

**Teaching Translation at the university level with Reference to the Department of English,
College of Languages, University of Baghdad: Difficulties and Remedies****Munthir Manhal Mohammed**

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Abstract

Teaching translation is a two-fold question; the first phase of the question refers to whether or not the translation is teachable as a subject in class. The second phase deals with identifying the methodological approaches of teaching /learning a foreign language in translation. Research has demonstrated that learners of a foreign language do refer to their mother tongue to aid the process of acquiring a second language or in other words, they translate silently. Translation into another language can help them systematize and rationalize the learning mechanism that is used. In other words, translation is present in the process of learning a foreign language. Moreover, it is necessary to differentiate between teaching translation as an academic subject included in the curriculum of the departments of English and teaching translation for professional translators. This paper addresses itself to the process of teaching translation to the students who are going to get their BA in English, not in translation. The researcher takes the department of English, College of Languages, University of Baghdad as a case study to diagnose the difficulties and to suggest remedies for them. The curriculum of the English department incorporates translation from the second-stage to the forth-one with different aims, topics and hours per week. The paper sheds light on several relevant topics such as: is translation a science or a craft? The issue of teachability, and the methods of teaching.

Keywords: craft, curriculum, program, science, teaching, teachability, translating

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1. Introduction

The past three decades saw a vast change in attitudes towards translation, both as an academic discipline and as a profession. Translation Studies are now a thriving field of research with increasing institutional standing.

Many people believe that translation is an easy thing and all you have to do is to change words from the source text into the equivalent words of a target text. However, this is not true since some phrases, if translated literally, would make no sense. The translation is a very complicated process which has to consider many factors - the genre and the style of the original text, the translator's competence, and the time allocated to the project and many more. It is worthy to mention that translators should determine the approach they are going to adopt in translation since there is more than one approach to translation; the most common approaches are the linguistic approach and the functional one. The linguistic approach, which looks at translation as a linguistic phenomenon, is adopted by so many scholars like Nida, Catford, and Newmark; whereas the functional approach, which looks to the function of translation, is adopted by other scholars like Vermeer, Nord, and Venuti. To clarify this point let us quote Newmark's (1988) words; He says that "translation theory derives from comparative linguistics, and within linguistics, it is mainly an aspect of semantics; all questions of semantics relates to translation theory" (p.5). His viewpoint is far from that of Catford (1965) who states before two decades that "translation is an operation performed on language: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another.... any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language"(p.1). According to Nida (1974) a translation should be based on two different types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. The former is equivalent to literal translation where the translator is after preserving all the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the source language, (SL) where the second is equivalent to free translation where the translator gives her/himself an area of freedom to put emphasis on the target language (TL) aspects whether linguistic or non-linguistic.

While many European countries have a long tradition of translation training programs, we unfortunately still lack such programs. Translation is mostly taught theoretically depending on local textbooks and the personal experience of translation teachers.

This study is an attempt to highlight the shortcomings of the current program at my college \college of languages \university of Baghdad and suggesting some solutions that might help in developing the ability of our graduates in translation.

2. Is Translation a Science, an Art or a Craft?

To determine whether or not the translation is teachable, it is necessary to identify the identity of translation. First, we need to define what the real nature of translation is. Is it a science, a craft, or an art? It is only then that one can decide whether it is something to be taught in the classroom like any other field of study with the same existing teaching methods or it is not be equated with any other academic subject included in the curriculum.

Some experienced and skilled translators who have been asked to educate beginner translators believe that translation is learned by experience and personal intuition and can by no means be taught in the classroom. Other people who have studied translation at universities do not fully agree with this viewpoint.

Some scholars argue that translation is a science. The most salient characteristics of science are precision and predictability. We can call something a science only if it has scientific rules that work all the time. In fact, scientific rules are so fixed and precise that they are not called rules anymore, but laws. For example, compounding two units of hydrogen and one unit of oxygen will always give us water or steam, or ice, depending on the temperature. Translation uses scientific data, mainly taken from different branches of linguistics (like neurolinguistics, semantics, sociolinguistics, etc). It has also been recently combined with computer science, giving birth to machine translation and computer-aided translation. But translation in itself is not a science.

Nida and Taber, (1969) consider translation a science; they designed a model of analysis showing the process of translation, as shown in figure. 1.



Figure 1. model of translation analysis (Nida&Taber 1969: 40)

Munday, (2001) comments on Nida's work in translation in that " Nida attempts to move translation into a more scientific era by incorporating recent work of linguistics" (p.39). She argues that Nida incorporates key features of Chomsky's theory into his science of translation. Thus, in the above figure, the surface structure of the ST is analyzed into the basic elements of the deep structure; these are transferred in the translation process and then restructured into the surface structure of the target language.

Translation has a lot in common with arts as well as science. It sometimes becomes highly dependent on the idiosyncrasies and intuition of the translator. Like composers and painters, translators often find their own moods and personalities reflected in their work. The major factor that prevents translation from being considered art is that, unlike translators who have to solve a range of different problems, the defining factor of an artist's work is esthetics.

As for being a craft, of the scholars who advocate this viewpoint is Newmark; he clearly states that translation is" neither a theory nor a science; it is "a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language." Translation as a craft shares with other crafts the feature that its standards of excellence can be determined only through the informed discussion of experts or exceptionally intelligent laymen. The translator as a craftsman has to know the foreign language so well that he

can determine to what extent the text deviates from the language norms usually used in that topic (Newmark, 1988, p.17). The viewpoint that translation is mostly a craft seems more reasonable; we should try to teach it as a craft, taking into account the merits and nature of translation, the proficiency of students in both source and target languages, and the objectives of the translation course itself. In the next section, we will come across some viewpoints concerning teaching translation.

3. The issue of teachability of translation

In Europe translation was involved in language teaching when Latin ceased to be the *lingua franca* and the national languages were introduced into the classroom. The teaching materials from Greek and Latin were translated in addition to the translation of Greek and Latin literature into the respective national languages (Menck, 1991, p.108). Translation has always played a role in language teaching; until the end of the eighteenth century, learning a foreign language implied learning Latin and was based around bi-lingual word lists and parallel texts.

A point to be mentioned here is that the language of translation is certainly different from that of the original and that some of the features of translational language are universal to all translations, regardless of the source and target text languages. These features include, e.g., additions, instances of explicitation, or normalization of the source text, phenomena that can be discovered through the comparison of one source text with multiple translations. This led to the move away from source texts and equivalence which is instrumental in preparing the ground for corpus work because it enables the discipline “Translation Studies” to shed its longstanding obsession with the idea of studying individual instances in isolation (one translation compared to one source text at a time) and creates a requirement which can find fulfillment in corpus work, namely the study of large numbers of texts of the same type. (Baker, 1993:237)

Some scholars argue against the incorporation of translation in the process of teaching a foreign language. They said that translation is an artificial exercise that has no place in the process of communication. It is also restrictive in that it confines language practice to two skills only, reading and writing. Translation into a foreign language is counterproductive in that it forces learners to view the foreign language through their native tongue. This leads to what is called interference. Translation into another language is a purposeless exercise that has no application in the real world since translators usually operate within the circle of their native language. Translating into a second language (L2) is frustrating and demotivating exercise in that the student can never attain the level of accuracy. It seems an exercise designed to elicit mistakes, rather than accurate use of language. The translation is a method that may well work with literary-oriented learners who enjoy probing the intricacies of grammar and lexis, but it is unsuitable to the average learner (p.5)

House, (1981) is also one of the scholars who depict the difficulties of associating translation with teaching. I quote what she says in this respect:

The teacher of the course passes out a text (the reason for the selection of this text is usually not explained). This text is full of traps, which means that the teachers do not set out to train students in the complex and difficult art of translation, but to snare at them and lead them into error. The text is then prepared ... for the following sessions and the whole group goes through the text sentence by sentence, with each sentence being read by a different student. The instructor asks for alternative translation solutions, corrects the suggested version and finally presents the sentence in its final “correct” form. This procedure is naturally very frustrating for the students. (p. 8)

On the contrary, some other scholars in translation disagree with this viewpoint and see that there is a close link between teaching and translation since the translation process represents the marriage between theory and practice. Hatim and Mason (1997) is a good example of this attitude; they state that being theorists and teachers, a key question to be in mind “on what basis could the selection, grading and presentation of materials for the training of translators be made more effective?” (p.179). Their answer is to use their own traditional notions of text, genre, and discourse, then to include new concepts such as “evaluativeness” and “statism” vs. “dynamism”. That is, source texts may be more or less subjective (“evaluativeness”).

They approach the process of teaching translation within text-paradigm, that is, instruction, exposition, and argumentation pose different challenges to translators and that the training of future translators is to be organized around text typologies.

They suggest that instructional texts teachers should start courses with, this type of texts tell readers in the target-language culture what to do. Legal texts are particularly useful for classroom translation practice because:

Texts of this particular type have conventionally developed a more or less finite set of structure formats that are highly formulaic ... The various instructional forms are thus ‘routines’ which the translator either knows or simply does not know. But, if not known, these formats and terminologies are learnable with remarkable ease, since what is involved is essentially a finite set of conventional formats and a finite list of conventional vocabulary. (p.179)

They have devoted a complete chapter to the training of translators in their book (the translator as a communicator, 1997).

Applied linguistics has taken a great interest in translation recently, and in the classroom it benefits students because: (1) It is ideal for studying the language system (2) its focus can be altered to make it genre, lexis, structure or function specific. (3) It encourages learners to think about meaning and form concurrently. This is because in translation they have already been provided with what they have to say but need to say it in the target language.

4. Methods of Teaching and Translation

The relation between translation and teaching approaches/methods went back to the very beginning of the twentieth century. Scholars who engaged in developing the process of teaching a second (foreign language) relied heavily on translation to the extent that they called the first method of teaching L2 'grammar-translation method'. According to this method teachers have to translate all the teaching materials to be presented in class into the native language. Translation mainly consisted in matching vocabulary and grammatical rules on a one-to-one equivalence basis between the mother tongue and the foreign language. As a result, teachers created new sentences and texts for their students to translate. The influence of this method can still be felt to this day though it has been replaced by some other teaching methods. Even in the other methods developed successfully, methodologists never forbid using translation whenever needed to facilitate the process of learning.

The second method is the direct method which was developed as a reaction against the shortcomings of the first or the traditional method (the grammar translation method). They put their emphasis on presenting the teaching material in L2, that is, they avoid as much as possible resorting to translation. Later, they discovered that this method is not satisfactory.

The third method is the audio-lingual method which focused on the skill of listening. Learners of L2 just listening to videotapes of passages written in L2. It involves a systematic presentation of grammatical constructions of L2 moving from the simple to the more complex often in the form of drills which the students have to repeat. Again, Methodologists who developed this method found that its results on the learners are very poor.

The recent approach to L2 teaching/learning is called the communicative approach(es); this approach tolerates using translation whenever is needed. It is said that translation is misconceived and overused not only in grammar translation method but also in this recent approach stating that the problem is not in translation itself but in the teaching method. (See Yule, 1981, p.152).

Research has demonstrated that learners of a foreign language do refer to their mother tongue to aid the process of acquisition of L2 or in other words they translate silently. Translation into L2 can help them systematize and rationalize a learning mechanism that is taking place. It is inaccurate to imagine that learners who only have two or three contact hours of language teaching per week can learn L2 by immersion in the same way as children acquire their mother tongue. Students do, and always will translate into their native Language (henceforth LI).

Practically speaking, if we check the textbooks of our students, we will find that they use the translation, i.e. writing equivalents of foreign words, nearly almost for every difficult word. Thus, translation is there throughout the process of teaching a foreign language. The teaching method abstracts language from its communicative function. Indeed, translation itself as it takes place in the real world is intrinsically and inextricably linked to a communicative purpose.

Teaching translation to students who are learning the target language at the same time necessitates taking into account two major issues: first of all, we should be aware of the fact that learning how to cope with translation-related problems is not exactly the same as learning the language itself, although they go hand-in-hand. There are many difficulties such as translation of figurative language, culture-specific terms, translation of sacred texts, and other text types with regards to their functions. Second, it is vital to decide which language teaching method is better to be used along with the adopted for teaching translation as a craft. In teaching translation, one has to take into account these two factors because they are closely related to both translation and language. The second set of factors, i.e., those which constitute the basis of the variational sequence, are important in teaching translation due to the fact that they are all intertwined with language and thus with translation. Being familiar with the target language culture is the best example of these factors.

So, to be successful in teaching translation, instructors should be able to merge the language teaching techniques they may deem best for their students with those of teaching translation. The techniques adopted for teaching translation should be chosen with attention to both sides of the nature of translation: first its objective and theoretical principles and second the subjective part which is mainly related to the student's intuition

Recent trends in language and translation favor the communicative approach by concentrating on language in communication rather than language as a formal structure. In teaching translation, language is used as a tool, no more emphasis on competence but on performance, whereas in language learning, learners try to come as close as possible to native speaker competence to the degree that they will be able to speak fluently.

In translating literature, there are three main approaches of teaching translation.

The first one (translation-oriented text analysis) developed by Nord, 1991, seems to favor guiding students step-by-step through the translation process until an adequate target text has been produced. The model is expressed in a series of Wh- questions to analyze the (ST) and see where it matches or not the (TT) on the grammatical and cultural levels. The second approach, the process-oriented approach, focuses on the translation process rather than the finished product. This approach is of psychological orientation, it is based on discovering what is going on in the translators' minds while they are translating. In the third approach, the concentration is on the skills of the translators as learners; it also depends on what is called by Nord (1992, p.45) transfer competence with a limited range of linguistic competence. Transfer competence, also named translation competence, is divided into two types of abilities: the ability to analyze the translational situation and the ability to decide on which strategy to adopt in translation. It seems to the researcher that these three methods of teaching translation developed by scholars in the translation are complementary, i.e., each one needs to be complemented by the others to achieve best results in teaching translation.

5. The Case study

The current situation of teaching translation at the undergraduate level at the department of English / the college of languages is characterized by the following points:

- Translation is given to three stages of students at the English department, starting from the second-stage up to the fourth-stage students.
- All the textbooks are written by Iraqi instructors.
- Translation is given as an academic subject for Iraqi students who are going to get BA degree in English not in translation.
- The time allocated for each stage is two hours per week which is not enough.
- The objectives of teaching translation are neither clear to the teachers of translation nor to the students.
- The number of students in the class limits the opportunity of practicing translation by every student in the class. Lack of training programs
- Absence of consistency in the program of teaching translation. The textbook of the second stage is called "principles of translation"; the book is specifically designed to the students of the departments of translation at Almustansirya University and Mousl University. The emphasis of the course is on translating simple sentences from English into Arabic. The students of the third stage study "scientific translation"; the textbook is compiled by some Iraqi instructors contains English passages from different scientific fields to be translated into Arabic. The instructor usually selects some passages as he/she cannot cover all the passages throughout the academic year. The fourth class students translate literary passages from Arabic into English guided by a textbook entitled "Literary Translation" (in Arabic); again the time span hinders translation every passage in the book.

6. Suggestions

In order to achieve better results in teaching translation, the researcher puts forward the following suggestions:

- Specifying the objectives of teaching translation to the students of the English departments which are definitely different from the objectives in the departments of translation.
- Accordingly, modifying the syllabuses of the third and fourth levels only.
- Both levels should translate from English into Arabic. Mastering translating into one direction, i., e., English into Arabic, better than mastering none.
- Instead of scientific translation, it is suggested teaching the students of the third stage what is called general translation which includes selected passages from different registers and genres. And the fourth class will translate two or three types of texts only like, for instance, legal, commercial, journalistic, interviews, etc.
- Multiplying the time of the third and the fourth classes from two hours per week (two lectures) into four hours per week (four lectures)
- Finding references serve the above curriculum.
- Practicing translation (written and oral, interpretation) in a specific laboratory equipped with the appropriate tools and data.

- developing training programs and minimizing the theoretical lectures.
- I also suggest establishing a department of translation at the college and reopening the MA studies in Translation. It is worth noting that there is no department of translation at the University of Baghdad (the mother university in Iraq), whereas there are departments of translation at the universities of Basra, Mousl and other universities.

7. Conclusion

Translation is a very complicated process which has to consider many factors - the genre and the style of the original text, the translator's competence, the time allocated to the project and many more. Translators should determine the approach they are going to adopt in translation since there are more than one approach to translation; the most common approaches are the linguistic approach and the functional one.

The goal of teaching translation is vital to be identified before determining whether translation is teachable or not. Teaching translation as an academic title for English undergraduate students is different from teaching translation for professional translators. This paper has tackled the question of teaching translation to the students of the department of English, college of languages as a case study. Three stages of students, the second –the fourth classes, study translation. The paper ends with some suggestions.

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