieve their objective in the most economical way. Among them, the use of translation and also its place has been a debatable topic. Although, most language educators are completely against the use of translation in English language classrooms, nowadays, this perspective is changing and more and more professionals have believed in the facilitating role of the students’ native tongue in language classrooms. In most of Arabic countries, the mother tongue, Arabic, is the formal language of education. All students do their primary education in their mother tongue. If these students have an early exposure to the English language, it would make a big difference to them. Therefore, ignoring the use of learners’ first language in English language classes could naturally lead to the students’ demotivation. The purpose of the present study is to deal with translation as a fruitful material in language classes and get rid of its reputation from what considered badly in GTM. Therefore, the challenging problem is to consider that whether translation use in EFL learning and EFL teaching is as facilitating or deteriorating matter.

## **3. TRANSLATION AND TEACHING**

Translation is viewed as a perplexing area of learning due to quite a number of factors. It is indeed a a valid and effective tool in foreign language learning. A few years before now, translation was hardly considered a useful tool for learning languages by teaching experts and educators. Translation as a language learning activity was considered as being unsuitable within the context of foreign language learning (Brown, 2002). It was criticized because of the close association with traditional grammar translation. Even today

translation is often regarded as some kind of mechanical linguistic transfer of meaning from one language to another. It is still ignored as a useful language learning tool because of being not a communicative activity that is not suited to the general needs of the language learner. Translation is considered as time-consuming, boring, and irrelevant.

This paper seeks to highlight the role to be played by translation as a teaching method to enhance foreign language skills. Definitely, the use of translation in classrooms can raise the level of awareness of students of the importance of foreign language learning. There are some linguists who encouraged the use of translation as valid technique for improving students' language attainment.

*Translation plays a very important role in an increasingly globalised world and in increasingly multilingual Europe where it is used on daily basis (Leonardi, 2010, p.17).*

Despite its apparent role in foreign language learning, translation is viewed differently by linguists, methodologists and teachers. Its use in foreign language teaching has stirred up such a voluminous controversy, disagreement as well as criticism. This controversial stance was greatly attributed to the fact that across the centuries quite a reasonable research and investigation have performed in the issue of translation as regards teaching. However, there are always opponents and proponents to the issue in question in a way that led to ignoring the vital role of translation as a learning tool. Translation was considered as inefficient, unreliable and irrelevant. Significant limitations led to the idea that the use of translation in language learning had to be avoided.

Malmkjaer (1998, p.6) briefly summarizes the main reasons why translation fell from favour:

1. Translation is independent and radically different from the four skills which define language competence: reading, writing, speaking and listening.
2. Translation takes up valuable time which could be used to teach these four skills.
3. Translation is unnatural.
4. Translation misleads and prevents students from thinking in the foreign language.
5. Translation is a bad test of language skills.
6. Translation produces interference.

7. Translation is only appropriate for training translators.

Duff (1994) discloses additional reasons for the teachers' abstain from using translation in foreign language learning and teaching. The researcher emphatically went to consider that translation is text-bound and confined only to two skills — reading and writing. It is not a communicative activity as it doesn't involve oral interaction. Then the use of the mother tongue is required, which is not desirable. Moreover, it is boring, both to do and to correct.

All the same, there are “*significant and visible signs of a revival of translation in language teaching according to recent literature and applied linguistics*” (Malmkjaer, 1998, p.1). Quite a number of theorists, linguists, teachers and educators do agree on the importance of using translation in foreign language classes. For instance, Schaffner (1998) admits that the translation and related exercises could be advantageous to foreign language learning:

1. To improve verbal ability.
2. To expand students' vocabulary in L2.
3. To develop their style.
4. To improve their understanding of how languages work.
5. To consolidate L2 structures for active use.
6. To monitor and improve the comprehension of L2.

Translation in foreign language classes is now in its way to become a form of “pedagogical translation”, which is held high in consideration as useful learning and teaching technique and hence the old negative view of translation as useless tool in language learning is banished, and as a way to enrich learners' competences. Students taught by using pedagogical translation are encouraged to practice reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, speaking. One of the main aims of foreign language teaching is to develop the student's ability to communicate in the target language. Researcher Ross (2000) states that translation is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding. As a form of communication, translation involves interaction and cooperation between people, which makes it a very useful tool in foreign language teaching.

#### **4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

1- To explain the pedagogical value of translation as a language learning methods.

2- To suggest some attractive translation techniques and activities that will help to motivate the learners to acquire second language skills.

3- To find out the appropriate methods and techniques along with translation skills that will enhance second language learning.

4- To develop English language skills using translation approach.

5- To investigate the effect of learning the culture of the target language on developing English language Skills.

#### **5. QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

1- What is the pedagogical value of translation as a language learning methods?

2- How can attractive translation activities help to motivate the learners to acquire second language skills?

3- How do using translation activities beside the appropriate methods and techniques, will enhance second language learning?

4- What strategies involving translation do English language learners use in learning process?

5- To what extent does learning the culture of the target language will develop translation and English language skills as well?

Translation is considered by many linguists as a salient tool for intensifying language awareness. This comes as a result of having students dedicatedly working with the varying structures, syntax and semantics in the process of translation, they are expected to develop or come to grips with deep understanding of the different techniques and strategies to be employed to explore the potentials of the languages in question. While translating students are focused on identifying differences in structure and vocabulary, they have to evolve strategies to deal with them and to negotiate the potential of both languages. The real usefulness of translation in foreign language classes lies in comparison of grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language points in the target language and the student's mother tongue. Students are directly exposed to contrasting language systems

of the target and the native languages. Therefore, the learners should be required to discuss and correct common mistakes. It may be appropriate at this point to mention Perkins's (1985) observations:

*In order to develop in the students a linguistic awareness of contrast between L1 and L2 grammatical structures, and thus counteract interlingual interference, the teacher can quite legitimately get students to translate L1 sentences designed to pinpoint and clarify structures and patterns the student still has not assimilated.*

It goes without saying that the material for translation should be attractive and an appeal to the students' interest as well as being varied, expressive and related to the learners' knowledge. As students should cover different aspects of the foreign language, the material is required to be authentic, diverse in terms of structure and function.

The teacher's main concern is to judge students' needs and tries to cater for them through the selection of the relevant material to demonstrate clearly particular aspects of the language and those parts which present complexities in the process of their learning the English language. As the students get along through those complex parts of the language, they develop the ability to establish the link between the language and its utilization.

Two researchers Nolasco and Arthur (1995) suggest that translation activities should meet the following criteria:

1. Language is used for a purpose.
2. Translation activities create a desire for communication.
3. Translation activities encourage students to be creative and contribute their ideas.
4. Students are focused on what they are saying, rather than how they are saying it.
5. Students work independently of the teacher.
6. Students determine what to say or write.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Translation has been found out to be an enormously useful pedagogical tool to be used in foreign language classes. Translation activities have to be incorporated into the curriculum and form an integral part of it so that students should not nourish the feeling that translation is an alien task.

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