

Didactics of Translation: Teaching Translation between Competence, Proficiency, and Performance

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Résumé

Traditionally, both the learning and teaching of language were based upon the bottom-up skill in language reception and production. Likewise, translating has been taught through following the same pattern. Here, the content is not preserved even if the surface structure of the target text is preserved. For the sake of removing the ambiguity that surrounds the didactics of translation, this paper focuses on the methods used in teaching translation, the best seen method of teaching nowadays, the teaching of literary translators and the issues that stand in front of the teaching of translation.

Introduction

Translation has always been defined as the rendering of one text from one language to another, i.e., from the source language to the target language. In this respect, translation relies on the knowledge of the translator (novice or pro) of two languages and sometimes more. For that, teaching translation has been strongly related to the methods of language teaching and learning. For a long time, the act of learning was seen as a bottom-up skill, i.e., learning starts by memorizing minimal elements like phones and morphemes till reaching the sentence which is an upper limit. As a result, translation was taught on this basis; understanding the content and the form of the source text and trying to transfer them in a linear sequence linguistically to equivalent target text forms. The content does not change from one language to another because it reflects the same meaning.

However, the main issue rises from the point of saying that in order to preserve the content of the source language and to transmit it faithfully, the surface structure of the ST should be imitated by the translator in the TT. For that, it was assumed that translation should preserve both the form and the content which makes a big difference between theory and practice. Moreover, in order to solve this issue, linguistic theorists have defined translation in terms of contextual similarity of content between the source language and the target language. In fact, the text is produced for specific audience and specific recipients and for a specific context which embraces different elements such as; situation, communicative function, addressor (producer), addressee (recipient) etc. Thus, translation is no longer considered as a rendering of linguistic elements from one language to another, rather, it is the production of a target text which can function in a different context for different recipients within another culture. In this respect, we shall focus on the functional approach and didactics of translation, designing a course of translation, training translators, and the methods which are of a great importance in teaching translation.

1. The Functional Approach and Didactics of Translation From the perspective of translation teaching, the functionalist approach sees translation as an act of intercultural communication rather than the transference of minimal linguistic units. They also argue that translation is taught/learnt on the basis of linguistic exercises which are the starting point towards a cultural competence in knowing how to deal with source and target contexts. In addition, the functional approach is not related to specific language pairs. It starts from general procedures of text reception and production in a primary culture and its language.

Cultural competence should be acquired as part of the translator's training because once functional skills are acquired they may be generalized to other cultures and languages as it becomes a common experience for the translator. This is mainly done by comparing the different contexts of situations of the primary and secondary cultures and languages. These comparisons go beyond the methods of contrastive linguistics. Once this competence is acquired, the translator passes by comprehension and production exercises which may be done by specifying a given task in one culture and trying to produce a corresponding text in another. Konigs (1987) states that there are five hypotheses in order to explain the comprehension of translation. The most important ones here are: (a) Understanding the intention of the text. (b) activating the new acquired knowledge and (c) activating the affective feeling towards a specific text. Konigs (1987) adds that there are two types of processing in the act of comprehending which are: (a) The bottom-up process in which the translator tries to comprehend the words as single units, and (b) the top down process in which the translator searches for connections. Comprehension and production exercises try to make the students able to acquire the translational competence which allows them to reproduce the text's meaning orally through using the thinking-aloud method, a variation of the former to write down a protocol about the given translation task, and class discussion about the overall feeling about texts, then by writing it then correcting the product when revising it and here the translator applies the skills he learnt in technical writing. So, the text design goes from translation to interpretation. Thus, it is quite common for the course of translation to start with exercises written in translation, and transforming the surface structure of a written source text as closely as possible into a written target language. This

is followed by oral interpreting. Here, the translator is caught in the trap of searching for the equivalent words in the target language rather than trying to get the gist of the source text in order to convey its meaning to the target language readership.

In the functional mode of teaching, the different components of a course are offered as units to the students which allow them to choose their sequence. Hence a course in a specialized subject such as economics or law is offered at the same time and it provides the student with the necessary information at least in one specialized subject. In addition to some expertise which the translator uses for a given purpose in a specific field. For that, the aim of the translation course is to teach functional problem solving. For instance, if the surgeon knows how to do a surgery, the translator should know how the surgeon talks about doing a surgery.

The main aim of the translation course is teaching functional problem solving in receiving and producing a text. The role of the teacher here is to suggest strategies, discusses expected results, and evaluates both individual research and team-work. From this the teacher can know that not all texts can be covered by a course. So, teaching is generally based on choosing examples from professional contexts to cover students' selected fields. Teaching translation through this framework is the fulfillment of a functional task which is provided by a delegate. The translator is assumed to be an expert in intercultural communication. He analyses the delegate's aim, expectations, and working conditions and acts as a cultural advisor. Such conversations are mimicked in the classroom environment.

2. English Language Production

According to Breen (1985: 60) “*one of the main authentic activities within a language classroom is communication about how best to learn to communicate*”. This implies that the most important activity in the classroom is learning how to communicate perfectly and in the appropriate way. In reality, language is recognized to be an integral part of establishing dialogues and communicating between nations and peoples for mutual benefit in economy and security. Kramsch (1993) has written that every time we speak we perform a linguistic and a cultural act which implies that culture is embedded within the spoken language. Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) argue that the communicative approach to language teaching has failed to explicitly focus on the socio-cultural supporting of language. Hence, someone whose social identities include being 'a translation teacher' will have acquired the knowledge, values, and behaviors shared with other teachers through a process of socialization since an intercultural speaker as well as a translator needs some knowledge to deal with the different contexts he finds himself in or he encounters in his life especially when dealing with two different languages and trying to render one text from the source language to the target language. As a result, the translation teacher who has the communicative competence needed for presenting his course will be able to transmit this faculty to his students in one way or the other.

For the sake of developing student's ability to communicate effectively and their awareness toward translation, recognizing the following aims should be involved:

- To give learners intercultural competence and enable them to translate as well as providing them with linguistic competence;

- To prepare them for interaction and expose them to others' cultures in order to be able to deal with different texts belonging to different fields;
- To enable them understand texts from other registers reflecting others' cultures; and
- To help them see that dealing with new registers is an enriching experience as it makes them able to acquire new vocabulary and new ways of translating.

3. Characteristics and Features of Translation Courses

One thing that should not be forgotten in presenting Translation courses is the organization of courses since there should be different curriculum with different types of exercises and different materials.

The organization of the Translation course is very important because it is the key factor which leads to achieve a satisfying goal in the course. There are many factors playing a great role in organizing a translation course. In fact, the teacher should be aware of the specific purpose for which English is learnt. The teacher should be aware of the answer of questions such as; what does the student need to learn? What aspects of language are going to be needed and how they are going to be described? (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992: 19, 22). Hutchinson and Waters (1992: 22) speak about "learning theory" which provides the theoretical basis for the methodology, by helping us to understand how people learn. Hutchinson and Waters (1992) focused on another aspect which discusses questions such as; 'who', 'why', 'where', and 'when' and their relation with the nature of particular learning situation and target. These are described as 'needs analysis'. In order to organize the course effectively and achieve the intended goals, three steps such as the following should be followed.

A. Selecting Material

The choice of materials in translation determines the running of the course and highlights the content of the lesson. Materials can be an introduction into the new learning techniques and help teachers and learners during the process of learning. Teachers determine which aspects of translation learning will be taken into account. Yet, only one piece of material can serve for developing more than one skill, e.g. reading, listening, vocabulary etc. Materials should also function as a link between already learnt (‘existing knowledge’) and new information. (Hutchinson and Waters, 1992).

B. Types of Activities with Texts

As a learning tool, texts can be used as a material for practicing a wide range of skills. The translation course may develop different skills in the learners such as communicative and reading skills and vocabulary. To make the working with a text as more effective as possible, the focus should be on all students’ skills. Thus, using productive and receptive such as providing students with audio-tape and video-tape while working with printed texts is a good method of work because it helps them acquire new information about the new learnt theme and enables them dig deeper in their minds to find exact equivalents for the text they want to render from English into Arabic.

C. Creating a Learning Environment (Motivation)

This criterion is very important. For that, creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom is the primary factor which will help in achieving the setting objectives. Creating a pleasant atmosphere is directly related to motivation which is a very crucial part of students’ work since it affects their future negatively or positively. Harmer describes motivation

as “some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action” (Harmer, 1991: 14). Students should be motivated as much as possible in order to, achieve the real aim of the activities.

4. The Role of Translation Teacher

Translation is taught in many universities of the world such as any professional associations of teachers of English. Much attention is devoted to translate on Didactics and translation courses and design. Translation teaching has much in common with English as a foreign or Second Language and English for Academic purposes (EAP) yet the teacher is going to be a bilingual or a multilingual teacher. As a result, he should know how to teach the English language (EAP) in relation to English for Specific Purposes, i.e., the specificities of the different registers, and the methods used in rendering a given text from one language to another.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) prefer to name the teacher of ESP using the term “ESP practitioner” as this definition seems to be more detailed and complete. This definition applies also for the translation teacher. They distinguish the following key roles of ESP practitioner that maybe used also for a translation teacher (practitioner):

- Teacher
- Course designer and materials provider
- Collaborator
- Researcher
- Evaluator

The first role which the teacher of translation should play is ‘a teacher’ which is synonymous to that of the teacher of GE yet the methodology changes since here the purpose is more specific as it is related to creating a new version in another language. In Translation classes, the students are

the primary knowers of the content of materials not the teacher. In the first role played by the teacher, he should create a communicative atmosphere in the class based on the students' knowledge. In the second role, the translation teacher becomes a course designer and material provider; he prepares the courses and provides students with the materials needed for their studies. The teacher's task does not stop at providing students with printed texts, it exceeded that to the adaptation of published materials when they are not suitable. The third role is a collaborator. In this role the translation teacher, in order to meet the specific needs of the learners and adopt the methodology and activities of the target discipline, must first work closely with field specialists as discussed by Johns et al. (1988) because he is liable to deal with different specialized fields in his classes and to make students practise the amount of knowledge they have learnt in the theory of translation. After that, the teacher is likely to make a research in order to design the aim(s) behind his course in order to fulfill the students' needs. The role of the translation practitioner as a 'researcher' is especially important, with results leading directly to appropriate materials for the classroom. The last role is that of an evaluator. Evaluation is not new in the case of the translation teacher, but it is different in its importance because he should be involved in the testing of students and noticing the effectiveness of the teaching and the students' progress. In addition, the Practitioner of translation should evaluate the testing materials and the course aim which is related mainly to the grasping the theory and putting it into practice as a means to creating a new product in the target language after dealing with the translation process.

5. The Training of the Translation Teacher

Training the teachers is very important for translation courses as it enables them to meet students' needs. Thus, teachers should follow some steps about themselves.

a) Selection: The selection phase is very important because not all teachers are able to become a translation practitioner. Thus, it is worth selecting those who are willing to be translation practitioners.

b) Continuing personal education: Teachers should be well educated either in the courses of their studies when they were students in their fourth year (nowadays third year) or in their post graduate studies in their field of specialization, or simultaneously in their professional training.

c) General professional training as an educator and teacher: This step is related to all teachers since it deals with what all the teachers should know. Teachers should know the psychology and sociology of teaching and have an educational thought especially the role of syllabus and teaching materials and how to manage students' skills.

d) Special training as a teacher of a foreign or second language: This step makes the teachers understand the students' needs which is mainly important for the courses because it will be helpful to them.

6. Issues of the Teaching of English-Arabic-English Translation in Undergraduate Level

It is believed that professional translators need awareness, reflectiveness and resourcefulness, by which we mean:

a) (**Awareness**) of the translator that he should develop his critical thinking positively "not simply to look through language to the content of the message, but rather to see

through language to the ways in which messages are mediated and shaped”(Carter 1993: 142). For that, the translator must go beyond the sole words and texts, and dig deeper in order to see language as a network of connected permissible choices, which are affected by the culture they express, which is in turn influenced by them. As a result, awareness is the first phase that translators should follow towards a professional and ethical attitude towards their job, as learners to make them aware that they are not simply “trans-coders” who are constructing a puzzle where source words are substituted with target words, but constructors of meaning and mediators of culture.

b) (**Reflectiveness**) that it is important for a translator to develop the capacity to practice, store and use more or less specific strategies and procedures involved in translation. My impression is that there is no agreement yet as to what these may be. At the very basic level, text analysis, reading and writing procedures and strategies may be relevant. Project management and group work also have their supporters, and there is quite a large and varied literature on local translation strategies (cf. e.g. Chesterman 1998; Kussmaul 1995, and the literature on process-oriented translation research in general).

c) (**Resourcefulness**) that attention should be devoted to fostering the ability to exploit a number of resources indefinitely (competencies and capacities) to cope with new and unexpected challenges, and to acquire new resources autonomously, as the need arises.

7. Pedagogical Recommendations

Translation pedagogy is still in its infancy. It is in need of its substantial theorization. For that, the best way to teach undergraduate students to translate is to replicate a professional potential situation (Bernardini 2000). Learners

are not yet professionals, they do not have the same age and the same experience. Therefore, they may need to carry out such tasks and draw the lessons that the teacher expects them to draw.

By taking the focus on differences into account, negative stereotypes can be reinforced. A focus on similarities may help students identify with the otherness and promote understanding and empathy by the end. So, a teacher should try to design a series of activities to enable learners to discuss and draw conclusions themselves and solely from their own experience of the target culture as a result of what they have heard or read. The teacher might provide some factual information related to the life-styles current in the cultures and patterns usually followed by members of these cultures, which gives the learners the opportunity to compare their culture with what the teacher has provided them and as a result to become able when translating a text from one language to another. Thus, the important thing is to encourage comparative analysis with learners' own culture in order to learn more about the target culture and enhance the way they understand it. For example, foreigners' views about the learners' country as represented in travel guides or in tourist brochures might be compared with the learners' own experience and views about their own country; they will quickly discover that there is a difference. They can then be asked to think whether their perceptions of the foreign country will be the same as those of the inhabitants themselves or not. As a result, this helps them to acquire the culture of the language they want to translate into.

The teacher does not need to have experience or be an expert on the target culture. The teacher's task is to help learners ask questions, and to interpret answers. Thus, a non-

native speaker inferiority complex is only the result of misunderstanding and prejudice. What is more important than native speakers' knowledge is an ability to analyze since a specific training in systemic cultural analysis is of a great importance in becoming a foreign language or a translation teacher, regardless of the teacher's mother-tongue. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic competence and it may be important to follow the authority of the native speaker in linguistic competence, but intercultural competence is a quite different matter because it is also important as it helps the translator to deal with different types of texts in translation pedagogy (Byram, Gribvoka, & Starkey, 2002).

Conclusion

Translation teachers have a great role in developing the ability of students to see the world differently since their choice of words can affect students' way of learning to view others' cultures. This may be done through equipping students with the skills to interpret the language and cultural images which are experienced outside the classroom. Since translation, language teaching and learning develop critical thinking and learning, learners will be able to develop tolerance towards others and a better understanding of themselves. In short, Critical self reflection and analytical skills should be part of learning another language and its culture. In addition, it is the key to acquiring translation skills and to developing the production of both the source and the target languages.

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