

THREE USES FOR TRANSLATION
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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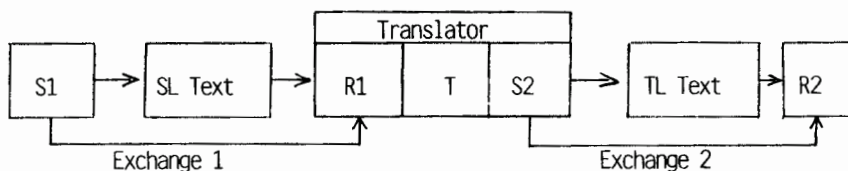
We all know the many good reasons for not using translation in FL teaching:

- i) An ability to translate presupposes knowledge of two languages, whereas learners by definition do not know one of the languages. Ability to translate should be an outcome of FL learning, not an input to the process: it should be an aim of FL teaching and not an objective to use Widdowson's (1983) distinction.
- ii) Translation from the native language (NL) encourages a state of mind (a 'set') that promotes NL transfer, much of which will take the form of interference, and ought to be stopped if possible, not promoted.
- iii) Requiring the learner to translate (from or into NL) encourages the patently false idea that the elements of pairs of languages correspond on a simple one-to-one basis.
- iv) Bilinguals (and that is what we want our learners to become) do not translate. They have two coordinate systems that are kept apart, so much so that many bilinguals find translation a daunting task.
- v) Translation emphasizes written language and literary forms, to the partial neglect of spontaneous informal speech.
- vi) Translation overemphasizes the medium (grammar and lexis) while it underemphasizes the message as a semantic and communicative act: after all, the original message is not the creation of the translator, but of the original author.

Most of these arguments against T come from Lado (1964: 55) and represent the negative stance of audiolingualism to T. Indeed, for most of this century there has been hardly a kind word for it. Only Harold Palmer (1921: 125) took a more sober view, realising it couldn't be all that bad: he points out that the Reform movement oughtn't to have killed it off, since "... the vicious form of translation might have been replaced by a beneficent form..." and "... new and more worthy uses of translation might have been found". And is it not surprising that the wheel of fortune has not yet come full circle for T, as it has for some other traditional FL teaching techniques, dictation and blankfilling (called Cloze procedure now) being obvious cases? I shall try to show here that T has something positive to offer: indeed, the sagacious use of T in FL teaching could help solve two major problems that have beset it of late. The first of these is the problem of the conflicting claims of conformity and communicativity. The second is the related issue of how to devise ways to constrain the learner's use 'communication strategies' (Faerch & Kasper, 1983).

To sketch in the problem briefly: communication has become a watchword in FL teaching and generally learners have been encouraged (overtly or implicitly) to develop their strategic competence at the expense of their grammatical competence. This has led to an overvaluation of learners' success in 'negotiating' meanings, accompanied by a failure to appreciate that negotiation is only necessary (whether in international diplomacy or in interlingual encounters) when things have been going wrong, when there is a communication crisis and failure to see eye-to-eye. Let us not overlook that there are ways of anticipating such crisis, the chief way in FL teaching circles being helping learners to learn the necessary repertoires that will ensure precise expression and comprehension. To put the selfsame issue differently as does Krashen (1985: 47), we must not allow learners to identify good reasons for not learning: what we have tended of late to nurture with reverence as "communication strategies" turn out, on closer inspection, to be an invitation to learners to over-control input. It could well be that our old pariah translation could serve the over-coping learner an occasional timely reminder of the need to learn the correct forms of the FL.

Translation is all about communication. It is an object lesson to learners of what has to happen when somebody does not know someone else's language. When this happens the 'knower' (translator) takes up a centre stage position, as the standard model of the T process makes clear:



Notice how the translator, as first recipient (R1) and as second sender (S2) participates in two consecutive monolingual exchanges, one receptive the other productive. Moreover, this is a position not only of privilege but also of responsibility, since he has to interpret S1's intentions and make sure that they reach R2 intact. This is no trivial task and I suggest that materials might be devised where the importance of conveying textualised information between monolinguals is emphasized: where misunderstanding could lead to the suspension of diplomatic relations. Apart from that, however, I suggest three new ways in which T could be approached in the FL classroom: these are positive as endorsements of T, not part of the attitude which says T is inevitable and therefore to be made the best of:

1. TRANSLATION CAN BE VIEWED EITHER AS PROCESS OR PRODUCT

Translation is resorted to in classrooms in two different ways determined by whether it is the teacher or the learners who are using it. As a standard exercise learners are required to perform the act of T, that is for them T is process oriented. The teacher's use of translation is usually as a short-cut to the intelligibility of a FL text: when there are FL forms which learners fail to understand, one of the options open to the teacher is to give the NL equivalent. The teacher knows this NL equivalent and retrieves it: he cites it as fact rather than as act. In parallel with this bias there is another difference, a difference in directionality of the T: while teachers' translations are usually into the NL, learners translate from the NL to the FL.

One of the classical objections to the use of T in FL teaching is countered if we are prepared to abandon the view of translation by learners as process and to think instead in terms of T as product: just as the teacher can make pedagogic capital of T, conceived in the sense of product, so can the pupil. At this point it is instructive to consider the distinctions drawn by Danchev (1982: 46) between what he calls 'conscious' as opposed to 'unconscious' translation. We are usually conscious of the processes of T when we make substitutions on the level of lexis, but the level of syntax is usually less tangible. Furthermore, unconscious T is something akin to language transfer by virtue of its taking place without the translator (or learner) being aware of the processes involved: it is in a sense involuntary. As Danchev says: "... transfer is described as an uncontrollable process, whereas translation is mostly controlled". What we need therefore, in order to use T most profitably and 'safely' in FL teaching, are ways to increase control. Without this, the learner will tend to negative transfer. We can best and most absolutely exercise this control by taking into class ready-made translations as products. If we do, we release the learner from the necessity to make products of translation himself and he has a chance to concentrate on T as process. This appears paradoxical but there is logic to the argument. We take into class not a single

translation of a NL text, but a pair or even a triple of alternative Ts. The class activity involves weighing the alternatives, comparing choices that have been made with those that could have been, and suggesting reasons why. This is multiple-choice translation work, akin to multiple-choice Cloze. We are dealing in fact with a paradigm of T equivalents. Hartmann (1980: 64) offers a ready-made example of this: three Ts into English of Der Werwolf, a poem by Christian Morgenstern. The poem is particularly challenging to translate on account of the two instances of 'word play' that it contains: the wer- element meaning 'who' in the title and the case inflections that are applied to that pronoun throughout the piece. Of course texts for teaching can and often must be much less problematic than this one:

Der Werwolf
Ein Werwolf eines Nachts entwich
von Weib und Kind und sich begab
an eines Dorfschullehrers Grab
und bat ihn: "Bitte, beuge mich!"

The Werwolf
A werwolf, one night, slipped away
From wife and child, and went directly
To the town schoolmaster's grave to pray
to that good man. "Oh please, inflect me!"

The Hoopoe
One night, a hoopoe left his tree,
His wife and child, and, when he found
A Boardschool Master's burial-mound
Begged: "Would you mind inflecting me?"

The Banshee
One night, a banshee slunk away
from mate and child, and in the gloom
went to a village teacher's tomb,
requesting him: "Inflect me, pray."

(From one of Morgenstern's Galgenlieder; the three translations are by W.D. Snodgrass and Lore Segal, A.E.W. Eitzen, and Karl F. Ross → Appendix E)

1. AN EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE TRANSLATION. SOURCE: HARTMANN (1980)

Another way to sensitise learners to the processes of T without imposing on them the unreasonable demand that they translate themselves, invokes the

real time dimension. Our last example of paradigmatic options involved the options available simultaneously. We can take a different perspective, that of changes through time. Anyone who has ever done a translation will know that it emerges slowly over time as a series of gradual approximations: it is seldom if ever a first-time-lucky, one shot accomplishment. This is made strikingly clear by Hartmann (op. cit.: 69). He traces the genesis of A.W. Wheen's English T of Erich Maria Remarque's anti-war novel Im Westen nichts Neues or All Quiet on the Western Front. Wheen produced five approximations: manuscript, typescript, proof, preprint and final version. (cf. Appendix)

This series gives us a rare insight into the dynamism of the translation process allowing us to see the translator's mind at work. Unfortunately such translation trials are rare, but there is nothing to prevent the teacher from preparing her own. First she does a rapid 'on sight' T of a short extract against the clock, resulting in an unedited first draft. Then on three occasions at ten day intervals she returns to successive versions to do the ten (in her opinion) most called-for improvements. The resultant five texts can be used in class to show the dynamics of T. As a bonus pupils will surely learn from this exercise how to carry out running repairs on their performance, how to 'monitor'.

What we have just described might be called 'heuristic' approximation: it is allowed to happen naturally. One can also take a more strictly formal approach. By this I mean one can intentionally exploit exhibit some category of translation theory: here the notion of rank bound translation (Catford, 1965: 25). This is one way of showing learners, through gradual approximation, what is involved in the successive moves from word-for-word, to literal, to free T. Catford's example is:

SLT: It's raining cats and dogs.

Wd. forWd.: Il est pleuvant chats et chiens.

Literal: Il pleut des chats et des chiens.

Free: Il pleut à verse.

The virtue of this technique is to show learners that 'free' T is not the same thing as 'rough' T. This comes as a timely lesson, because many learners have the mistaken impression that it is first drafts that are 'free', these being gradually tightened up on successive approximations: in actual fact the reverse is true.

2. TRANSLATION IS A SPECIAL CASE OF REPHRASING IN THE SAME LANGUAGE

T is the quest for textual equivalence in two languages or interlingual equivalence. It is a happy coincidence that much recent thought on FL teaching has been concerned with the pedagogic exploitation of textual equivalences

within a language, intralingual equivalence. The reason why these latter types of equivalence are so important is that they provide ways of bringing the FL to the learner in forms that he can internalise: this is for Krashen (1985) the all-important necessary and sufficient condition for FL acquisition - 'comprehensible input'. We can make input that is not accessible more accessible as input by rephrasing it. Widdowson's work on Communicative Language Teaching (Widdowson, 1978) makes similar proposals, and these are in language that reads as if it came from a book on translation, which is what Widdowson's book in a sense is. He suggests "... a controlled move from an analysis of discourse 1 to a synthesis of discourse 2." Then "... a way of mediating a transition from a one discourse to another". This is to be "... a process of lexical and syntactic substitution" (Widdowson, 1978: 151; 155; 88).

For Widdowson the teaching unit starts with learners reading a text and finishes with them composing a similar one: synthesis on the basis of analysis. To make the exemplary text comprehensible to the learner a kind of simplification is necessary, to produce "... a kind of translation from the usage available to the author of the extract to that which is available to the learner" (op. cit.: 151). Widdowson calls the resultant text a simplified version. Now, any form of mediating text must be recipient-sensitive; this is true of foreigner talk or of bilingual translation. All involve the substitution of the familiar in an extract by corresponding familiar forms in the version for the recipient. Widdowson's suggestions for simplifying replacements are pertinent also to the use of translations in FL teaching. One time-honoured way to easeify a text is endorsed by Widdowson: the provision of glosses or glossaries. Glosses are substitutes for "... the words which are judged to be outside the learner's current competence and which would pose a comprehending problem". They can be provided either before or during the text reading, and are accordingly referred to as priming and prompting glosses respectively. Let us see how these could be used in translation.

Priming: There should be a stage of familiarization with the NL text before its translation(s) are considered. It is probably an extract from a longer text, so the gist of this should be given. This will deter teachers from resorting to books of published extracts: they should select extracts for translation from their own NL reading, their favourite authors or magazines; they too thrive on motivation! Extracts should carry titles which place them in context: these should be long and explicit - there is no virtue in crypticisms. Sometimes the expanded title should be given even before the extract is, and the class asked to predict what the extract will be about. Such attempted prediction will take the form of single lexical items and will thus be an 'expectation' vocabulary. Predicted but unknown vocabulary will be learnt more easily than vocabulary that just happens to reside in a text: one is here creating a learner 'demand', to use a commercial image.

Prompting: It might be thought that providing glosses in the text is valueless, since they remove the challenge, do the job of translation for the pupil. At times this is easily justifiable, when we know that the FL expression is exotic. It is similarly defensible when we want the learner not to avoid: the 'avoidance strategy' (Schachter, 1974) is a popular refuge in translation, when the translator conceals his ignorance of the TL 'mot juste' by giving a paraphrase. But, while we must not regard T as a test, we do want to use it as a practice opportunity, and that opportunity is vitiated by avoidance. To explain how prompting glosses can constrain avoidance we must briefly mention the two types of gloss Widdowson discusses: usage glosses, which state the signification of the inaccessible original item, as opposed to use glosses, which give the value of the item that is unknown. The usage gloss usually takes the form of a dictionary definition and needs to be tailored to fit the particular context, while the use gloss fits this context without modification but might not fit a slightly different context. Here are examples of the two types, an intralingual pair from Widdowson (op. cit.: 87)

porous: allowing liquid to pass through [USAGE GLOSS]
approximately: about, roughly [USE GLOSS]

and an interlingual pair:

útil: useful, helpful, of value [USAGE GLOSS]
úteis: work-; for working (dias úteis) [USE GLOSS]

The NL English learner translating into Portuguese might come across the expression 'on weekdays'. There is a fair chance he will feel uncomfortable about the Portuguese equivalent and he will be disposed to avoid by using nos dias quando trabalha a gente or nos dias da semana or even nos dias semanais. He will of course be understood, but that is not the objective, for we want precision and idiomaticity of the sort that does not distract from the content of the utterance - that is real communication after all. To block the escape route to avoidance we insert a prompt which the learner must obey: here the 'use' gloss úteis. One might object that this is making the learner's life too easy, doing the task for him. Not so: it would have been even easier for him to use NL transfer or to avoid in some other way. Moreover, we are using the translation act as a teaching opportunity, promoting the 'mot juste' right when it is called for. But there is a way of making the task progressively more difficult. If we set out to increase the learner's independence on successive drafts, we first supply him with use glosses, then with usage glosses, and finally with no gloss at all.

3. TRANSLATION DEMANDS DUE ATTENTION TO TEXTURE

Recall Catford's definition of T as "... the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another" (Catford, 1965: 20). Nevertheless this aspect of T still gets overlooked or at best receives mere lipservice. To some teachers T still means rendering sets of sentences that have nothing more in common than membership of the same exercise or the fact of realising the same grammar rule. We now have some interesting and applicable (to teaching) descriptions of the texture of (mainly) English texts. We also have some documentation of what the results look like when nonnatives produce English that has failed to conform to the rules of textuality, when, as Corder (1974: 123) put it "... the speaker [writer:CJ] does not select the structurally correct form to show the intended relation between two sentences in a discourse." Here are a couple of examples:

- a) In the midst of a city street full of high buildings we found a little house. It had the appearance of a [? a fairy tale house?]
(Deyes, 1978)

Here the bracketted noun phrase violates theme: rheme organisation in English whereby new elements come last in the sentence. Since the reader knows that 'house' is being talked about, to give it sentence finality with second mention is awkward. Since the vital new information is 'fairy tale', this should come last e.g. ... a house in a fairy tale.

- b) [Essay Title:] Why I would not like to live in a big city.
[First sentence:] A big city is one of the places where I never want to live (Leinonen-Davies, 1984)

The defect here is also to do with the order of delivery of information: the essay title makes it quite clear that the text should give new information about places of which it is predicated you do not want to live in. The first sentence does not comply: it puts the cart before the horse and tells us more about not wanting to live somewhere.

Information structure is just one part of texture. One even more researched is Cohesion. One thing definitely is lacking however: there are no strikingly innovative suggestions as to how to teach learners to handle texture. The proposals we do have are for showing learners how these features operate in TL texts, ostensive teaching and 'raising to awareness' of the facts. Thus Deyes (op. cit.) suggests a four-step approach:

- i: NL text analysis.
- ii. FL text analysis and contrast.
- iii. Translation of full texts.
- iv. Supplementary exercises

Williams (1983) is an important paper on teaching recognition only of the cohesive devices operating in English FL texts, but there is nothing on how to teach the utilisation of these same devices productively. Most teachers of intermediate level learners will dismiss these techniques as too 'advanced' and too analytical. Teachers have been conditioned over the last few years to expect softer techniques. Perhaps the use of a familiar technique such as translation will sugar the bitter pill for teachers a little.

Let us assume that learners have had some experience at recognising and interpreting the cohesive devices in English as a FL texts as Williams (op. cit.) does it. We can now resort to a form of restricted translation, a term used by Catford (op. cit.: 21). This is T which is done on all but one of the levels of language: so Catford speaks of 'lexical' or 'grammatical' or 'phonological' translation to add to Catford's types. So we give to learners both a) a NL text to serve as a reference source for all kinds of meanings, and b) a FL/TL text which is a lexical and grammatical translation of the NL text, but differs crucially from it in that it is lacking in texture i.e. has not been translated on the level of text. Now sequences of sentences are often quoted as being non-texts in this sense: so the FL non-text that we give to the learner is just such a list of sentences based on the NL texts. The learner is now asked to 'retextualise' that list of sentences. Optionally, prompts of the kind we discussed in the previous section, can be supplied. Here is an example:

a) NL TEXT

Apenas a água principiou a ferver, com a revolução do peixe que se aproximava da superfície, rompeu a mais tremenda gritaria e algazarra de que tenho memória, e que ainda redobrou ao aparecimento dos primeiros atuns. Correçou então a toirada.

Sucedeu que o primeiro atum arpoado se escapou, e caído à água com tal velocidade parecia voar, jorrando sangue que o acompanhava de um rasto de púrpura....

(Manuel Teixeira Gomes: O Algarve: Uma Copejada de Atum)

b) TL RESTRICTED TRANSLATION:

1. The water started to boil/seethe
2. Masses of fish rose to the surface
3. A wild shout and pandemonium broke out
4. It doubled when the first tunny appeared
5. The fight/duel/trial began
6. The first tunny to be harpooned got away/broke loose
7. It fell so fast into the water, it seemed to fly
8. It spurted/gushed blood
9. Blood followed the tunny in a crimson wake/slipstream.

Exactly how much help to give, only the teacher familiar with her group will be able to decide. One thing must be clear: this is a teaching technique and not a test: so a high degree of cooperation should be encouraged, both teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil.

The sentences in b) are rather bland and simple SVC 'kernels'. Let us now explore, as we might in class, ways of injecting some texture into them, since, as they are time sequenced they possess some coherence but lack cohesion as well as other ingredients of texture. We take the first three as a block since these appear to constitute a sense-unit centred the relations between the three events mentioned there. Apenas and com suggest rapid successivity, if not overlap, while one event (aproximava) serves as background to another (rompeu). The TL expressions called for are of the set as soon as, no sooner ...than, scarcely/hardly had...when etc. These are supplied as prompts (in-text) but it is the pupils' job to put them to good use. Now take 4. What is it that redobrou? What is the antecedent of que? Which comes to mind, but this is an alternative. Whether to select it (and it is a matter of learners selecting from options still) depends, as one would expect in textured behaviour, on whether we are happy to begin a new sentence at 4: this as an anaphora implies opening a new sentence. If we do so, we lose some identity with the Portuguese source text and we risk hiatus, interruption of the rapid breathless flow of events that permeates the original. Another decision concerns então: will it be now, then or next? Again, we have toirada for which we suggest fight/trial and duel³ but why not bullfight? The decision taken now will have repercussions later in the text, for at a later point we learn that the seamen drove the tunnies como se fosser bois (as if they were oxen/bullocks). So, abandoning the 'bullfight' metaphor incurs the cost of losing the lexical cohesion carried in the original. Translation is essentially an exercise in motivated decision-making which is what we do all the time when we are producing language. The point about this exercise is that it allows us to ask questions concretely i.e. about a specific text, and allows pupils to make practical decisions: these are features of translation which must inevitably give it high 'authenticity' as a classroom activity. As Widdowson puts it: "Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader [and writer too: CJ] and it has to do with appropriate response" (Widdowson, 1978:80).

CONCLUSIONS

Though we started with six good reasons for not teaching FL skills through translation, we have only identified three good (?) reasons for so doing. This imbalance is not too serious however: I think we could find more reasons for and that we could annul some of the reasons against. What I have done here is exercise a little objectivity and ask whether translation is necessarily the evil it has, since the days of anti-Grammar/Translation, been made out to be. Relatively recent reappraisals of some other 'traditional' techniques such as dictation and blank-

filling encourage one to expect to uncover something that is salvageable in translation too. The three techniques for using translation are not my invention: others have discussed them, but in contexts other than pedagogic ones or other than interlingual ones. The processual, approximative approach is now well tried in the form of simplified versions, while the process-orientation of much work on Interlanguage is taken for granted. Attention to features of texture is widely recognised as necessary to improve nonnative speakers' reading skills: I here have switched the focus to writing. But, as the proof of the pudding is at the chalkface, these proposals must remain hypotheses pending trials.

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