

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Аннотация: Проблема использования перевода как одного из способов обучения иностранному языку всегда оставалась в центре внимания лингвистов и методистов, обосновывающих эффективность и рациональность его продуманного и своевременного применения. Однако, проведя тщательный сопоставительный анализ учебников по английскому языку для лицейских классов Молдовы и, соответственно, старших классов российских школ, авторы пришли к выводу, что молдавские учебники не только не предлагают учащимся никаких практических упражнений на перевод, но и полностью отвергают саму идею возможности использования родного языка на уроках английского, что не соответствует современной концепции преподавания иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: перевод, родной язык, язык перевода, инструмент обучения, языковые навыки.

Translation is a very important component in the process of acquiring a foreign language. In fact, it is a cultural mediation that involves two different national languages. Translation studies have recently emerged as a strong discipline with a solid theoretical foundation. Roman Jakobson (1959) classifies translation into three basic categories: “1) *intralingual translation* or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; 2) *interlingual translation* or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; 3) *intersemiotic translation* or interpretation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” [4: 233].

The following definitions characterize translation *as a process, as a result of this process, as socially oriented interlingual communication and as a skill*. For instance Y. Solodub et al. (2005) affirm: “Translation is a creative intellectual activity, denoting the transmitting of information from a source language into a target language” [7: 7].

A. Lilova (1985), in turn, claims that “translation is a specific oral or written activity aimed at the recreation of an oral or written text (utterance) existing in one language into a text in another language, accompanied by keeping the invariance of content, qualities of the original and author’s authenticity” [5: 33].

V. Vinogradov (2006) sees translation as “a process (and its result) caused by social necessity of information (content) transmitting, expressed in a written or oral text in one language by the means of an equivalent (adequate) text in another language” [9: 11], while N. Garbovsky (2004) in his work *Theory of Translation* states that “translation is a social function of communicative mediation between people, who use different language systems. This function is carried out as a psychophysical activity of a bilingual person aimed at the reflection of reality on the basis of his (her) individual abilities as an interpreter, accomplishing transition from one semiotic system to another with the purpose of equivalent, i.e. maximally complete, but always partial transmission of a system of meanings, contained in a source message, from one communicant to another” [3: 214].

P. Newmark (2001) writes that “translation is a craft consisting of the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language” [6: 7].

All these definitions lead us to the idea that translation is an undoubtedly essential skill to be gained in the process of language acquisition. We agree with Alan Duff (1996) who states that “translation is a natural and necessary activity. More so, indeed, than many of the fashionable activities invented for language learners. Outside the classroom – in offices, banks, factories, shops and airports – translation is going on all the time. Why not inside the classroom?” [2: 6].

Translation has been used in language classes for hundreds of years and the grammar-translation method, having originated from the practice of teaching Latin, has generally been considered one of the fundamental methods of teaching a foreign language. Consequently, it was quite natural that when in the 19th century modern languages appeared in school curricula, teachers continued to use the same method. The students learned grammatical rules and then applied them by translating sentences between the source language and their native language. When students reached more advanced levels, they were able to translate entire texts from the target language. Reading was the only competence trained mostly without any listening or speaking practice, with very little attention paid to pronunciation or communication skills. Gradually, the universal recognition that translation itself was an academic exercise rather than one which would actually help learners to use language, led, at the height of the communicative approach to language learning in the 1980s and early 1990s, to its almost complete banishment from the EFL classroom. It has been asserted that the mother tongue should not be allowed to influence the target language – since this influence is in most cases negative.

However, in reality, a great number of teachers, both native-speakers and teachers who are speakers of languages other than English, have continued using translation on a regular basis in their teaching of English because of common sense reasons, that is both because L1 reference provides the support that many beginning learners are in need of and because of translation economy and efficiency as a means of grammar presentation – as opposed to such direct method techniques as demonstration and/or providing different situations. Moreover, whether it is forbidden or not, foreign language learners tend to constantly compare and contrast the two language systems; and translation is evidently making this non-verbalized cognition more explicit and efficient. Additionally, contemporary methodological research seems to opt for the reinstatement of the grammar-translation approach, arguing that “this type of approach can give learners a basic foundation upon which they can then build their communicative skills. On the one hand they have motivating communicative activities that help to promote their fluency and, on the other, they gradually acquire a sound and accurate basis in the grammar of the language. Therefore without a sound knowledge of the grammatical basis of the language it can be argued that the learner is in possession of nothing more than a selection of communicative phrases which are perfectly adequate for basic communication but which will be found wanting when the learner is required to perform any kind of sophisticated linguistic task” [8:2].

For Duff (1996) translation is an activity of many merits and use, as it develops three qualities essential to all language learning; accuracy, clarity and flexibility. It trains the learner to search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity) [2: 7].

Discussing the right or wrong use of the mother tongue in mono lingual classrooms, we can state that in many instances L1 is used to give a quick and accurate translation of a word in a foreign language that, if explained in the target language, would take much more time to be understood. David Atkinson (1987) suggests a judicious use of L1 in the FL classroom as its limited use can help students to benefit from activities which, at other times, the L2 should be used. [1: 241-247]. Undoubtedly translation activities might enhance the improvement of communicative skills as they involve learners in discussing and sharing context-oriented meaning as well as encourage students to see the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 thus revealing most language learning difficulties through a comparison of the target language and the students’ native language.

We are convinced that adequate, timely and well-thought-out use of translation in the EFL classroom is certain to promote language learning, to raise language awareness and to develop students’ autonomy. Then, if translation activities indisputably bring so many potential advantages, why should they completely be banished from the English textbooks for the 10th, 11th and 12th forms of Moldovan lyceums?

The detailed study of Moldovan high school English textbooks has proved the total absence of activities that would require translation from/into the English language. On the contrary, the textbooks used in Russia include numerous examples of activities that involve translation. Some of them are really interesting and attractive to learners. For example, in the English textbook for the 9th form by O. Afanasieva and I. Mikheeva the following activities have been found: difficult words are translated, grammar is explained in Russian, the use of some words/phenomena is also presented in

Russian; and at the end of the textbook there is an English- Russian vocabulary. Pupils are also proposed to fulfil such exercises as: “express the same in English using your active vocabulary, find in the text English equivalents for the following, and write it in English. In English Student’s Book for the 10th form the same authors offer such translation-centered activities and exercises as: express the same in English, translate the poem into Russian, translate the following into English, use the new vocabulary, use the words from the box above and express the same in English, find in the text English equivalents for the following. Additionally, difficult words in texts and in the grammar explanation are translated into Russian, the Grammar References at the end of the book are also in Russian and the Topical Vocabulary is translated. The 11th form textbook asks the pupils to find in the text English equivalents for the following, to express the same in English using the new words, to translate the sentences into Russian using the phrasal verb..., to translate the following into Russian trying to preserve the original style of the author, and as usual the Topical Vocabulary is translated.

The translation-oriented activities employed in the above-mentioned textbooks, serve as a practical confirmation of the methodological suggestion that the use of translation makes the lesson more productive as less time is spent on sophisticated monolingual explanations. It also appears very efficient while explaining new grammar phenomena, introducing vocabulary and enhancing ideas during written composition classes in L2. In the reading class the teacher may provide the translation of key vocabulary and of the gist of the reading passage thus facilitating the process of comprehension. Furthermore, while presenting certain civilization topics, especially to the beginner learners, a teacher, feeling that s/he is not properly understood by the pupils because of their insufficient background knowledge and cultural differences, can give a brief translation of the passage, thus reinforcing their cultural awareness.

So translation activities, being very diverse, imaginative, real and motivating, can appear useful and reinforcing while teaching students of various learning styles and levels. Aspiring to monolingual teaching as to a desirable standard, we should not neglect translation as a helpful and rather effective teaching tool and according to the findings detailed in this work its use in the classroom deserves serious reconsideration.

References:

1. Atkinson D. ‘*The mother tongue in the classroom: a neglected resource?*’ *ELT Journal*, 1987, Vol 41/4, pp.241-247.
2. Duff, Alan. *Translation*, 5. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
3. Garbovsky, N.K. *Theory of Translation*. Moscow: MSU, 2004.
4. Jakobson, Roman. *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, in *On Translation*: Edited by R. A. Brower. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959.
5. Lilova, A. *Introduction into General Theory of Translation*. Moscow: Visshaya Shkola, 1985.
6. Newmark, P. *Approaches to Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.
7. Solodub, Y.P., Albreht, F.B., Kuznetsov, A.Y. *Theory and Practice of Literary Translation*. Moscow: Academia Press, 2005.
8. Sudhansu Dash. *Grammar-translation approach of learning English as a Second language: A case study of the Secondary School Students in the Tribal Schools of Odisha*, in *Review Of Research Journal*, 2015, Vol. 4, No. 12. pp.1-10. [Available URL: <http://ror.isrj.org/UploadedData/1899.pdf>]
9. Vinogradov, V.S. *Translation: General and Lexical Problems*. Moscow: KDU, 2006.

Textbooks:

Used in Moldova:

1. Chira, G., Duşciac, M., Gîscă, M., Onofreiciuc E., Chira, M. *Working Together. English as a Major Language*. Student’s Book, 10th Form, Editura ARC, Chişinău, 2012.
2. Chira, G., Duşciac, M., Gîscă, M., Onofreiciuc E., Chira, Rotaru, S. *This Is Our World*. Student’s Book, 11th Form, Editura ARC, 2014.
3. Duşciac, M., Gîscă, M., Onofreiciuc E., Rotaru, S., Schneider, T., Ewell, S., Chira, G., Chira, M. *English Awareness - At the Crossroads*. Student’s Book, 12th Form , Editura ARC, Chişinău, 2015.

Used in Russia:

1. Afanasyeva O., Mikheeva I. *English*, 9th Form. Moscow, Drofa, 2009.
2. Afanasyeva O., Mikheeva I. *English, Student’s Book*, 10th Form, Moscow, Prosveshcheniye, 2007.
3. Afanasyeva O., Mikheeva I. *English, Student’s Book*, 11th Form, Moscow, Prosveshcheniye, 2008.