

Traditional Translation in a Positive Light

Dalia Pravackaitė, Julija Sakalauskienė

Abstract. The paper focuses on the application of translation as a means to check comprehension or to convey the meaning of what is taught. Translation has to be incorporated in language learning activities alongside with a wide range of commonly recognized ones, e.g. vocabulary development, comprehension, listening, writing, reading for gist, etc. In translation the learners are encouraged to use the language creatively by paraphrasing, guessing as well as simplifying which facilitates understanding. They are also exposed to the two language systems if they are made to evaluate and explain the translated version as well as substantiate the reasons for their choices. We have analyzed some aspects of translation covering several grammatical and lexical forms (e.g. Passive, Non-finite verbs, Compound nouns) which might be troublesome for understanding. On the other hand, the teacher will also know better what the real teaching problems are and can better provide coping with them as he/she has got an insight into the linguistic problems involved. This approach is based on extensive classroom observation and experience.

Translation as a language learning activity has long been considered as a poor relation in the family of language teaching techniques as “uncommunicative”, “boring”, “pointless”, “difficult”, “irrelevant” and the like. It has suffered a lot from too close an association with grammar. Along with other traditional teaching activities such as dictation, vocabulary, reading aloud, etc. it has been pushed into the methodological lumber room. Through a long-term teaching practice we have observed that translation as a method has to be employed along with other practices to stimulate deeper insight into the meaningful contents of the material to be taught.

One of the striking features of the expanded demand for English which has followed political change in Eastern and Central Europe has been its simultaneous emphasis on both the cultural and functional values of the language.

During the last decade with the rise of new jobs and professions never practiced before, there emerged a need to shift from the prevailing communicative approach in studying languages to language translation which used to be out of favour with the language teaching community. Even today translation is largely ignored as a valid activity for language practice and improvement. And even though it is practiced it is more likely to be used for language testing, not for language teaching.

The main reason for this is that over the years translation had gradually become fossilized. It became less and less associated with the excitement of new discoveries, more and more with tediousness of bookish learning; what should have been a vital and challenging discipline had degenerated in most schools into a pointless routine exercise, a chore, a punishment.

Duff (1992) distinguishes the main reasons that the teachers point out why translation has fallen from favour:

1. It is text-bound and confined to only two skills – reading and writing. It is not a communicative activity as not involving oral interaction.
2. It is not suitable for classroom work because it is time-consuming and wasteful.

3. It is associated with a “different” language or “third” language, with literary or scientific texts and, therefore, not suited for communication.
4. Use of the mother tongue is required which is not desirable.
5. It is boring, both to do and to correct.

Nevertheless, in recent times the EFL teachers have been reviving the use of translation for different teaching purposes. Through translation the students are engaged in new and interesting ways to practice vocabulary, reading, writing and comprehension, thus, they build the skills which they will need in the future. Translation can also be communicative if taught by a positive and innovative approach in which the language can be practiced at all levels within a meaningful context.

According to Nunan (1989, cited by Eadie, 1999), students can be involved in problem solving activities in which they are required to negotiate the meaning, if the text to be translated is being discussed before translating it. They are encouraged to use the language creatively, by paraphrasing, guessing, simplifying which is helpful at the preparatory stage. The learners are exposed directly to the contrasting language systems of the English and the native languages if they are asked to assess and explain the appropriacy of their translated versions as well as give the reasons for their choices. Common errors should also be discussed. Authors on the subject of translation generally agree that consciousness-raising, i.e. the learner’s awareness of grammatical features without directly instilling the rules is more important than just saving time.

Translation might provide guided practice in reading for gist, the task frequently offered in modern English textbooks, as well as promote vocabulary development, structural pattern, recognition (Heltai, 1999, cited by Eadie, 1999) and improve reading comprehension as well as writing skills. Translation is carried out everywhere – in the offices, banks, shops and factories. The students secretly translate in their heads or to each other whether or not we want them to do it. So why not engage the students in the activity aiming at practicing the main language

learning skills. In the class the students can be provided with the opportunity to share information, prove their knowledge, engage in independent learning and creative language use.

We need to communicate both ways: into and from the foreign language. As translation involves contrast it enables us to explore the potential of both languages. However, textbooks place great emphasis on competence in the foreign language, yet little, if any, guidance is given how to communicate back into the mother tongue, though many professionals need to do it as their daily work. We consider translation as ideally suited for practicing this vital skill. Translation refines the students' sensitivity to alternative ways of expressing meaning, as well as trains them to apply this sensitivity to rendering English texts into their own language. So, translation heightens language awareness.

The proper material for translation should be authentic, not "made-up" language, and all language is relevant to translation – all styles and registers in both speech and writing. Thus, the learner is brought into touch with the whole language, and not just those parts isolated by the textbook. It helps to increase the students' power and range of expression.

Depending on the students' needs and the syllabus, the teacher can select material to illustrate particular aspects of language and structure with which the students have difficulties in English (e.g. prepositions, articles, if-clauses, etc.). By working through these difficulties in the mother tongue the students come to see the link between language and its usage.

Wills (quoted by Campbell, 1998) offers a five-step operation for teaching translation which includes source text analysis, evaluation of translation difficulties, elimination of difficulties, assessment of equivalence, and back-translation.

In this paper we will analyse some aspects of translation as practiced in our language classes focussing on several grammatical and lexical forms which have proved the most challenging ones during the long-term teaching process.

Specialists in language teaching are well aware of the fact that the major problem in the process of learning a foreign language is the interference caused by the structural differences between the native language of the learner and the foreign language. "The most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner" (Fries, quoted by Ellis, 1985). A similar approach was expressed by R.Lado "It is observed in bilingual studies that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meaning, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture – both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives" (Lado, quoted by Ellis, 1985).

Thus, arises the use of contrastive analysis – the point-by-point comparison of mother tongue and target language. The student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some of its features quite easy and others extremely difficult. The elements similar to his/her native language will be simple for him/her, and those that are different will be difficult. The teacher, who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the learners, is better aware of translation teaching problems and in the process of solving them he is gaining linguistic insight that cannot easily be achieved otherwise.

A careful contrastive analysis of the two languages definitely contributes to the preparation of instructional materials and to the considerable improvement of teaching methods, and might be successful in predicting comprehension errors.

A preliminary contrastive analysis provides language teachers with:

- 1) certain similarities between the language patterns being studied;
- 2) relevant differences between them;
- 3) patterns that are nearly identical.

These similarities, differences and correspondences should be taken into consideration when teaching language phenomena. At all times the teacher needs to diagnose accurately the difficulties his students have in learning each pattern.

Thus, the presence of similar structures in both languages (e.g. some types of subordinate clauses) requires little effort from Lithuanian speakers and even facilitates the acquisition of their English equivalents.

Cf.: My mother died *when* I was eight years old...
Mano mama mirė, *kai* man buvo aštuoneri...

On the contrary, English predicative phrases or syntactic structures with non-finite forms of the verb are the most troublesome for Lithuanian students. Though in Lithuanian we also have three non-finite forms of the verb (*dalyvis*, *padalyvis*, *bendratis*), they do not fully coincide with those in English.

Cf.: *Silver being expensive*, we rarely use it as a conductor.
Kadangi sidabras brangus, mes jį retai naudojame kaip laidininką.
Weather permitting, we shall make an excursion.
Jei leis oro sąlygos, mes vyksime į ekskursiją.

The examples above show that the absolute participle constructions have to be rendered into Lithuanian by means of an adverbial clause.

The absence of gerundial structures in Lithuanian sometimes quite seriously complicates the use of such patterns in English by Lithuanian-speaking students.

Cf.: *Her falling ill* spoiled our outing.
Tai, kad ji susirgo, sugadino mūsų iškylą.
He insisted *on our coming*.
Jis primygtinai reikalavo, *kad mes ateitume*.

Gerundial complexes of the type are nearly always rendered into Lithuanian by a subordinate clause generally introduced by *kad, tai...kad*, etc.

The students may find it difficult to understand the meaning of the action expressed by a gerund with a preceding noun or pronoun.

Cf.: *On the buyer's paying* only part of the amount of the invoice we cannot insist on the contract being signed immediately.

Kai pirkęjas sumoka tik dalį faktūros sumos, mes negalime reikalauti, kad kontraktas būtų pasirašytas tučtuojau.

Finally, we come to one more structure, the *-ing* form, in the function of attribute preceded by the prepositions *of* or *for*, the comprehension and translation of which may present difficulties for the speakers of Lithuanian.

Cf.: Various methods of cooling transformers are adopted in practice.

Praktikoje naudojami įvairūs transformatoriaus aušinimo būdai. (translated by students as "aušinimo transformatoriai")

In terms of punishment, support for jailing burglars was highest in the USA and the UK.

Kalbant apie bausmes, daugiausia pasisakiusių už įsilaužėlių įkalinimą buvo JAV ir Jungtinėje Karalystėje. (jailing burglars as "sėdintys kalėjime įsilaužėliai")

Source language influence is of important concern. If the thought is set out in English the students will naturally be tempted to reproduce the English structure rather than look for possibly more appropriate structure in their own language. E.g.:

"You are invited to the Society's meeting which will be followed by a discussion."

This is a characteristic formula in English. Would the same formula be characteristic in Lithuanian? There may be another way, as for example:

"The society invites you to attend the meeting after which there will be a discussion."

or

"We are inviting members to attend and take part in the discussion (which is) to follow."

This is not to say that a different formulation must be found but that the English structures should not be automatically imitated. The abundant usage of passive forms is not so typical of the Lithuanian language.

The same applies to the language of signs and notices as a special language with its own set of forms and expression. The same message in one language may be expressed in quite different words in another. This is why the importance of context is stressed to remind students that they should interpret the message in terms of their own culture which is not necessarily the same as translating words. E.g.:

Credits not allowed (we do not give any credits);

Parking prohibited (you must not park here), etc.

Dictionaries normally lag behind the developments in science and technology, still they are the main resource for translation. We have noticed that students take the entry as the final word and do not explore other possibilities.

Besides, the largest English-Lithuanian dictionary by B.Piesarskas does not give a full scope of the meanings of words, such as: approach – as "method", considerations – as "reasons", evidence – as "data", experience – as "practice", procedure – as "process, method", etc. So the teacher's role here is to help generate versions of translation or advise the students to select the equivalent.

Translation should be based on certain regularities derived from the lexical analysis of the written text. Lexical constitution of modern writing can be characterized by a number of specific terms (words, word combinations, phrases) which serve as a tool to understand the concepts. Specifically, an abundant usage of compounds poses a considerable difficulty in understanding and might be challenging for translation. Generally, the problem does not lie in understanding what is meant but, rather, in finding a suitable expression in the Lithuanian language, e.g.:

low-income families (= families with low income)

cash deposit (= deposit in cash)

oil-rig accident (= accident in an oil rig)

research study (= study by research)

product design brief (= brief for the design of a product)

The most frequently used compounds could be divided into several groups according to their lexical composition, e.g.:

1. Noun-noun compounds (mail system, information management, delivery date, water-proof, power supply, alarm clock, lead unit, needs analysis, exam results, life test, etc.).
2. Adjective-noun compounds (remote control, reverse current, manual operation, low cost, etc.).
3. Noun-participle-noun compounds (noise measuring channel, far-reaching consequences, etc.).

Mostly compounds are shorter and more convenient than noun phrases, e.g.:

a tax payer *versus* a payer of taxes

They are more concise and, therefore, have greater impact than noun-phrases, e.g.:

a product design brief *versus* a brief for the design of a product

Nevertheless, compounds can also be ambiguous, e.g.:

criminal lawyer – 1) a specialist in criminal law
or

coordination area – 1) the area to be coordinated
or

2) the area from which coordination is provided

ship movement service – 1) service designed for ship movement
or

2) service employing movement of a ship

community service – 1) service dedicated for the sake of community
or

2) service provided by the community

The nouns used attributively may express manner, place, etc.

acid treatment – treatment by using acid
North Sea oil rig accident – accident in the North Sea oil rig

But the most troublesome for translation are compounds consisting of a chain of words without auxiliaries (prepositions, articles), e.g.: total network expansion, public call offices, quality control management development officer, etc.

A different kind of hyphenated phrases placed before nouns are often unclear to Lithuanian students, e.g.:

a state-of-the-art computer (=very modern)
run-of-the-mill performance (=ordinary and disappointing)
behind-the-scene negotiations (=not generally known that smth. is happening)
a four-wheel-drive vehicle (=one in which the engine provides power to all four wheels so that it can go over rough ground easily)

In some cases, the context may help to grasp the meaning of such compound nouns but not to find the equivalent Lithuanian term. Thus, most often the Lithuanian translation equivalents are not terms but rather wordy definitions.

Conclusions

In this paper we have discussed some common problems connected with language learning and teaching practice. The acquisition of some complexes in English may pose certain difficulties for a native speaker, since they do not exist in the students' mother tongue. The similarities and differences of the languages compared can be identified by means of contrastive analysis. The most feasible approach to overcome the hurdles that hinder understanding the message in English is to use translation in the classroom.

Dalia Pravackaitė, Julija Sakalauskienė

Naujas požiūris į tradicinį vertimo metodą

Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas vertimo vaidmuo užsienio kalbų mokymo procese. Pastaruoju metu didėja susidomėjimas tradiciniu vertimo metodu, kuris buvo beveik ignoruojamas dėl ribotų taikymo galimybių. Tačiau vertimas, kaip būdas, gali ir turi naudojamas mokant užsienio kalbų greta naujausių metodų, nes jis, integruodamas įvairius įgūdžius, pvz., supratimą iš klausos, rašymą, kalbėjimą ir t.t., gali suvaidinti teigiamą vaidmenį tikrinant informacijos supratimą ir skatinant besimokančiųjų gilesnį teksto suvokimą.

Remiantis ilgamete anglų kalbos dėstymo patirtimi ir stebėjimais, straipsnyje aptariami kai kurie anglų kalbos gramatikos ir leksikos formų vertimo į lietuvių kalbą sunkumai (pvz., neveikiamosios rūšies veiksmažodžiai, bendratis, gerundijus, sudėtiniai daiktavardžiai ir kt.). Dviejų kalbų struktūrų gretinimas gali pasitarnauti aiškinant užsienio ir gimtosios kalbos ypatumus ir iš čia kylančius sunkumus.

Straipsnis įteiktas 2001 11
Parengtas publikuoti 2002 05

The authors

Dalia-Valerija Pravackaitė, lecturer, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.

Academic interests: teaching grammar, theory of language learning, language teaching materials.

Address: Centre of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Gedimino Str. 43-313, LT-3000 Kaunas, Lithuania.

E-mail: rastukc@adm.ktu.lt

Julija Sakalauskienė, lecturer, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania.

Academic interests: translation-interpretation, ESP, new economic terms and usage, psychology and sociology.

Address: Centre of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology, Gedimino Str. 43-313, LT-3000 Kaunas, Lithuania.

E-mail: rastukc@adm.ktu.lt

Translation is the activity which by its very nature provokes speculation and discussion, therefore, should not be neglected in the study of a foreign language. In translation there is rarely the only "right" answer, though there might be several wrong ones, so the teacher need not and must not get involved in producing the ultimate or the "rightest" answer to the student. Instead, by encouraging him to search, to invent, to speculate on the most appropriate version of rendering the message into another language the students are given the chance to explore the potentials of both languages and get involved in problem-solving activities. So, translation is viewed as a relatively communicative activity in which language can be practiced.

References

1. Campbell, S. (1998) Translation into the Second Language. Longman.
2. Chamberlin, D., White, G. (1991) Advanced English for Translation. Cambridge University Press.
3. Duff, A. (1992) Translation. Oxford University Press.
4. Eadie, J. (1999) A Translation Technique. Forum, Volume 37.
5. Ellis, R. (1985) Understanding Second Language Acquisition. Oxford University Press.
6. Hewings, M. (1999) Advanced Grammar in Use. Cambridge University Press.
7. Hristova, S. (2000) Literature in the Training of Translators and Interpreters. The European English Messenger, XI/1.
8. Piesarskas, B. (1999) The English-Lithuanian Dictionary. Vilnius: Alma littera.
9. Rimkus, Č. (1999) Mokykimės suprasti anglišką tekstą. Kaunas: Šviesa.
10. Yule, G. (1998) Explaining English Grammar. Oxford University Press.

