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THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Abstract. Translation has always been one of the most important skills in a process of teaching and learning foreign languages. But today it gains some new aspects for its development. The article gives some arguments that translation is not just a skill to be learned but a useful language learning tool in the ordinary classroom.

Key words: translation, language teaching, language learning, language skills, language competence, translation skills, EFL teaching process.

Ключевые слова: перевод, обучение языку, изучение языка, языковые навыки, языковые компетентности, навыки перевода, обучение английскому как иностранному.

Nowadays it is impossible to think of a specialist that cannot speak at least one foreign language and cannot gain information from foreign sources, render it in his/her mother tongue and use it in his/her professional and scientific activities. With the increased mobility of people and goods in the modern world translation is practiced almost on daily basis. Many professionals often have to translate instructions and letters, look for information in foreign journals or in the Internet and translate it in the form of summary or produce it in their mother tongue just from a computer screen. These activities have become their daily work. So it is necessary to teach translation as an ability to decode a text in a foreign language with the purpose to elicit information.

Translation is usually defined as converting of expressions of a foreign language into that of a native language, or reverse. Another definition of translation is expressing the sense of words or text in another language. Based on the two definitions, for EFL learners, translation is a transfer between the first and the second language. The purpose of translation in the language classroom is not to

train professionals, but to help learners develop their knowledge of English. In other words, it is a means to an end, not an end to be achieved. However, some learners may become translators one day, and the basic knowledge of translation that they have gained in the classroom can serve as a solid ground for building up translation skills.

The present article aims to give some arguments that translation is not just a skill to be learned but a useful language learning tool in the ordinary classroom, a good way of teaching and testing comprehension especially of the main ideas within the text. The objectives of the paper are, firstly, to describe the translation activities which raise students' awareness of language use and, secondly, to examine the usefulness of translation in learning English.

Translation has always been the core of the controversies on whether it can be a valid and effective tool in foreign language teaching and learning. Until recently, translation was out of favour with the language teaching community. Translation as a language learning activity was considered as being unsuitable within the context of foreign language learning. It was criticized because of the close association with traditional grammar-translation method. Even today translation is often regarded as some kind of mechanical linguistic transfer of meaning from one language into 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 was considered as time-consuming, boring, and irrelevant. However, in the last few decades there has been an increasing interest in the translation practice in the foreign language classroom. Recently foreign language teachers have been reviving the translation usage for different learning purposes. It was observed that translation activity could be used for pedagogical purposes along with other traditional language teaching activities. Reading, grammar exercises, translation are in fact perceived by learners to be conducive to learning.

Translation plays a very important role in an increasingly globalizing world. Nevertheless, translation is perceived differently by linguists, methodologists and teachers. Its use in foreign language teaching provokes a great deal of disagreement and criticism.

The main reason for this is the fact that throughout the years a number of studies have been carried out, that have either favoured or completely ignored the use of translation as a learning method. Translation was considered as inefficient, unreliable and irrelevant. Some teachers objected to the use of translation in foreign language classes as they considered it to be text-bound and confined only to two skills – reading and writing. They did not regard it as a communicative activity because in their opinion it didn't involve oral interaction.

Nevertheless, there are some significant and visible signs of the revival of translation in language teaching. Many theorists, linguists, teachers agree on the importance of using translation in foreign language classes. For instance, C. Schaffner [7] claims that the translation and related exercises could be beneficial to foreign language learning:

1. To improve verbal agility.
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 in the process of becoming a form of “pedagogical translation”, which is no longer viewed as an ineffective tool in language learning and is evaluated as a way to enrich learners' competences. Students taught by using pedagogical translation method 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.

As a form of communication, translation involves interaction and cooperation between people, which makes it a very useful tool in foreign language teaching. Translation raises language awareness. While translating students are focused on identifying differences in structure and vocabulary of languages, 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.

The material for translation should be interesting and varied, expressive and related to the learners' knowledge. It must be authentic, diverse in terms of structure and function and must motivate students for exploring and experimenting with a language. It develops students' creative and critical thinking. Translation activities comprising innovative techniques such as brainstorming, problem solving, group discussion, and group assignments help students to move from lower order thinking to higher order thinking. The acceptance and usage of translation activities will assist the teachers and students to make the process of language learning worthwhile. The teacher's task is to assess students' needs and select material to illustrate particular aspects of the language and the structure which present difficulties for students in the English language.

Translation might provide a guided practice in reading. Before starting translating a text it should be read carefully and analyzed in detail to determine the contents in terms of what, how and why it is said. Careful text analysis improves students reading comprehension and promotes vocabulary development.

Translation can help students improve their writing skills because it is a transfer of a text from one language into another. As translation is regarded a communicative activity, it involves communication between the teacher and the student. Learners are encouraged to discuss rights and wrongs as well as problems

related to the translation task. On the one hand, students are involved in a conversation on the translation topic, which helps them strengthen their speaking skills. On the other hand, students are requested to talk to both the teacher and other learners, and through listening to both the lecturer and the students improve their listening skills.

According to V. Leonardi [5], translation as a pedagogical tool can be successfully employed at any level of proficiency, at school or University, as a valuable and creative teaching aid to support, integrate and further strengthen the four traditional language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. 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.

Moreover, translation activities need not be used in isolation, but should be included in an inherent part of the language learning course.

Translation activities have always been used in the English language learning classes at Kharkov University of Economics. The reason is to prepare the students to pass their final Bachelor language competence examination, during which examinees are required to translate a short text into their native language. Translation activities are used in the foreign language learning process to improve language skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. According to A. Duff [3], properly designed translation activities can be employed to enhance the four skills and to develop three qualities essential to all language learning: accuracy, clarity and flexibility. The purpose of translation activities is not to train

professional translators, but to help learners acquire and strengthen their knowledge in the English language. Integration with other activities takes various forms. On the one hand, translation activities are preceded by grammatical and lexical exercises to practice and eliminate certain difficulties that learners have. On the other hand, translation is a starting point for further oral practice.

Translation activities must be well-prepared. First of all, appropriate texts, interesting and relevant to the needs of the learners, are selected. While selecting the material, the potential for encouraging discussion is also very important. Texts intended for translation should lead to discussion. Pair and group work is effective as it gives students an opportunity to compare and discuss their ideas. Thus, all the students are equally involved in the task. Translation activities consist of pre-translation and post-translation exercises. Pre-translation activities are based on grammar and vocabulary practical tasks. Post-translating activities are focused on rewriting, revision and evaluating.

Distributing the text to students and telling your students to translate is not a good way to start a translation activity. Students should be instructed about the purpose of each assignment. They should know why the activity is done. Seeking to integrate translation and reading, first of all a discussion on the translation topic is initiated. Active words and terms and key words that appear in the text are explained in English and in the learners' native language. The students work in pairs. They read, translate and analyze the most complicated parts of the text. After having read the text, the learners are asked to do comprehension exercises, such as answering questions, identifying true or false statements, forming questions on the contents of the text. Finally, they have to write a summary which is also a very important activity. The students translate the text using a bilingual dictionary.

The activity at higher levels can focus on a specific aspect of grammar, for example, tense and time. This type of activity makes the learners concentrate on problematic areas and helps to notice the dangers of word for word translation.

All mentioned activities involve the translation of the text. This does not mean that the translation of sentences taken out of context is irrelevant to language learning. Translation of sentences can be used as a warm-up activity. It serves as an introduction to the material the students will be working on. This form of translation may be useful because it can be interactive, learner-centered; it promotes the learner's autonomy, and uses authentic materials.

In order to assess the benefit of translation activities in the English classroom, a survey was carried out in the form of a questionnaire. The sample consisted of 50 second year students from different faculties of the university. The students had English classes 6 hours a week and their level of language was different. The questionnaire consisted of 6 questions. The questions were mostly yes/no and multiple choice ones. All the questions were answered. The questionnaire return rate was good – all sheets were returned. The obtained data were analyzed and summed up. The results of the students' survey are discussed below.

When answering the question whether they assess translation as a learning method, 94% of the respondents considered translation to be a useful learning tool. Only 6% of the students doubted about the usefulness of translation tasks. The results show that most students are quite positive about translation activities.

The respondents were also asked to give their opinions on the effects of using translation activities to learn English. The results show that all the students perceive translation as an effective language learning activity. Translation activities were considered to be a positive learning recourse to understand the meaning, memorize the new words, acquire the English language skills, produce better sentences both in English and in their native language and develop interpersonal communication skills.

While most of the students perceived translation activities as being useful and important in their current learning process, only 86% of the respondents found it enjoyable.

When asked whether they thought they could make faster progress through other teaching tools, 45 students gave a negative answer and only 5 persons answered positively. Thus, almost all of the students believe that translation is an effective method to learn a language.

Analyzing the data of the survey where the learners were given a list of areas of language and asked to tick them according to whether or not they thought translation activities could help them improve skills in each of those areas, all the respondents answered that translation was a beneficial tool to learn vocabulary. 40% regarded this activity appropriate to improve speaking skills. 10% admitted that translation activities helped to improve their writing skills and 32% of them thought that translation tasks helped improve grammar. 14% of the respondents thought that by using translation exercises they improved their listening skills.

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked the students to assess how well translation activities helped them to prepare for their language competence examination. The data received show that translation activities offered excellent preparation for 20% of the respondents. The option “very good” was chosen by 42% of the respondents, “good” – by 36% of the respondents. The options “sufficiently”, “satisfactory” and “do not help” were not chosen at all. The results show that the overwhelming majority of the students believe that translation activities help them prepare for the English language examination.

Finally, when the respondents were asked to tick whether or not translation activities should be used in the language class room, 10% gave a negative answer and 90% answered positively. This means that translation is a useful learning tool and could be applied in the foreign language learning process. Most of the students gained the English language knowledge, developed skills in speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary, grammar and writing. Moreover, translation tasks taught the learners to work in groups and contributed to their preparation for the language competence examination.

In conclusion it may be said that translation activities are not only an efficient learning tool but also a useful teaching method. On the one hand, students use translation to facilitate their comprehension process and to reduce insecurity that arises from limited language proficiency. On the other hand, teachers use translation to consolidate what students have learned about the English language, such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and cultural aspects. If introduced purposefully and imaginatively into a language learning programme, translation becomes a suitable language practice method for many students. When integrated into daily classroom activities translation can help students develop and improve reading, speaking, writing skills, grammar and vocabulary. Translation in foreign language classes enhances better understanding of structures of the two languages and also strengthens students' translation skills. It is an effective, valid tool in the foreign language learning and can be used in the university classroom to improve knowledge in English.

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