The Revival of Translation as a Fifth Skill in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Review of Literature

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Abstract
With the advent of the monolingual principle entrenched by the Reform Movement of the late nineteenth century and exponents of the Direct Method, translation has been treated, for a long time, as a skeleton in the closet. Recently, however, many researchers (Witte, Harden & Ramos de Oliveira Harden, 2009; Cook, 2010; Leonardi, 2010; Malmkjaer, 2010) have questioned the outright dismissal of translation from the foreign language classroom and called for reassessing its role. Moreover, they welcomed it as a fifth skill alongside reading, writing, listening, and speaking that learners need in their learning and future careers. This paper argues for the rehabilitation of translation in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. It attempts to give a panorama of the revival of translation. So, it first reconsiders its dismissal in the method era and then it summarises the literature on its revival in the 21st century. The review of literature has revealed that the onslaught against translation was illegitimate and that the literature in favour of it is a reputable, a recent, and an abundant one.
Keywords: fifth skill, foreign language classroom, the revival, translation

Introduction

In the 21st century, innovative ideas have been applied to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. One prominent change is the revival of using translation in the foreign language (FL) classroom. So, after dismissing it for about one century without any clear convincing reasons (Cook, 2010), translation has assumed a comeback as a fifth skill in the 21st century (Witte et al., 2009, Leonardi, 2010) that learners need in their learning and future careers. This paper re-examines the role of translation in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. It first reviews the literature on how translation was rejected in the 20th century and then it summarises the literature in favour of its revival.

1. A Reconsideration of Translation in the Method Era: The 20th Century Revisited

With the advent of the monolingual principle entrenched by the Reform Movement of the late nineteenth century and exponents of the Direct Method, translation has been treated, for a long time, as a skeleton in the closet. However, reviewing the literature on the major trends in language teaching methodology during the 20th century, it became clear that the rejection of translation was

First, the main source of its rejection was the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) that reformers attacked in the late 19th century. Their views towards translation were, however, moderate and what they rejected, in fact, was the misuse and overuse of translation and first language (L1) in the GTM and not translation in its real sense (Howatt, 1984).

Second, the strong rejection of translation was by proponents of the Direct Method that emerged as a response to political, demographic, and commercial changes of that time (G. Cook, 2013). It also drew heavily on the work of Berlitz who rigidly banned translation in his private schools. However, it is important to note that Berlitz employed native-speaker teachers and that his classes were of students with different native languages and so, it was logical that there was no place for L1 and translation. So, reformers, who can be considered as applied linguists of their time (Cook, 2012), had an influence on the issue of translation and L1 but the Berlitz's method, one may say, was the major source of the onslaught on translation and L1 use.

Third, in spite of the fact that all theories of language and language learning are concerned with how first languages are learnt, they influenced language teaching practices during the 20th century (Van der Walt, 1992). However, some transmissions from linguistics to language teaching were not always valid and suitable to all contexts and learners and the ban on translation and L1 is case in point (Stern, 1983). They were, in fact, the product of a top down pedagogy to serve other political and commercial needs. There are many scholars (Wilkins, 1972; Cook, 2012) who criticised the way findings of linguistics were transmitted to language teaching by applied linguists without taking into consideration the roles of context, teachers' views, and learners' needs. Widdowson (2000) describes this model of transmission as 'linguistics applied'.

Furthermore, although in the 1960s and 1970s changes of views in linguistics and psychology created a climate for the revival of translation and L1 in the FL classroom under the cognitive approach and the humanistic approach of teaching, these changes of views towards translation and L1 were ignored in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which came as a corrective to previous shortcomings. Based on Chomsky's linguistic competence, Hymes (1972) developed 'communicative competence' that has influenced language teaching practices to the present time. The goal of language teaching and learning has become that of achieving a native-like proficiency in the target language and so no place has been offered to the use of translation and L1. However, the concept of communicative competence has misled language teaching methodology. Yes, it is important to enable students to communicate in the target language but FL learners are multi-competent individuals in that they can do what natives cannot do (they can translate and code switch naturally) and they have different needs from those of natives (Cook, 2009). It does not follow that children acquiring their first language do not translate so L2 learners should not translate as ironically expressed by Cook (2001) "The argument for avoiding the L1 based on L1 acquisition is not in itself convincing. It seems tantamount to suggesting that, since babies do not play golf, we should not teach golf to adults" (p. 406).

In retrospect, it is legitimate to say that the rejection of translation was "a logical sleight of hand" (Cook, 2010, p. 15) that should be reconsidered. The issue of translation and L1 use has been glossed over for about a century without providing convincing reasons. Cook, (2010) comments on this state of affairs sating that:

> from the 1900s until very recently there has been virtually no discussion of [translation] in the mainstream language-teaching literature. It is not that it was considered, assessed, and rejected, with reasons given for that rejection, but rather that it was simply ignored [...] It seems fair to say that the case for translation was summarily dismissed without ever being properly heard (pp. 20-21).

The following figure demonstrates the rejection of translation in the method era:
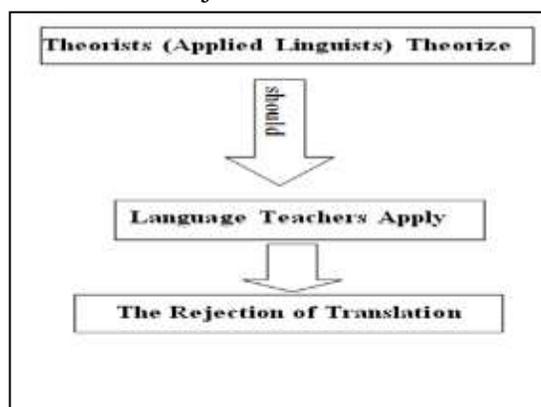

Figure 1: Translation in the Method Era

2. The Break with the Method Concept and the Shift to the Postmethod Pedagogy

Language-teaching methodologists spent almost one century searching for an ideal best method to achieve the set long-term aim that was to enable FL learners to naturally communicate in the target language. CLT, as its name suggests, was thought to achieve the set goal. However, like other methods, CLT had its share of criticism. A number of researchers (Swan, 1985; Bax, 2003; Spada, 2007) addressed limitations and misconceptions of CLT. Swan (1985), for example, revises the tenets of CLT and considers it as evolutionary rather than revolutionary. He describes it as "little more than an interesting ripple on the surface of twentieth-century language teaching" (p. 87).

In a critique of CLT, Spada (2007) states the following most widespread myths and misconceptions of CLT:
- CLT is merely concerned with the teaching of meaning and it neglects the teaching of forms.
- CLT does not permit providing feedback on learner's errors because it hinders learner's fluency.
- CLT should be learner-centered.
- CLT is concerned with developing listening and speaking skills and it totally marginalized the reading and writing skills.
- CLT means avoiding the use of L1 in the classroom.

In general, CLT has been criticised in that it has neglected the role of context (learners' needs, cultures, first languages, and teachers: natives or non-natives) in which it has been employed. Bax (2003) addresses this problem arguing that CLT focus was mainly on how to teach communicatively (role of teachers and methodology) and ignored the leaning process. He comments that "CLT is seen to be about 'the way we should teach'. After all, it is Communicative Language *Teaching*, not Communicative Language *Learning*" (p. 280). Bax suggests adopting a 'Context Approach' that gives priority to the learning context.

So, after believing it to be the panacea for its preceding teaching methods, CLT failed to meet the set goal that was enabling learners to achieve native-like proficiency in the target language. That state of affairs led many researchers in the late twentieth century to shift to the search for an alternative to the method concept rather than an alternative method. Different labels have been used by many authoritative authors in the field of language teaching to refer to this main transition in language teaching methodology. Stern (1983) refers to it as 'the break with the method concept', Richards (1990) refers to it with 'beyond methods', Widdowson (1990) uses 'pragmatism', Kumaravadivelu coins the terms 'postmethod condition' (1994) and 'postmethod pedagogy' (2001), Brown (2002) employs 'postmethod era' and 'the requiem for methods', and others use 'the death of methods'.

In the late twentieth century, many researchers noticed the gap between theorists and practitioners. They noticed, in other words, the discrepancy between methods and what actually happened in classrooms and suggested a bottom-up pedagogy, which gave an important role to the learning context and to teachers' views. Stern (1983), for example, explicitly states that a "good way to start developing a language teaching theory is to look at ourselves and to explore to what

extent our second language teaching has been influenced by our own language learning and teaching experiences" (p. 75).

In line with Stern (1983), Pennycook (1989) claims that "all education is political" (p. 590) because methods were imposed on teachers even if they did not serve them. He proposes that teachers should have a role in deciding what and how to teach "based on their own educational experiences, their personalities, their particular institutional, social, cultural, and political circumstances, their understanding of their particular students' collective and individual needs, and so on" (p. 606).

In 1990, Prabhu published his article 'There Is No Best Method-Why?' in which he claims that in order to better their teaching, teachers should not use methods mechanically but rather they should develop their "subjective understanding of the teaching they do" which he refers to as "teachers' sense of plausibility" (pp. 171-172). Prabhu, in other words, emphasises teachers' autonomy and creativity.

On his part, Widdowson (1990), one of the proponents of CLT, expressed his dissatisfaction with the direct applications of research findings in linguistics and psychology in theorising language teaching methods. He (1990) points out that there existed a gap between applied linguists and teachers. And as a solution to this problem, he suggests 'pragmatism' that he explains as "a function of pedagogic *mediation* whereby the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization, can only be realized within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching" (p. 30). In other words, he calls for a reconsideration of the role of teachers as "mediators between theory and practice, between the domains of disciplinary research and pedagogy" (p. 29).

Kumaravadivelu, considered to be the severest campaigner on the method concept, addresses the gap between applied linguists and teachers in many of his publications (1994, 2001, 2006). He describes the transition into the postmethod pedagogy as a sudden move to "a period of robust reflection" (1994, p. 27). He considers the method concept as a colonial construct and suggested postmethod as a postcolonial construct.

3. Questioning the Monolingual Tenet and the Revival of Translation as a Fifth Skill

Most of the time what theorists said did not fit in the teaching of foreign languages in many contexts (Stern, 1983). One of the issues that gained more attention by researchers in the postmethod era is the fallacy of teaching "a bilingual subject by means of a monolingual pedagogy" (Widdowson, 2003, p. 154). Reputable literature (Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1992; Auerbach, 1993; Canagarajah, 1999; Widdowson, 2003; Cook, 2012) ascribes the genesis of the monolingual principle to political and commercial factors rather than to linguistic and pedagogic ones.

Phillipson (1992) provides a historical account of the widespread of English as an international language and ascribes its pedigree to colonial times. He considers the widespread of ELT in the

Periphery (Third World countries) as an imperial means used by the Centre (Western native English countries and America) to dominate the world as he clearly puts it 'whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them. The British empire has given way to the empire of English.' (p. 1). Phillipson (1992) notices that language teaching has been isolated from its social context and considers this as linguistic imperialism that he puts in the broad theory of imperialism. He also considers the transmission of ELT teaching methods, which he refers to as 'professionalism', from the Centre to the Periphery as a form of linguistic imperialism. One of the aspects that gained more importance in his discussion is questioning the monolingual principle that characterised language-teaching methodology for about one century.

Phillipson (1992) claims that what really helped the idea that language should be taught monolingually, which he refers to as 'the monolingual tenet', were political and economic factors. Furthermore, he expatiates on the reasons behind the entrenched monolingual tenet that prevailed language teaching methodology and sums up the main tenets of the Makerere Conference (1961) on the Teaching of English as a Second Language (p. 185), that Howatt and Widdowson (2004) consider as a very essential event in the history of ELT:

1. English is best taught monolingually.
2. The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
3. The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
4. The more English is taught, the better the results.
5. If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop.

Phillipson (1992) considers all of the above tenets as fallacies and claims that they were not built on scientific bases and did not take into account the social context of the Periphery. He maintains that all the above tenets shared a common purpose which was perpetuating the monolingual principle in ELT in the Periphery in the postcolonial period to meet political and economic goals of the Centre.

Lucas and Katz (1994) also reconsider the English-Only policy in the U.S. and assert that the political factors were behind the rejection of the use of languages other than English in schools. They (1994) contend that:

> Many people perceive the growing numbers of speakers of languages other than English in the U.S. as a problem. They may also see increasing numbers of language minority (LM) residents as a threat to their status as speakers of the dominant language and as members of the dominant culture (p. 538).

In line with Phillipson (1992), Canagarajah (1999) also maintained that the Centre countries used the monolingual and native-speaker fallacies to make profit in the Periphery states. He analysed Tamil secondary school teacher-student classroom interactions in Sri Lanka and came to the conclusion that in spite of the fact that teachers reported that they discouraged the use of L1 (Tamil) in their classrooms, his study revealed that both teachers and students naturally switched

from L1 to L2 and vice versa. He also found that teachers' views towards the use of L1 were influenced by centre's pedagogical thinking in that teachers admitted that their professional training and common sense inclined them to adopt the monolingual policy. Canagarajah (1999) also observed that code switching from and into Tamil helped in the teaching/learning of English mainly in managing classrooms, knowledge transmission, providing instructions, and in developing grammatical and communicative competence.

Among those who assertively attribute the reasons behind the rejection of translation to political and commercial imperatives is Cook (2010). He explains:

> It is perhaps no coincidence that the Direct Method originated just as the English language publishing industry entered a new period of mass production, and drew upon ideas developed in Europe's two most powerful industrial nations, Britain and Germany, in the heyday of European nationalism. Direct Method was in tune with mass production, nation building, and imperialism. The chilling slogan:
>
> 'One Nation, One People, One Language'
> can easily be rewritten for English Language Teaching:
> 'One Class, One Learner, One Language (pp. 18-19).

The post-method concept, in that it has given a role to local knowledge and to the learning context, has led many researchers to question the rejection of translation and L1 from the FL classroom. Therefore, the post-method era, one may say, is the realisation of what Howatt anticipated three decades ago when he said "if there is another "language teaching revolution" round the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power [to the monolingual principle]" (1984, p. 289). The revival of translation in the postmethod era can be demonstrated as follows:
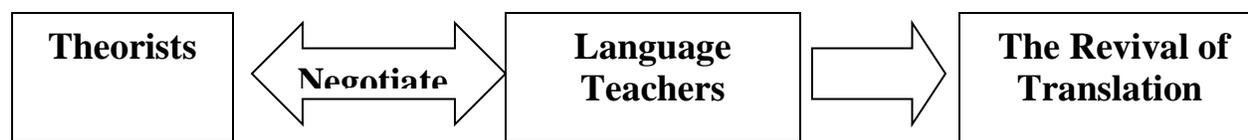

Figure 2: Translation in the Postmethod Era

Many publications appeared in the 21st century that directly pleaded for the comeback of translation into the FL classroom (Widdowson, 2003; House, 2008; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Witte et al., 2009; Leonardi, 2010; and Malmkjaer, 2010). Furthermore, many scholars have argued for its revival as a fifth skill alongside the other four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Naimushin, 2002; Baker, 2006; Gaspar, 2009; Leonardi, 2009; Cook, 2010; Pym, Malmkjaer, & Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2013). At the advanced level, translation is also taught as a subject at the departments of foreign languages (Translation Practice module).

Translation is not a waste of time. It is a multi-skilled activity that entails both receptive and productive language skills and leads the translator to practice all of them. It is not radically

different from the four skills but it can be considered as a 'fifth macro-skill' (Campbell, 2002). In this respect, Leonardi (2009) points out that translation "should not be seen, and consequently treated, as a completely different language skill as compared to Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening because it is an activity which includes them and is, to a certain degree, dependent on them" (p. 143).

The L1 is a resource that FL learners resort to compensate for their failures when dealing with the target language. So, translation is a naturally-occurring activity when learning a FL and is a preferred learning strategy by FL learners (Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). It is not practical to deny this fact. In this respect, Cook (2010) posits

> Humans teach and learn by moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, by building new knowledge onto existing knowledge. Language learning and teaching are no exception to this general rule. Translation is just such a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known and the unknown. To burn that bridge or to pretend that it does not exist, hinders rather than helps the difficult transition which is the aim of language teaching and learning (p. 155)

For a long time, the goal of language teaching has been achieving native-like proficiency in the target language to enable learners to communicate with native speakers. Recently, however, many scholars have questioned basing the teaching and learning of a FL on the goal of achieving native-like proficiency and regarded it as utopian (Mckay, 2003; V. Cook, 2013). In the 1990s, Cook introduced the concept of multi-competence and emphasised that EFL learners differ from natives in that they have different purposes for learning English in their own countries and that they have different mental abilities. Cook (2001) used 'L2 user' concept as an alternative to the native speaker goal. L2 users, according to him, should not be treated as deficient but they should be distinguished as different from native speakers because they have two languages in their minds. He maintained that L2 users can do things that native speakers cannot do; they can translate and code switch.

Many people learn English not because they want to know the culture of native speakers but to serve their needs, for example, to have access to scientific and technological information and to promote trade and tourism (Mckay, 2003). Translation is a skill that L2 learners need in their social and professional life especially in the age of globalisation (Campbell, 2013).

The needs of the 21st century, in fact, give a prominent place to translation as a skill that FL learners should develop (Cook, 2010). Moreover, the majority of EFL learners work as translators. Shaheen (1991), for example, reports that the majority of translators in the Arab World are graduates of English from Arab universities. Leonardi (2010), in this respect, also maintains that "whereas translators tend to be viewed as good bilinguals and life-long language learners, language learners are meant to be natural translators who face this activity everyday as students and workers" (p. 17).

Recent studies showed that both teachers and students hold positive views regarding the use of translation and L1 (Carreres, 2006; Liao, 2006). Sewell (2004), for example, maintained that despite the fact that learners at the University of London had the chance to study in very well-taught communicative classes, they always asked to do translation. By means of questionnaires and an interview, Bagheri & Fazel (2011) also examined beliefs of forty EFL students at Shiraz Azad University. Their findings showed that students believed that the use of translation helped them in the process of learning, especially in acquiring English writing skills. Fernández-Guerra (2014) surveyed EFL learners and found that they held positive views about using translation in learning the foreign language. Furthermore, the participants in her study "ranked translation tasks as the most motivating activities and the ones they believed that could be more effective in FL acquisition, alongside listening and/or watching activities and speaking activities" (p. 167)

As we have seen above, the native-speaker teacher helped the monolingual tenet to be entrenched for a long time. The majority of EFL teachers in the colonial and postcolonial eras were native-speakers of English which made the rejection of translation a logical action. However, nowadays the majority of EFL teachers are non native-speakers of English who share the same L1 with their students (Phillipson, 1992; Moussu & Llurda, 2008). Canagarajah (1999) estimates that 80% of English language teachers are non-native speakers, which justifies the use of translation in the teaching and learning of the target language. Furthermore, recently, the idea that the ideal teacher is the native speaker has been questioned (Medgyes, 1992; Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999; Cook and Wei, 2009). Many have argued that non-native teachers can achieve equal professional success. Non-native teachers have advantages that most native-speaker teachers do not have. They can learn from their experience as learners of the FL and so they are more aware about needs, difficulties, strategies and above all, they share the L1 of their students which gives them an advantage over the native-speaker teachers because it facilitates the learning and teaching processes (Medgyes, 1992).

Conclusion

To conclude, the contribution of this paper is a response to the researchers' calls for reassessing the role of translation in the foreign language classroom. It reconsidered its rejection in the method era and provided an account of how translation has assumed a role as a fifth skill in the FL classroom in the 21st century. So, the literature review revealed that the onslaught against translation was illegitimate and that the literature in favour of it is a prolific one.

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