

TRANSLATION AS A TEACHING METHOD IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TRAINING FUTURE TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

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Abstract

The article presents translation as a teaching method applied in learning foreign languages as well as a profession serving inter-lingual and intercultural communication. It substantiates the advantages of translation as a method in foreign language learning, yet considering also the arguments of the opponents of this method. Here translation is also viewed as the main method of training future translators and interpreters who benefit from other methods in the process as well. Thus, the author supports the integrated use of different methods including translation in foreign language learning and professional training as translators and interpreters.

Key words: translation, teaching method, foreign language learning, training translators/interpreters, interlingual communication

INTRODUCTION.

Translation performed pedagogically should be distinguished from translation professionally. We should consider translation as a teaching method versus translation as a means of interlingual communication.

In pedagogical terms, translation is a teaching method utilized either separately or integrated with other language tools in the acquisition of a foreign language. Here translation can be replaced by any other relevant method to teach the presented language material on the given theme. Translation in this particular case serves as a tool, whereas translation as a profession is performed to provide an interlingual and intercultural communication between the speakers of two different languages. Yet, as a trainer of translators or interpreters, we apply solely translation method in teaching how to translate which means we do not have to prove anyone the importance of translation as a method in training language specialists. On the other hand, translation as a language tool has been the subject of many debates since the mid-20th century which is due to the fact that the translation accompanied by grammar translation method was used in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries without having a strong rival, since the learning of languages in those centuries mostly involved Greek and Latin texts that were acquired through reading or writing and translating. Whereas, the situation in the second half of the 20th century changed in favour of a communicative teaching method, as the main goal of language learning switched from research and entertainment to practicing the language as a tourist or student, an immigrant in the country where that particular foreign language is spoken. Moreover, the communicative method favours a teacher of the foreign language who goes abroad and does not know the language of his/her students in a foreign country and thus has to resort to his/her own language in teaching it to them. Therefore, the opponents of the translation method brought forward the arguments that

- Translation is good only for reading and writing, real communication does not take place;
- Learners straddle between two languages;
- The time to be devoted entirely to the foreign language is divided between the foreign language and Language 1;
- Learners still think in Language 1 and the reformulation process takes time [3].

METHODOLOGY.

Our main goal at the Translation Faculty of our University being to train translators and interpreters, in our case without any hesitation we can continue our talk presenting the way we use translation to generate and develop translation skills in our professional courses. However, prior to coming to that point, we would like to emphasize the role of translation also in teaching languages.

Contrary to those who think that teaching a foreign language through translation delays the acquisition process, we are of the opinion that

- 1) In the process of presenting the new material, there are cases when translating a lexical unit or a grammatical structure we spend less time than when we try to communicate solely in the foreign language to explain the meaning of that particular unit or to show how that grammatical structure should be applied;

Through translation, learners are directly presented with the exact equivalents of lexical items. They can easily avoid the false friends of translators, such as the word “actual” in Azerbaijani is often misunderstood as “urgent” because of the word “актуальный” borrowed via Russian, whereas in English it means “real, true, genuine, etc.”.

- 2) In language acquisition, the presence of translation as a method, facilitates the comparison of a foreign language taught with the learners’ mother tongue. This way, the learners find out the differences between the two languages and the best solutions to the challenges rising from those differences.
- 3) The learners do not have to look up for the exact translation of the word when they encounter two or more meanings or homonyms and hesitate which is the very meaning. So, instead of giving the explanation of the meaning of the given word, the teacher can easily prompt to the learners the corresponding equivalent. For instance, the word “a chair” means a piece of furniture to sit on and also an administrative division at universities. In the first case, simply providing directly the Azerbaijani equivalent “stul”, the teacher will prevent a further confusion. Or we can consider the word “a ruler” and its two meanings in English ‘a person who rules, governs the country’ and ‘a tool wooden or plastic to measure the length of objects’. Naturally, when learners must work on the language material independently, they can integrate translation method with other tools, looking up for the meaning of that word in the same language and come to a certain decision. For example, if we look up in the dictionary for the meaning of the word “a stage” as a noun, we come across with the following,

stage

1. a point, period, or step in a process or development.

"There is no need at this stage to give explicit details"

2. a raised floor or platform, typically in a theater, on which actors, [entertainers](#), or speakers perform.

"There are only two characters **on stage**" [6].

In class or in written exercises by providing the translation of the word “a stage” as ‘a raised platform in the theatre’ (‘səhnə’), the teacher can avoid the confusion for a student who simply looks up for the word in a bilingual dictionary, and can save the time of the student who has to read all the explanations of the word in different meanings before giving its correct equivalent in the foreign language.

In my experience of teaching Azerbaijani, my mother tongue as a foreign language to American students in the intensive two-month course at Indiana University, the learners’ Language 1, i.e., English comes to my assistance, especially during the first 2 weeks of the introductory course to explain the vowel harmony and other specific grammar and phonetic rules of Azerbaijani so that learners focus on the differences and not confuse it with the way English functions in the similar situations. Also, at the beginning, all the written directions in the textbook are in Language 1, again in the case of the IU Summer Workshop, it is English. However, in the second month, which equals a semester, the outcomes and other explanations in the syllabus should be reflected in both the languages, that is in the taught language, along with their translation into English. As a co-author of the Introductory Azerbaijani textbook, which is under review for publication in the USA, we have been advised to provide separate words and phrases in Azerbaijani within the English directions for different activities in the textbook, like

Çalışma 14. (W) A. Look up the items in **Rüstəmin sinif otağı** and write a list of the items he has. Look up in a dictionary for any vocabulary that you do not know.

Məsələn: Rüstəmin **karandaşyonanı** (*pencil sharpener*) var.



B. (P) Working in pairs, take turns, asking one another if you have the same items that Rüstəm has.
Məsələn:

Sizin karandaşyonanız var? Xeyr, mənim karandaşyonam yoxdur.

Overall, translation comes to one's help, especially, at the beginning of a foreign language teaching, i.e. the first week or two weeks at the introductory level, and also at the advanced level of foreign language teaching when students are taught literature of that foreign language.

Although we are always advocating the principle that translation classes are aimed at developing translation and interpreting skills [2], that students should first acquire the advanced level in their future working languages, then get enrolled in translation programs, yet all translation/ interpreting classes also teach working languages in all their aspects. Moreover, they deal with the improvement of not one working language, but both of them within one class. Even when deciding in our curricular the sequential order of requisite, pre-requisite and post requisite translation courses, the level of language competence acquired in the first year at the University is taken into consideration. For example, we consider the sequence of 3 interpreting courses at BA level as follows:

Sight Translation => Consecutive Interpreting => Interpreting

As a prerequisite course Sight Translation prepares the students to genuine form of interpreting: Consecutive Interpreting. Yet the first stage of Sight Translation course requires the improvement of Reading skills learnt during the language courses. Strong skimming and scanning skills thus serve also the process of language learning. The acquisition of the delivery skill, one of the criterion to assess Sight Translation quality, serves to guide the future translators how to get rid of repetitions, long pauses, parasite words, unnecessary sounds like *hm*, *err*, etc. in their speech, how to prepare vocal cords through tongue-twisters, reciting poems before the interpreting process starts. For instance, when drilling some tongue-twisters, the learners gradually change their minds about the meaningless content of tongue-twisters, at least come to a conclusion that some old samples of them can even testify to the speakers' life-style, mentality existing in the ancient times when those tongue-twisters were created.

The sole transcripts of the speeches taken as a source need a comprehensive analysis before practicing how to interpret them. We usually resort to the speeches of political leaders and public speakers and work on the text from different angles. Thus, finding the most favourable variant from among different structures to interpret the given message, the usage of the most appropriate component from the range of synonyms, deciding on the exact register in translation all these link translator training to language learning process. The selected speech in a foreign language is often given as a home assignment with the purpose of drilling their interpreting skills as much as possible so that in class the student can interpret without consulting the transcript, vocabulary, etc. While studying the speech at home, students have to listen to it as many times as they need and this way they subconsciously acquire the speaker's idiolect, vocabulary and syntactic structure of his/her speech, which sets them free from the impact of the structure, style and vocabulary of their mother tongue when reformulating their speeches and translations in the foreign language.

We sometimes offer our students also back translation assignments, consequently, they can compare their back translation with the original document and see the differences in the structure and vocabulary of the two working languages. Additionally, when dealing with the texts in a foreign language, the listeners and readers are certainly exposed also to some cultural points unfamiliar to them from their own culture. After elucidating the intention of the author or speaker, the instructor can easily facilitate the students to find solutions including from among the resources of their own language. For example, when translating the famous speech "Tear down This Wall" delivered by the former US President Ronald Reagan at Brandenburg Gate, we came across with a statement "Wherever I go, I have a suitcase in Berlin". At first sight, it seems as if he had really left a suitcase behind in Berlin on his way to other places, to take care of when he travelled and got back to Berlin. But when considering the situation this

statement was first uttered and the reason why Mr. Reagan used it, we find a similar expression in Azerbaijani too which in literal translation means for me, all roads lead to Berlin, '*Haraya gedirəm sə, gedim, yolum Berlindən keçir*' [4]. Or while working on an assignment to interpret the former US President Obama's tribute to Nelson Mandela, we hear a word "Ubuntu" and no matter how much we try to express it in a word, we end in producing a long sentence to express the idea conveyed by this 6-letter word that all the human beings on the earth are bound to one another with invisible ties [5]. We come across many bright examples of the language use when we translate our President Mr. İlham Aliyev's speeches from Azerbaijani into English in our interpreting classes where we have long discussions how to convey the message behind his statements rich in cultural elements yet not to add or delete any primary information in them [1].

RESULTS.

Translation makes us go into depth of the language and culture and strive to detect the most appropriate target language equivalent or closest possible reformulation of the given phenomenon in the source text/speech.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion we can state that in teaching a foreign language we are in favour of reasonable uses of translation as a method along with some other tools, as

- Translation method is helpful especially at the initial stage as well as more advanced level. At the introductory level, because then the vocabulary is not rich enough in a foreign language to explain the given issue and at the advanced level because they can enrich their vocabulary taking into account the stylistic and register differences in the two languages, the learners can see which structures are better in expressing the given idea instead of providing a general message. Especially through the fiction translation, students can question the correct usage of words and phrases.
- Learners compare the structures and phonetics of the two languages and their conscious approach facilitates them to avoid mistakes related to differences between the two languages.
- Also, it is sometimes easier to give the equivalents of lexical units directly in Language 1 rather than explaining it in a foreign language which is more time consuming.

As for translation as the basic method used in training translators, translation courses are often appraised also by the graduates of the Translation Faculty as the genuine school of language learning too. Since, their outcomes in the end surpass in most cases those by their fellow students from other faculties.

All this, as stated above, is the proof that the translation courses apply translation method, yet we also integrate it in the process with some other language tools mainly used in learning languages. Likewise, language learning can also resort to translation for more effective outcomes.

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