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TRANSLATION DIDACTICS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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[Received January 15, 1985]

ABSTRACT. Expanding interest in specialized translation increases the possibility that in a growing number of cases the task will be executed not so much by trained specialists as by inexperienced students and graduates of philological departments. These potential translators must therefore be made sensitive to the basic requirements and responsibilities they will have to take up in order to produce acceptable translations.

The first part of the paper describes the distinction between foreign language teaching oriented translation and translation proper, and lays emphasis on those aspects of the latter which are of particular importance in translation didactics.

In the remaining part, a tentative translation-training syllabus conformable to the needs of philological departments is presented, as well as specific procedures and techniques which develop translating skills in the trainees.

In view of the great demand for specialized translations there is a growing probability that in countries whose languages are not widely spoken beyond their borders the task, in an increasing number of cases, will be performed not by professional translators but by "translationally unskilled" graduates of the philological departments. It is therefore necessary to make them aware of the responsibilities, of the importance of a correct approach to translation, and last, but not least, of the basic requirements of the profession.

If inexperienced translators expect their future employers to meet their financial demands they ought to be able to turn in work that will meet internationally acceptable standards. As for the inexperience, it seems possible to doctor it to some extent at the very centres in which the students acquire their philological skills — namely at the departments of foreign languages.

Translation, if it is introduced at these departments at all, usually means some form of auxiliary technique of foreign language teaching. The methods employed are specific for FLT and differ from those used in translation pedagogy. Translation for translation's sake is virtually unknown. Yet, for reasons specified above it seems worthwhile to introduce advanced students to combined language and translation practice in a way that will help improve their linguistic abilities through translation exercises and will also increase their sensitivity to the problems of translation. In order to do it correctly, however,

it is necessary to be aware of the distinction between translation proper (TP) and translation used for language teaching purposes (FLT T) and incompatibilities between procedures employed by the two respective disciplines. (Pisarska, *forth.*) This paper attempts at sketching the dividing line between them, and offers suggestions concerning the possible ways of drawing a common denominator from both in order to introduce students to basic translation skills, while at the same time improving their mastery of the foreign language. A version of these suggestions has experimentally been introduced as a translation syllabus at the Institute of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and is the result of the author's exposure to translation courses at several translator training centres, both in Great Britain and the United States, and her own experience as a foreign language and translation teacher.

The failure to distinguish between translation proper (understood here as a separate skill acquired during specialized training in translation) and translation used in foreign language pedagogy may result in confusion leading to mistakes in didactics.

FLT T is one of the procedures used as an auxiliary technique at various levels of foreign language tutoring. After the grammar-translation method had been replaced by more modern ways of foreign language teaching, translation, having become a dirty word and procedure, was totally eliminated from the language classroom in the years to follow, especially during the post-skinnerian period. With the advancement of contrastive analysis and the cognitive approach it re-emerged as a possibility. The modern approach allows for the use of translation not only in the initial stages of teaching but also at the advanced level in order to develop productive skills in the student. It may also be used during all the four stages of presentation, exercises, revision and testing in the conscious presentation and teaching of grammatical problems (Marton 1979:42—43).

Jakobson's (1959:233) definition — the replacement of verbal signs of one language with verbal signs of another language — or interlingual translation — explains what translation proper is. Another quotation from the same author signals the approach to message and form in TP: "Most frequently, translation from one language to another substitutes messages in one language not for separate code units but for entire messages in some other language" (Jakobson 1959:235). Here, it seems, is where the first divergence occurs. In FLT T in most cases the students translate individual sentences only and look for second language equivalents to words, expressions and structures of their first language. Such translation exercises deal only with the structures being mastered and there is no complex text analysis involved. In the case of translation proper, the whole text is first analyzed in terms of style and content, and possibly divided into translation units of various

lengths. The message is extracted from the source language text, "... and expressed in the target language by means of linguistic tools of that language. The implication is that content can be separated from the form" (Ivir 1969:15). The foreign language has already been mastered and the translator is instinctively aware of the meanings carried by the specific linguistic formulations in the original text.

In FLT T, even at the advanced level where similar procedure might seemingly be applied, the analysis will usually be linguistic, the concentration will be on the form, and, at best, the students will be made aware of the existence of sets of possible translational equivalents to a particular construction. Experience shows that very few instructors (other than TP teachers) will go as far as showing the students which of the equivalents from the set matches the foreign language text best with the stylistic and message criteria governing the choice. In extreme cases, at the other end of this polarity scale, bad or inexperienced teachers may not even correct elementary grammatical errors if they occur in structures other than practised.

As a consequence of concentrating primarily on particular, isolated structures, a large proportion of the many options which are allowed in TP in order to achieve stylistic uniformity of the translated text will be out of reach for someone exposed to FLT T only. We might venture a statement that FLT T (still) advocates a microlinguistic, sentence-based approach to text. TP breaks up texts and sentences, manipulates them, changes their order, even eliminates portions of them, defying correspondence in the sense of FLT translation. Exposure only to the latter quite frequently results in the production of grammatically correct but non-target-language sounding translations.

Concentration on structures only carries a certain danger (hopefully to be eliminated by experienced TP teachers) and if it is projected on all translation activities, it may boomerang in the actual process of translation teaching. Students who are taught to concentrate on individual sentences and structures are not capable of viewing larger portions of text as translation units. They are bound to start translating at first sight without prior detailed analysis. While this is sometimes done during sight translation exercises or aptitude tests administered to prospective translators/interpreters, such an approach may prove harmful in the long run.

Translation proper requires from the practitioner the use of a certain scheme. All factors even remotely connected with the text are taken into consideration. Thus the intention of the text, the quality of writing, the setting of the text, the potential reader are all analysed. So is the style of the particular author. The style of the translator who gives the final shape to the target text cannot be ignored either. A most thorough analysis of the text must precede all translating. The "translational" value of the text must first of all be judged, and then a detailed style and content analysis must follow,

which allows the translator to determine his translation strategies. There will be different types of text involved: expressive, informative or operative (Reiss 1976). Scriptural writing will require a different approach than a text on space research. There will be different degrees of textual autonomy of the source text requiring a greater or lesser degree of calque correspondence.

Conventions of translation will have to be followed. Only then can the target text slowly begin to emerge. It will later have to be reformulated and the final version edited and critically analysed in order to be in agreement with the target language norms. Rendition of the text in the second language will require certain additional steps (Dzierżanowska 1977). Translation proper stresses different aspects of knowledge — CULTURAL and linguistic. In fact, linguistic knowledge is taken for granted — in the case of translator's native or near-native knowledge of the second language is presupposed. In the case of interpreters the knowledge of a foreign language must allow them to express the sense of a message at the rate of 150 words per minute.

Another difference between FLT T and TP is the direction of translating. TP means primarily translation from the foreign language (L_2) into the native language (L_1) of the translator and, secondarily, translation into the second language. Difficulties and objectives different in both cases are handled differently, which should be reflected in translation didactics. Translation into L_1 is regarded as more natural and legitimate because "... native-tongue competence is more powerfully internalized than foreign-language competence. Hence, a translator can analyze and adequately eliminate translation difficulties only in the field of L_2/L_1 transfer" (Wilss 1982:161).

FLT T concentrates on transferring structures and expressions first and foremost into the second language and prefers the spoken medium.

It is very probably the superficial similarity in the direction of translating that results in the confusion of FLT T and TP into the second language.

The reasons for the reluctance of FLT T to convert from foreign to native language may stem from the oversensitivity to the legacy of the infamous grammar-translation method in which the didactic activities were reduced to mechanical translation and excessive exposure to written texts. The arguments concerning the value of translating from L_1 to L_2 for the development of communicative skills and the superiority of the spoken medium as more difficult and demanding in foreign language teaching are obvious and not to be denied. It seems, however, that translating from L_2 to L_1 should neither be neglected nor rejected, as it is, among other things, one of the best ways of mastering conventional syntagmas, professional jargon and LSP. As to the spoken or written medium controversy, it seems that the choice should be entirely dependent on the level of proficiency of the student and current pedagogical requirements. The written form allows for better control over the use of the foreign language and — because of the time factor — for a better

understanding of what is being translated. The spoken form requires a relatively high linguistic competence from the student. Otherwise s/he will only be capable of doing oral translations of material much below his/her linguistic abilities. Needless to say, there will be different criteria adopted in the choice of medium in the case of translation/interpreting pedagogy.

“Translation is an act of communication — with the accent on communication rather than language, which only serves as an intermediary. It has as its objective the transmitting of a message in a given situation. Translation is far more than a mere linguistic operation and to reduce it to this level is to give students a false idea of what translation really is” (Roberts 1983 : 2). When we realize that FLT T, in spite of its ultimate communicative goal, accentuates linguistic operations connected with the acquisition of a foreign language, the distinction becomes obvious. The negation of the difference between TP and FLT T may further lead to a serious notional and procedural conflict: a misinterpretation of the real character of TP resulting from the application of FLT T criteria to it on the one hand, and on the other — the propagation of practices (erroneous from the point of view of TP) of translating into the foreign language without the proper mastery of this language, as is in the case in FLT T.

Without the differentiation between translation as an END in training where TP is concerned and translation as a MEANS in the case of foreign language teaching any discussion of these issues would be futile. Such differentiation is furthermore substantiated by the figures of enrollment in translation courses and foreign language learning courses.

As two separate fields of activity TP and FLT T require two distinctive approaches. It is not possible to substitute one for the other. In spite of the recognition of natural translation — which is the rudimentary ability to mediate between languages regardless of the level of proficiency — the importance of appropriate systematic training in TP is beyond dispute. To disregard it would equal promoting amateurish translation. Contrary to the views held by numerous FLT T proponents the knowledge of a foreign language is not the sole qualification for a translator and the strategies to which the students of FLT T are exposed do not equip them with the necessary professional apparatus indispensable for the qualified translator. It often happens, as M. Rose points out, that those who attempt translation believe that they understand a text “... while, and as long as, it is in the original language, only to find themselves unsettled, if not actually confused, when they must reformulate it in their own language” (Rose 1981:3). Only expert training in TP can help overcome such difficulties. FLT T cannot help much, especially in view of its total disinterest in translating into the first language.

Having specified the differences we may now proceed to the description of TP-oriented procedures. Before we enumerate them, however, certain provisions must be made.

Although the aim of such a course is to develop in students basic translation skills, both in writing and in speaking, it is not, and cannot be, an attempt at training skilled translators and interpreters. The students should be able to convert rapidly *ad hoc* from the source language (SL) to target language (TL) within certain thematical limits and become acquainted with the basic rules of translating, but they cannot be expected to be able to cope unfailingly with all the difficulties. The vocational character of proper translation training places it outside the scope of a philological curriculum. Therefore, what is meant here by the ability to translate in speaking is an *ex tempore* translation from a written text, sometimes called (on) sight translation. A variety of simultaneous interpreting, it may be introduced as a supporting technique to perfect the students' knowledge of the spoken language and their linguistic reflexes. For, unless we want to adopt the oversimplified definition of interpreting as a simple word-for-word translation with a certain number of words or portions of individual sentences stored in the memory, we cannot claim that we can effectively teach interpreting in such a course. The usual lack of professional personnel and proper electronic equipment at departments of foreign languages constitutes a serious contraindication in the case of simultaneous interpreting. Consecutive interpreting calls for a specific skill of note taking and, just as is the case with simultaneous interpreting, requires from a student certain psychological predispositions not evenly distributed over all the educatees.¹

— The course should not be offered till after the fourth semester, when the students' linguistic abilities are more or less uniform and their linguistic awareness increases.

— The students should be introduced to some basic problems of translation and translation theory so that they can understand how translation theory can assist them in the comprehension and analysis of texts in SL and their reformulation in the TL.

— A word about translation theory. Most people frown when they hear the term in this context. However, translation theory for our purpose is not so much a scientific theory, prescriptive in character, as a body of knowledge about translation. It can be presented to students in the form of a number of very short introductory talks illustrated with a plentitude of examples but better still by way of a running commentary to texts dealt with in class. In that case the absorption of the material will be virtually painless and it will better cling to the students' memory. In the area of English, Duff 1981 and portions of Newmark 1981 might be good complementary sources of information.

¹ A carefully selected group of really able students may be introduced to interpreting proper but no sooner than during the eighth semester of their studies and only if their knowledge of the foreign language is impeccable. Ideally, these should be extra-curricular activities supervised by a professional.

— The course should be taught by teachers with at least minimum experience in translating (TP) and exhibiting positive attitudes towards the task.

The contents of the course can be distributed over the period of four to five semesters in such a way that the students will be able to understand what the crux of translating is, while, at the same time they will be improving their knowledge of the foreign language. The degree of difficulty should naturally increase from semester to semester.

Since in the case of university students the knowledge of the foreign language is not always comparable to that of native speakers, the attempts at translating should always proceed in the direction from foreign to native language — until the students become comfortably familiar with the grammatical, lexical and stylistic characteristics of the variety of the foreign language in a given discipline or range of topics. Then native to foreign language translation can be commenced.

It seems that during the initial period of instruction only written translation should be practised. While acquiring new skills the students tend to focus on the activity only and not on the linguistic requirements. Thus in their efforts to find the proper version of the SL message they usually forget all about grammar and pronunciation, not to mention style. Furthermore, written translation is always more meticulous and accurate than oral production and, since in a written text errors are more easily detected, the instructor has a better chance to carefully control the use of the foreign language and correct more striking translation errors. In oral production speed compensates for attention to detail and it is easier to get away with a poor job, both linguistically and translationally. Oral translation of broken sentences (the only possibility at such an early stage of tutoring) rather than passages of speech is incompatible with the usual understanding of the activity of interpreting and can furthermore result in undesired effects in the form of incorrectly constructed sentences in the target language or in the distortion of the message.

Before they commence text analysis, the students should become familiar with translation procedures (literal or word-for-word, paraphrase) and text classification (literary and non-literary or artistic, fiction-as opposed to other texts). Text analysis might proceed along the lines presented by Rose 1981 and Dzierżanowska 1977. Attention should be paid to the quality of writing, style (linguistic features, syntax) and register (degree of formality, the degree to which the writing reveals the professional, educational, geographical, social, age and sex characteristics of the writer). Principles relating to the translation of specific problems (slang and professional jargon, institutional and cultural terms, neologisms, proper names, etc.) should be outlined. Although the great majority of translators adopt the universalist approach to translation, the problems of untranslatability, whether linguistic or referential, should not be left unexplained.

Texts should include passages of journalistic prose covering current issues, cultural events, arts, social sciences and related topics. Leading magazines and dailies are good sources of such materials. Using texts on a variety of topics rather than on a single one seems more profitable in the long run, as it aids vocabulary build-up. Therefore selected technical texts of increasing difficulty should also be used. At the same time special procedures used when translating specialized and scientific texts should be presented to students (see e.g. Wallerstein 1981). Teachers should be particularly careful not to misjudge the importance of one topic at the expense of other ones and the importance of active knowledge of specialized vocabulary when only passive mastery is recommended.

Other materials to be used include SL texts and their accepted translation, paraphrases, SL and TL texts dealing with the same topics but not necessarily translations or paraphrases of one another. Under no circumstances should a single handbook become the only source of texts used in class. Texts should be relatively easy and short in the initial stages of instruction, but later their length and degree of difficulty should increase. During the final period of instruction they should correspond to, or better even exceed, the student's linguistic abilities. It is pointless to demand from students translations into the second language below their actual level of mastery of that language.

Classroom procedures should include precis writing, paraphrasing texts from the existing publications in order to practise expressive techniques and synonym use, comparison of parallel (topic, content) SL and TL texts for form, expression and style, substitution exercises prepared by the teacher or student (word and expression building exercises). In these the students should replace the native language expressions provided in a text with suitable words and expressions of the TL:

"Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. Captain Smith and his crew WITAJA PAŃSTWA NA POKŁADZIE (welcome you on board) this British Airways Trident Three. We are now leaving Warsaw. PRZEWIDYWANY CZAS LOTU (our estimated flight time) will be two hours and fifteen minutes. BĘDZIEMY LECIEĆ NA WYSOKOŚCI (we shall be flying — tense! — at an *altitude* of) thirty thousand feet. Now PROSZĘ ZAPIĄĆ PASY (please fasten your seat belts) and place your chair backs in the upright position with tables stowed, ready for take-off." (See Dzierżanowska 1977 for similar procedures).

Once technical texts are introduced, oral summaries of texts and short debates on specialized topics should be included in order to introduce and practise the use of specialized vocabulary. Students should work on specialized glossaries of technical terms and neologisms which should be brought to class and consulted when necessary.

Apart from translation from foreign to native language there is a great deal of translation into the second language involved in this course. This direction

of translating calls for a separate approach taking into account the specificity of the task. Roberts 1983 presents a long list of exercises which are used in Canada to teach translation into the second language. Some of them could successfully be employed in our course since apart from being true translation exercises they also help expose syntactic and stylistic correspondence and differences between languages. Here are some examples:

1) In order to compare SL and TL structures we might look in the text for similarities that could undergo a more or less direct translation and for structures which cannot be translated directly into the target language.

2) To test comprehension of words and expressions in a context and situation possible polysemous words should be found and their exact meanings established in the text. Then they should be tested against the context. Finally sentences with these words should be translated. The students should also search for context clues that might give an idea of the meaning of polysemous words and then replace them with plain words conveying the same meaning.

3) Once the main ideas of the text to be translated are extracted and summarized, key words directly related to the main idea of the text and those pertaining to the message should be picked out and translated.

4) Units of thought both in the SL text and in the translation should be compared.

5) Substitution exercises may be varied by using an SL text and a partial translation in which the students will fill in the blanks with appropriate words and expressions. Structures may be varied. The use of dictionaries should be disallowed.

6) In SL texts some words may be underlined and the students asked to choose from the provided list those TL equivalents to be used in translation which best suit the context.

7) Specialized vocabulary and elements in the text that may facilitate the explanation of the concept underlying each term should be identified to ensure the comprehension of specialized concepts.

8) In efforts to eliminate recurring second language errors in translation an overview of the problem should be given, followed by a contrastive analysis in which the various semantic values of a SL structure and the TL forms which render the meaning of the SL structure will be analysed through examples. Exercises in SL should follow to practise conscious choice of the form required by the meaning of the message. This conscious use of the practised form should then be carried over to translation by translating carefully chosen sentences in which the given structure appears contextual clues as to the semantic values of this and structure can be found. Only then can translation of a text with similar specifications proceed.

Naturally, translations of paragraphs from foreign to native language and then in both directions should be practised too, as well as introductory "on

sight" translation. Since students tend to "smuggle in" a lot of grammatical and other errors during their first attempts at sight translation (the instructor has fewer possibilities of strict reinforcement of correct forms without constantly interfering with the student's performance), it should be left to the teacher's discretion to introduce the exercise at a stage when there is no danger of permanently implanting such errors in the student's memory. Also utmost care must be taken not to let the students repeat their "old" mistakes when they do oral translations of the texts previously translated in writing (which is bound to happen for reasons of extra stress involved).

The amount of sight translation may increase with time. The students should also have some idea of how to assess the quality of translation. This can be achieved through analyzing several translations of the same text, or through analyzing non-target-language-sounding translations (examples in Duff 1981 and Voellnagel 1979). It is also possible to compare improving versions done by the same person at different stages of exposure to instruction.

Detailed discussion of homework assignments should also become a standard part of every class.

Homework should be assigned after every class and should always be corrected. It should include written translations or any of the above mentioned exercises. Every teacher will probably develop his own most efficient way of correcting the assignments, but the way suggested by Hieke in the 1982 issue of *English Teaching Forum* deserves to be recommended. It can roughly be summarized as follows: each week, always several days prior to class, a small group of students prepares a very careful rendition of the homework assignment in three (preferably typewritten) copies. The teacher gets one copy which is very carefully corrected and receives every possible valid comment. One copy is deposited in the library and one is retained by the team which prepared the translation. The teacher's copy is returned to the group before class discussion and correction. In the course of class discussion the team adds changes, improvements, comments, information and contributions from the class as a whole to their copy on which the teacher's remarks have already been entered. The final version of the assignment prepared by the same team then replaces (or is added to) the pre-class one. To other class members who prepare less elaborate assignments these two copies serve as reference material. This procedure should allow the teacher to treat efficiently the various problems and options that the assignment poses and to increase the quality of the translation assignment (Hieke 1982: 38-39).

Throughout the course the requirements should increase gradually, and the students' progress should be checked regularly. This can be done through a number of tests, both written and oral, pertaining to material done in class. During the first two semesters the requirements should be language rather than translation oriented. However, most basic translation errors like incor-

rect word-for-word substitution of items, unnecessary omission and addition, obvious terminology errors, or violation of specific translation procedures should be eliminated. In order to test the students' mastery of technical terminology, multiple choice tests should be administered regularly. Unless the requirements of a particular test specify it, the students should always be able to use one dictionary when doing translation tests. A time limit may become an additional requirement in cases of revision of particular material done in class. Otherwise, testing materials should be different from those used in class, but they may be similar in scope, degree of difficulty, and length.

Literary texts should either be excluded from this course or approached with greatest caution as they are not of immediate value for our purposes, and besides, they require a certain literary talent from the translator.²

Out of necessity the above is a general outline of a programme to which various details may be added and from which portions may be removed, depending on particular needs.

In conclusion, the merits of a programme that takes into consideration two different aspects of translation should be made clear. These are both direct and indirect. Apart from learning how to eliminate most striking translation errors, students develop confidence and skill in converting from the SL to the TL. They also learn to discriminate between good and bad writing and good and bad translations as only good writing translates well. Good writing depends on clear thinking and conscious choice of the most precise word-

² The difficulties are best illustrated by Zbigniew Herbert's poem "On translating poetry":

Jak trzmiel niezgrabny
siadł na kwiecie
aż zgięła się lodyga wiotka
przeciska się przez rzędy płatków
podobnych słownikowym kartkom
do środka dąży
gdzie aromat i słodycz jest
i choć ma katar
i brak mu smaku
jednak dąży
aż bije głową
w żółty słupek
i tu już koniec
trudno wniknąć
przez kielich kwiatów
do korzeni
więc trzmiel wychodzi
bardzo dumny
i głośno brzęczy:
byłem w środku
tym zaś
co mu nie całkiem wierzą
nos pokazuje
z żółtym pyłkiem

Like an awkward bumble-bee
he sits on the flower
until the delicate stalk bends
he squeezes through rows of petals
like the pages of a dictionary
he tries to reach the center
where the scent and sweetness are
and though he has a cold
and lacks any taste
still he perseveres
until he knocks his head
against the yellow pistill
and here already is the end
it is difficult to penetrate
from the cups of flowers
to their roots
so the bumble-bee goes out
very proud
and loudly buzzing:
I have been inside
and to those
who don't quite believe him
he shows his nose
yellow with pollen

ing. This in turn is acquired, among other things, through wide and intensive reading for both general information and language use — a habit that ought to be deeply rooted in the participants upon the completion of this course. The natural consequence of the above is the refinement of the knowledge of the target language and increased awareness of the possibilities of the native one, and the inevitable correspondences between them. This is how TP can aid foreign language acquisition at an advanced level. And this is precisely why an attempt has been made at finding a golden mean between the demands of modern translating and the requirements of the curriculum at a university philological department, where one of the goals is to help the student in acquiring perfect mastery of the foreign language. Another reason is the necessity of dispersing the myth that anybody can translate well provided he knows a foreign language. Translation, like any other activity, requires special skills and the knowledge of a foreign language is only one of them.

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