

## **Translation and Foreign Language Teaching**

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(Received A.H. 30/12/1420; accepted A.H. 22/1/1421)

**Abstract:** This paper starts with the assumption that translation, when applied adequately and effectively, can be used as a means of language learning and language teaching. Despite the controversy of the adequacy or inadequacy of using translation in the teaching of a foreign language, this paper argues that analytical and descriptive studies along with teachers' observations have revealed valuable additional information about the validity of using translation as a tool for language learning and/or language teaching. Therefore, those who believe that translation has a minimal role to play in the teaching of a foreign language are invited to think again of its role and contributions it makes to the fields of language learning.

### **Introduction**

Over the last decennia, many linguists and translation theorists argue that translation is a form of comparative linguistics [1- 4]. Since linguistics studies language contrastively and comparatively, i.e., focusing on the differences between one language and another, especially in a language teaching context, or identifying common characteristics of different languages, it is reasonable, then, to say that translation can be utilized as a method of comparing and contrasting between two languages [5- 6].

Furthermore, translation is transferring the meaning of a text from one language to another, and such transference has to account for the textual, grammatical and pragmatic meanings of the text to be translated, taking into account that meaning necessitates reference to linguistic and non-linguistic factors embedded within the text. The non-linguistic aspects of the text include thought, situation, (cultural) knowledge, intention, and use. Any successful translation has to be based on the analysis of all these aspects of meaning within texts. Therefore, translation should yield useful information as it brings up the similarities and differences between one language and another. It is in this particular way that translation facilitates and speeds up the learner's comprehension

process. The role translation plays in foreign language learning and language teaching will be investigated later. However, in order to envisage translation and translators, one has to examine the way this profession and those who practice it are viewed within the Arab and Western worlds.

### **Status of Translation**

This section focuses on the present situation of translation and translators. It attempts to examine the way translation and translators are perceived within the Arab world, compared with translation and translators in western countries. This section highlights the problems that both translation and translators face in their academic profession, and the role they play within cross cultural communication.

Although translation has suffered from lack of characterization and delimitation for the last twenty years, it is placed as one of the important professions ever practiced. One may note that translation played its different traditional roles within the Arabic language and culture. It also enriches the most vital dimension and that is being the link and mediator not only between different cultures, but also in terms of everyday business, educational programs, and technology and science. The problem, however, remains to be that translation is looked upon as an amalgamation of different and sometimes unrelated subjects. And for translators, they are divided among themselves and in a state of flux, as to what should be done towards the role translation should play in their lives.

### **Perceptions of Translators**

There is a big gap between how translators perceive themselves and how the public perceives them. Translators perceive themselves as linguists and language experts. They are writers, critics and communicators. They are experts when it comes to language differences. This goes in line with what Tytler states that translation should belong to the literary stream, simply because its main aim is to prepare translators to be good writers and good orators [7].

In his essays, Tytler believes that most admired scholars of classical antiquity, Cicero, Quintilian among other, insist that through translation, translators acquire two basic language skills: speaking and writing. Tytler is not alone in his high regard for translation and translators. One can point out that modern literature is full of scholars and translation practitioners who have excelled in their work as translators: John Florio, with his translation of Montaigne's essays, Thomas Shelton, John Dryden, Juvenal, William Coper, Homer, Mathew Arnold with his essay on Homer, and Wilhelm Von Humboldt, a well-recognized German scholar who successfully translated Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, which was published in 1796; all these have contributed significantly to the teaching of the theory of translation. The connection between translation and literature is viewed by these scholars as highly important [8].

### **Perception of Translators within the Arab World**

Within the Arab world, translators face various difficulties which interfere with their performance. This can be attributed to two factors: (1) at the professional level, translation is perceived as a relatively new discipline, compared with other scientific disciplines. There is a lack of information as to what translation is all about and the role that translators can play within the educational system; (2) many translators have practiced the profession of translation, despite the fact that they are not qualified to practice such a profession. It is unfortunate, these days, to see that translation is practiced by unspecialized university and/or college graduates. What is really perplexing, or even more pathetic, is to see translation practiced by translators or foreign language speakers who are engaged in translation activities for economic purposes.

### **Translation and Foreign Language Teaching**

Since we are discussing the status and role of translation in the teaching of a foreign language, it is important to distinguish between translating into the native language and translating into the second language, i.e., the foreign language. According to Barhoudarov, there is an important difference between translating into the native (mother tongue) language and translating into the second or foreign language [9]. In translating into the native language, the foreign text to be translated is the point of departure. That is, the foreign text is the first thing the translator deals with and accounts for. Here, the translator runs into the problem of analysis. That is, the translator analyzes the text for the purpose of understanding it and perceiving the implicit and explicit shades of meaning behind it.

In translating into the second language, the foreign text is the targeted one. That is, the translator aims at producing a foreign text, not native to him. Here, the translator runs into the problem of synthesis. That is, the translator goes into the process of reconstruction and the process of production. The text to be reconstructed or produced should express all aspects of the intricate meanings (explicit and implicit) manifested in the original. The effect of translation on both languages is summed up by Barhoudarov as follows:

Translation into the mother tongue appears, in the first place, to be one of the means in developing skills of understanding, perception of foreign speech (oral, in case of translation by ear, and written, if translation of a written text is meant). As far as translation into a foreign language is concerned, it is, first of all, a means of developing speech habits, that is a synthesis of foreign speech (again, of oral and written speech respectively) [9].

The issue of using translation as a means of teaching a foreign language remains a controversy. Some believe that translation could be utilized as a means of developing language competency within learners, others have some suspicion about this. Andrzej

summarizes these for and against arguments on the use of translation by saying that translation should not be used in foreign language teaching because it causes language interference [10]. Translation can inhibit thinking in the foreign language and can produce compound bilingualism rather than coordinate bilingualism. Besides, using translation in foreign language teaching can interfere in attaining automatic habits. It also makes the learner assume that there is one-to-one-correspondence of meaning between native language and foreign language. Using translation directs the learner's attention to the formal properties of foreign language items rather than their communicative functions.

From an opposite perspective, translation is extremely important for foreign language teaching simply because it allows conscious learning and control of the foreign language, and as a result, it reduces native language interference. It is to be noted here that conscious learning does not preclude automatic habits. Car-driving and tying a tie can be thought of as an example. Using translation can make learning meaningful because the learner is an active participant in the process. Learning a foreign language is not like acquiring the native language.

In learning a native language, the learner is there to fall back on prior knowledge. Such knowledge is extremely important in learning new knowledge. Here, one has to assume that the learner makes use of the prior knowledge that exists within him and that there is a process of mental translation going on throughout the process of language learning. It could be, in this respect, that the use of translation is helpful even more for advanced learners. For beginners, of course, it is useful simply because it expounds grammar and teaches vocabularies.

It should be noted that the above pro or against arguments for using translation have been made by different scholars such as translation practitioners, linguists, psycholinguists, sociolinguists, etc. Those scholars have more likely linguistic and behavioristic backgrounds. However, one attraction towards using translation as a means of teaching foreign language has to do with the teacher, and that is, whether or not the teacher wants language learners to use translation for learning a foreign language. Teachers and, university professors in particular, know this fact very well. They know, whether they like it or not, that language learners indirectly and unconsciously use the translation method for learning a language. Harris claims that a child is conscious of his bilingualism and freely switches from one language to another while learning a language. Harris calls this "natural translation", i.e., translation which is done by people who have had no special training in translation. This kind of language learning led Harris to believe that translation is co-extensive with bilingualism [11].

Other studies have touched upon the subject of translation and bilingualism, indicating that from the earliest stages of bilingualism, the two languages are compounded. That is, they are made up from one another. Therefore, avoiding native language interferences while learning a foreign language is almost impossible [10 -12].

### Strategies in Foreign Language Learning

There are of course strategies in which learners can benefit from and learn a foreign language and communicate with it effectively. One of these strategies is called "code-switching." According to Bolinger and Sears, code-switching is a linguistic behavior in which speakers may switch between one language and another; it also means switching between standard forms and regional forms of the same language [13]. Code switching is mixed discourse. That is, when a word or phrase is used occasionally in a host language, the user is inserting that word or phrase in his native language to become as part of his way of using his own language.

Foreignizing is another strategy used in foreign language learning, namely the invention or creation of a word or phrase that does not exist in the learner's second language, particularly when applying his native language morphology of second language lexical items. Transliteration and interlingual transfer are other strategies used in learning a foreign language. According to Bialystok and Forlich, transliteration is a literal rendition of the native language word or phrase [14]. As for interlingual transfer, Faerch and Kasper suggest that interlingual transfer is rewording the text and interpreting verbal signs by means of some other languages [15]. Interlingual transfer has to account for total and full translation.

There are common questions that should be asked when considering the role of translation in foreign language teaching. These questions are represented in the type of translation, the function of translation, for whom we translate, and at which phase of language should we introduce translation. First of all, according to Andrzej, interlingual translation is the type of translation that should be fully taken into account in teaching translation for the purpose of learning a foreign language [10]. In this approach, translation is looked upon as a series of operations of which the point of departure and the end product are functions within a given culture. Interlingual transfer of information has to account for total and full translation. Total or full translation refers to the translation of language at all levels. It should not be restricted to some partial analysis or analysis at some specific levels. Although the word-for-word translation and the grammar-translation methods are the earliest type of translation, one should note that interlinear translation is used in the grammar-translation method, whereas word-for-word and literal translation are used in contrastive analysis.

As for the function of translation, it is to be remembered that expounding and interpreting a text is not only a matter of providing equivalence but, in fact, it is a translation of the grammatical and lexical aspects of the text. For example, at the phonological level, students should be made aware of the different and similar sounds between the two languages, the native language (NL) and the foreign language (FL). In Arabic, for example, there are [c], [kh], [h], and [gh] that are glottal and palatal sounds that do not exist in English and are pronounced with difficulty by non-native speakers of Arabic. At the same time, other sounds such as [a], [b], [d], [e], [f], [j], [t], [s], [z],

[m], [n], [k], [l], and [r], among other sounds, are pronounced the same in English. Therefore, making students aware of the two phonological systems of the two languages is extremely significant and undoubtedly useful. It is indeed useful in the sense that it makes them familiar with the different pronunciations of the sounds of the two languages

The other translation approach through which students can learn a foreign language is the semantic approach. Semantics, in its simplest form, is defined as the study of meaning [16]. Through semantics, students become acquainted with the relations connecting between sentences compared with equivalent sentences in their native language. They also become acquainted with the fact that the vocabulary of a particular language is not simply a listing of independent items, but is organized into areas or fields with which words interrelate and define each other in different ways [13]. Furthermore, semantization of foreign language meanings is known to be the oldest uses of translation [10]. That is, teachers within this field are mainly concerned with translating words, phrases and sentences into the native language to explicate their meanings. This approach was developed later as the contrastive linguistic approach by Fries [17], Lado [18] and later by Stockwell and Bowen [19], Di Pietro [20], Fisiak (et al). [21] and James [22]. Fries, cited in Andrzej, states:

The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner [10].

Along the same line, Kulwein, Wilss and Thome suggest that one of the important techniques of comparing between two languages is translation [23]. Although contrastive linguistics has been through its ups and downs, it has become an established science and a necessary component in preparing teaching materials. Even nowadays, according to Andrzej, it is hard to find a pedagogic grammar which would not make contrastive statements [10].

Furthermore, translation has also been used to teach grammar [24]. Here, teachers can show students equivalent and non-equivalent structures. For example, the sentence *Adam goes to college* can be explained in terms of its grammatical equivalents. *Adam* is equivalent to *fa'il* (subject) as in English and *goes* can be explained in terms of its grammatical equivalent *fi'l*, (verb) and *to college* can be explained in terms of its grammatical equivalent *jar wa majroor* (prepositional phrase). In terms of non-equivalent structures, the focus in the sentence *Adam is a good student* should be on comparing adjectives.

In English, adjectives proceed nouns (as S+V+ADJ+N) whereas in Arabic, adjectives follow nouns (as S+V+N+ADJ). Making students aware of these grammatical structures will benefit them significantly in understanding both foreign and native languages.

Translation has also been used for teaching the lexis of a foreign language. Lexis is used here in a variety of technical phrases. It could incorporate a unit of vocabulary (lexical item or lexeme) or a complete inventory of lexical items of a language (lexicon). It could also incorporate items that are cited in a lexicon as a set of lexical entries [25].

As for the translation method of teaching a foreign language lexis, Marton suggests that an example of translation as an important factor in teaching lexis is the teaching of what is called conventional syntagms at an advanced level of learning [26 - 27]. Syntagms are words that are bound in collocation relationships. He rightly states that the problem of learning new vocabulary items at the advanced level is not learning the items themselves, but it is the conventional collocation, which they enter. In a foreign language, there are fixed expressions which are different from expressions in the native language. They differ in the fact that their meanings are conclusive from their component parts. For example, in English, one can say *fish and chips* as an English collocant whereas the expression itself cannot collocate in Arabic. That is, in Arabic, *fish* does not collocate with *chips*. The expression *khobz and malh* (bread and salt) are an Arabic collocant but not in English, as *bread* does not collocate with *salt*. These collocations and their importance can be put in focus through translation.

It is to be noted that translation can also develop language skills at an advanced level. In an experimental project conducted at Poznan University, Poland, Skowronski confirms that student groups at the English Department that were trained by translation techniques had better results in developing the skills of speaking and writing than the groups that did not use translation techniques. This shows that using translation is indeed significant in the teaching of foreign language skills [10 -12].

### Conclusion

This paper has argued that translation is an important technique in learning or teaching a foreign language. Marton, cited in Fisiak, suggests that the native language of the learner should be treated as an ally in the process of foreign language teaching [21]. It should also consciously be used instead of being ignored and avoided at all costs. Along the same line, Bouton argues that by applying translation consciously and systematically, learners can be conditioned to monitor their own code switching [28]. Therefore, translation can be like medicine, which, when administered in the right dose and way, has a curative effect, and otherwise, when used injudiciously, it can also prove harmful. In other words, by using translation, teachers do not invite interference indeed, but is done in order to overcome it and to create, using medical parlance again, anti-interference immunity and resistance.

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## الترجمة وتدرّيس وتعلم اللغة الأجنبيّة

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ملخص البحث. تنطلق هذه الدراسة من فرضية مفادها أن الترجمة يمكن أن تستخدم لتدرّيس وتعلم اللغة الأجنبيّة، شريطة اتباع الطرق والوسائل المناسبة والمؤثرة في عملية التدرّيس والتعلم. ورغم وجود الجدل حول فاعليّة أو عدم صلاحية استخدام الترجمة كوسيلة لتدرّيس اللغة الأجنبيّة، إلا أن هناك دراسات وصفية وتحليلية تبين مدى أهميّة استخدام الترجمة كوسيلة لتعلم اللغة الأجنبيّة. لذلك، فإن هذه الدراسة تدعو أولئك الذين يعتقدون بأنه لا يمكن استخدام الترجمة لتعلم اللغة الأجنبيّة، لإعادة النظر في الإسهامات التي يمكن للترجمة أن تقدمها في مجال تدرّيس أو تعلم اللغة الأجنبيّة.