



## The concept of translation in different teaching approaches and methods

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### ABSTRACT

In these days, nobody can ignore the importance of communication. In recent years, international communications grow up increasingly; hence, translation plays a major role in transferring ideas and communication. Translation is a tool through which a language with a different representation of elements and rather similar meaning is converted into a language of different representation of forms, but still with rather the same concepts and meanings. In this descriptive study, the researcher attempted to investigate the concept of translation in different teaching methods and approaches. To achieve this purpose, the status of translation was investigated in the most popular and prevalent teaching methods and approaches such as Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method or natural approach, and Audio-Lingual Method. Result showed that despite the wide spread popular assumption that translation should play a major part in the study of foreign language, twentieth-century theories of language teaching and learning have at best ignored the role of translation, and at worst vilified it. With regard to the crucial role that translation plays in effective communication, transferring ideas, and conveying culture; the teachers should not ignore the major role that translation can play in learning foreign language.

### Original Article:

*Received 5 Ago. 2014*

*Accepted 11 Oct. 2014*

*Published 30 Mar. 2015*

### Keywords:

Communication, Translation, Teaching methods

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, nobody can ignore the importance of communication. Therefore, the need for communication caused people to show an interest in foreign language learning. We use language to transfer ideas and communicate with each other in spoken and in written. In recent years, international communications grow up increasingly; hence, translation plays a major role in transferring ideas and communication. The major task of language is meaning, and in translation meaning is central. According to Sewell (1996), Translation is the process in which one transfers a word, segment or text from one language into another, going beyond mere words; it includes interlinguas relationships, cultural differences - and when spoken, body language - in order to eventually transfer the source text's message in the target language. Translation is a tool through which a language with a different representation of elements and rather similar meaning is converted into a language of different representation of forms, but still with rather the same concepts and meanings. Venuti (1995, p.17) contends that: "Translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers constitutes the source language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation".

As Hervey (1995, p.20) states, One of the most important aspect of translation, requiring careful and skillful handling, is that translation is "not just a convey of information between languages, but a transfer from one culture to another". In another study, Mirhadi (1991, p.23) holds that "translation is a two way process from one culture to the other, and from one culture into one's own culture". The main goal of translation is to serve as a cross-cultural

bilingual communication vehicle among people. In the past few decades, this activity has improved due to the rise in international trade, increased immigration, globalization and the expansion of technological and scientific knowledge. With regard to the crucial role that translation plays in communication and conveying culture, understanding the concept of it in different teaching approaches is of paramount importance. Therefore, this study is taken up to investigate the concept of translation in different teaching methods and approaches.

### 2. Review of related literature

The term translation itself has several meanings: It can refer to the general subject field, the product (the text has been translated) or the process (the act of producing translation, otherwise known as translating). The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL) (Munday, 2001). Translation can be seen as an art, where although translators use words as a tool, mood and personality may reflect the translator's choice. It can also be presented as a teachable craft and although it is closely related to language learning itself, it is a distinct and separate skill (Azizinezhad, 2007).

#### 2.1 Translation and language

There are certain characteristics of language which have very direct bearing on principles of translation. First, it is characteristic of meaning components that meaning components are "packaged" into lexical items, but they are packaged differently than in another. The study of any dictionary will indicate the amazing "packaging" of meaning components in lexical items. Second, it is

characteristic of language that the same meaning component will occur in several surface structure lexical items (forms). Third, it is further characteristic of language that one form will be used to represent several alternative meanings. Most words have more than one meaning. There will be primary meaning—the one which usually comes to mind when the word is said in isolation—and secondary meaning is the additional meaning which a word has in context with other words. Fourth, whole sentences may have several functions. A question form may be used for a non question. Fifth, one form may express a variety of meanings and single meaning may be expressed in a variety of forms. Each language has its own distinctive forms for representing meaning. Therefore, in translation the same meaning may have to be expressed in another language by a very different form. (Larson, 1984).

### **2.2 Translation and formulaic language**

Collocations, fixed expressions, lexical metaphors and idioms can all be considered as examples of formulaic language (Howarth, 1998; Wray, 1999), in which word strings occurring together tend to convey holistic meanings that are either more than the sum of the individual parts, or else diverge significantly from a literal, or word for word meaning and operate as a single semantic meaning (Gairns and Redman, 1986, p.35). The nature of formulaic language makes resistant to literal translation; the target language may not use lexical formulas that are directly equivalent to those used by the source language to express the same meanings, or at least not with the same frequency. Thus a literal translation of formulaic language may at best sound unusual or marked in the TL, or else fail to convey one or more of the intended dimensions of meaning.

### **2.3 Translation in the foreign language classroom in the past**

#### **2.3.1 The Grammar Translation Method of foreign language teaching**

The Grammar Translation Method was implemented in the latter part of the nineteenth century as a method of teaching a foreign language (Howatt, 1984) for westerners interested in learning classical languages, such as Greek and Latin (Brown, 2000). Its aim was to teach students a foreign language using intense grammatical analysis and to familiarize them with the grammar of their native language and the foreign language, while introducing lists of vocabulary items in order to teach them to read and write classical materials in a foreign language and to pass standardized exams (Zimmerman, 1997). It was also believed that this comparative method of languages might have an effect on the students' comprehension of their native language. Students were given either literary or religious texts and with the help of a dictionary were required to translate the texts according to the grammar structures they had learned. Sometimes they were given isolated texts that had little purpose other than the task at hand – which was to compare grammatical structures and increase vocabulary.

The Grammar Translation Method was supported by the prestigious universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England, where it was believed that using translation as a method of language learning helped maintain the standard of foreign language learning and its place in the university curriculum (Zimmerman, 1997). On the other hand, an

argument against the Grammar Translation Method was presented by Halliday (1964, p.266) who states that presenting translation as a methodology to students who have not yet mastered the L2 is placing the unnecessary and perhaps stressful burden on the learner who has to learn "a whole new technique ... at the same time s/he is learning a new language." This method could possibly have tested what learners understood on a grammatical and lexical level, but it did not address aural, oral and written communicative skills, which were increasingly being recognized as necessary when learning a foreign language. Furthermore, the Grammar Translation Method proved insufficient in testing comprehension and it also provided little aid in developing techniques that could be transferred to other L2 texts (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). The skills required in the Grammar Translation Method were of limited use outside the formal classroom setting, and therefore gave way to newer language theories, such as the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, the Communicative Method and the Holistic Approach.

#### **2.3.2 Reform**

Interestingly enough, despite harsh criticism of the Grammar Translation Method, it was used well into the twentieth century as the principal method of foreign language instruction. Sweet (1899) began a reform of the Grammar Translation Method at the beginning of the twentieth century in which isolated sentences and words were avoided and only following a complete study of a text would grammar structures or vocabulary items be addressed.

When the need for communication between European countries became greater, adults began to show an interest in foreign language learning. The Grammar Translation Method was ill-suited for adults as they were less inclined to accept this type of language learning without question. The reform, beginning towards the end of the nineteenth century as a reaction to the Grammar Translation Method, was based on the following principles (Malmkjaer, 1998):

1. The importance of speech.
2. The importance of relevant texts in teaching and learning.
3. Prioritizing oral classroom methods.

#### **2.3.3 The Natural or Direct Method**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Natural Method was introduced, (also known as the Conversation Method, the Direct Method or the Communicative Approach), which had a negative effect on the popularity of the Grammar Translation Method. It was believed that language was intuitive, and that people had a natural capacity for it, provided it was taught under the proper conditions, not in a step-by-step manner, following graded syllabuses or complicated explanations and exercises (Howatt, 1994, pp.198-201). The Natural or Direct Method forbade any translation whatsoever, and discouraged teachers from using the mother tongue of the pupils, even minimally (Zimmerman, 1997). This method was widely practiced and applied by Maximilian Berlitz (1852 – 1921), when he opened language schools all over the United States, to teach immigrants basic means of communication that they needed in order to get ahead in a foreign country and become assimilated, using the same methodology in sixteen different

schools in the United States and 30 schools in Europe. Berlitz's explicit instructions to the teacher were that under no circumstances could translation be considered a method of teaching, nor should L1 be used in the classroom.

Lado (1964) and Gatenby (1967) discuss translation as a skill that can be taught, while Harris and Sherwood (1978) relate to it as a natural skill of some bilinguals. Lado (1964) believed that good translation could not be achieved without complete mastery of the L2. He advocated becoming proficient in the second language and then teaching translation as a separate process. He also believed that understanding one's native culture would facilitate understanding a foreign culture, which is necessary when learning the intricacies of translation. Gatenby (1967), comparing the way children acquire language naturally and the way foreign languages are taught, stated that when a language is learned intuitively, there is no process of translation per se. Intuitive translation that does not involve a process can result in L1 interference (Brini, 2000). Malmkjær (1998) supports this and adds that in order to translate one needs to master both L1 and L2 but "clearly (translation) involves something in addition...namely the ability to relate the two (language) systems to one another appropriately, thus minimizing negative interference while maximizing positive interference when selecting the most appropriate translational equivalents."

Reasons not to use translation as a means of teaching a foreign language included the following arguments (Newson, 1998):

1. Translation is a separate skill, and is independent of the four skills that define language proficiency: reading, writing, speaking and listening.
2. It is fundamentally different from the above four skills.
3. Teaching translation uses valuable time that could be otherwise utilized to teach these four skills with other language learning methods.
4. It is unnatural.
5. It erroneously makes students believe that languages correspond on a one-to-one basis.
6. It prevents students from thinking in the L2.
  7. It produces L1 interference.
  8. It is a poor test of language skills.
9. It should be only used in training professional translators.

#### **2.3.4 The Audio-Lingual Method**

In spite of the negative attitude towards the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual and Cognitive Methods showed support towards using translation in an EFL classroom. Advocates of these methods were followers of Skinnerian behaviorist psychology, popular between 1930 and 1950, believing that learning occurs in the Stimulus-Response Reinforcement chain, meaning that if we want our students to respond in a certain way to a foreign language (e.g. English), the stimulus must be in that (foreign) language (Zimmerman, 2006).

#### **2.4 For and against translation**

According to Chellapan (1982), we should not simply eliminate 'translation' but we should absorb translation into a larger creative process of learning. He points out:

Translation can make the students come to closer grips with the target language. A simultaneous awareness of two media could actually make the student see the points of convergent

divergence more clearly and also refines the tools of perception and analysis resulting in divergent thinking. (p.60)

Duff (1989) further points out that translation help us to understand the influence of one language on another. Fully aware of the interference, students will try to avoid making such errors when performing in a second language. When errors do occur, the students will be able to explain why and try not to make the same mistakes again.

Cook (1992) also found that second language learners use their L1 processing L2. Her idea that an instructor must not separate the L1 from L2, but instead should make uses of the L1 while instructing the students. Urgese (1989) states that translation can be used as a good way to teach and test comprehension, especially of the main ideas within the text. According to Weschler (1997), most arguments against translation fall into one of the following areas:

-thinking in mother tongue inhibits thinking directly in the target language. The main objection to translation as a teaching device has been that it interposes an intermediate process between the concept and the way it is expressed in the foreign language, thus hindering the development of the ability to think directly in the new language (Rivers & Temperly, 1978). This intermediate process, with its occasional misapplication of L1 rules to the L2, is sometimes referred to as interference.

-too much reliance on the first language will result in fossilization of an interlanguage.

-too use of first language waste too much valuable time that would be better spent on the target language.

Gower and Walters (1983) "Teaching Practice Handbook" describes translation as "a dangerous habit for the students to be encouraged into" because they say, "there are numerous occasions when seemingly obvious structural and lexical equivalences are used differently in an English-speaking context" (p.67).

### **3. Discussion**

As mentioned before, translation plays a major part in communication. Therefore, it was supported and advocated in some teaching approaches and methods. On the other hand, in some methods it was rejected as well. One of the methods which strongly used translation was the Grammar Translation Methods (GTM). Students were given either literary or religious texts and with the help of a dictionary were required to translate the texts according to the grammar structures they had learned. According to Zimmerman (1997), in this method it was believed that using translation as a method of language learning helped maintaining the standard of foreign language learning and its place in the university curriculum. Moreover, Lado (1964) and Gatenby (1967) discuss translation as a skill that can be taught.

Halliday (1964, p.266) on the other hand, argues against GTM that presenting translation as a methodology to students who have not yet mastered the L2 is placing the unnecessary and perhaps stressful burden on the learner who has to learn "a whole new technique ... at the same time s/he is learning a new language." Newson (1998) brought reasons for rejecting to use translation as a means of teaching a foreign language as mentioned above.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sweet (1899) began a reform of the Grammar Translation Method. According to Malmkjaer (1998), because of the importance of speech and the greater need for communication, the reform was a reaction to GTM and against the translation. Following the reform and at the beginning of the 20th century, the Natural Method was introduced which had a negative effect on GTM. This method forbade any translation and discourages teachers to use it. Weschler (1997) states that thinking in mother tongue inhibit thinking directly in the target language.

On the other hand, the Audio-Lingual and Cognitive Methods despite the negative attitudes towards GTM supported the use of translation in EFL classroom. Advocates of these methods believed that the stimulus must be in foreign language that students could respond in a certain way. As Duff (1989) points out, translation helps us to understand the influence of one language on another. According to Chellapan (1982), translation should not be eliminated but it should be absorbed into a larger creative process of learning and it can make the students come to closer grips with the target language.

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite the wide spread popular assumption that translation should play a major part in the study of foreign language, twentieth-century theories of language teaching and learning have at best ignored the role of translation, and at worst vilified it. From the turn of century onwards, almost all influential theoretical works on language teaching have assumed without argument that a new language (L2) should be taught without reference to the student's first language (L1).

Needless to mention that most modern and so-called innovative methods have their roots in the former traditional or old-fashioned methodologies; however, these new approaches have often resulted in throwing out well-established procedures instead of rethinking them. It may be some comfort for the experienced teacher to be aware that yesterday's 'old-fashioned' method has come back, albeit in a slightly different form.

Teachers need to know how to deal with the problems, as well as the advantages that translation can bring to learning. The main point; however, is the recognition that translation can help the learner by the attempts to clarify meaning. It is now seen to be a positive teaching/learning resource and not as an obstacle, or only a negative means that produces more errors and distracts the learner from developing L2 through L2.

Using translation as part of foreign language teaching can provide foreign language learners with the tools necessary to improve their understanding of and mastery over each of the two linguistic systems by investigating the relationship between them (Abdrabou, 2003). Each foreign language student becomes proficient at a different rate during his/her foreign language education, having an effect on the level at which they could possibly become proficient in translation. As a consequence, the teachers should not ignore the major role that translation can play in learning and effective communication.

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