

Translation is a Means, not an End of the Process of English Teaching and Learning

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การแปล คือ กระบวนการนำภาษาหนึ่งไปใช้แทนที่อีกภาษาหนึ่ง นักแปลไม่เพียงแต่มีความรู้สองภาษา แต่ต้องเข้าใจวัฒนธรรมของภาษาทั้งสองด้วย เพราะเป็นปัจจัยหนึ่งในสื่อที่ทำให้การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรมประสบความสำเร็จ นอกจากนี้การแปลยังหมายความถึง กระบวนการในการสอนและเรียนภาษาด้วย เพราะเป็นเครื่องมือที่มีประโยชน์ในการเรียนรู้ ไวยากรณ์ วากยสัมพันธ์ และคำศัพท์ ทั้งในภาษาต้นฉบับและฉบับแปล บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอประโยชน์ของวิชาการแปล โดยการเปรียบเทียบไวยากรณ์ศัพท์ ลำดับคำ และประเด็นอื่นๆ ในภาษาอังกฤษและภาษาแม่ของนักศึกษา การแปลไม่ได้เป็นเรื่องซับซ้อน และมีเหตุผลสนับสนุนหลายประการที่บ่งชี้ถึงเห็นประโยชน์ของการแปล ที่สำคัญ คือ ช่วยพัฒนาศักยภาพในการเรียนภาษา ให้ใช้ภาษาอย่างถูกต้องชัดเจน และมีความยืดหยุ่น

คำสำคัญ: การแปล, การสื่อสารข้ามวัฒนธรรม, การเรียนการสอนภาษา

Abstract

Translation is a process of replacing text in one language by text in another language. A translator is not only bi-lingual, but also bi-cultural because one of the four factors which makes cross-cultural communication possible is the range of common cultural experience. Moreover, translation is also a means of language teaching and learning process. It is a useful tool to learn grammar, syntax, and lexis in both source language (SL) and target language (TL). The purpose of this article is to present the actual usefulness of translation in English classes that lies in exploiting it in order to compare grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language points in English and the student's mother tongue. In addition to that, translation is not as complex as it appears to be and there are reasons for considering translation very advantageous because it develops qualities that are essential to all languages: accuracy, clarity and flexibility.

Keywords: Translation, Cross – cultural, communication

Introduction

Vietnamese is the official language in Vietnam. It is spoken by about 85 million people in Vietnam and 3 million living overseas. But after the waves of reformation and open policy (after 1990), interest for English has grown stupendously. English is penetrating into every corner of Vietnam through electronic media: bilingual Vietnamese Web sites, cell phones with bilingual text messaging, cable television packages with English-language news and movie channels, as well as radio stations that broadcast Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation. As the number of students and users has risen steadily since 1992 to make English the most widely learned language in Vietnam, the issue of English acquisition among the population has become a vital one. As English was rarely studied in Vietnam previously, English teachers were virtually non-existent when English began to spread throughout the country. Before 1990, the study of English was strictly confined to Hanoi Normal College of Foreign Languages, Hanoi College of Foreign Languages and in some educational organizations in big cities, especially in the South of Vietnam.

Translation is a Useful Tool to Learn Grammar, Syntax, and Lexis in both SL and TL.

Everyone knows that translation as “utopian operation” and a faithful word-for-word translation cannot not transmit the original sense completely. However, translators should work to ensure a result that sounds as natural as possible. So, it appears that translation is a creative activity and a translator has a great responsibility on his/her shoulder to develop better understanding among people. Schweers (1999) encourages

teachers to use the native language in lessons to influence the classroom dynamic, offer a sense of security and authenticate the learners' experiences. The actual usefulness of translation in English classes lies in exploiting it in order to compare grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language points in English and the student's mother tongue. He conducted a research in this context and found that a high percentage (88.7%) of the student participants felt that the mother tongue should be used in their English classes. According to Ross (2000), if students are aware of the differences, language interference (transfer) from their own language is likely to be reduced. Moreover, translation in the L2 classroom offers a way to highlight similarities and differences between L1 and L2 forms.

Translation is sometimes referred to as the fifth language skill along with the other four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing): "Translation has special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: in the advanced or final stage of language teaching, translation from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1 is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers." No matter how good the students are at comprehending authentic reading or listening materials, the majority keeps mentally translating from L2 into L1, and vice versa. This fact makes teachers of foreign languages conscious of the significance of translation in language classrooms.

Why do students use their mother tongue in class? According to Harmer (2001), a principal cause of this L1 use is provoked by the activity, i.e. if students are linguistically incapable of activating vocabulary for a chosen task. Another reason is that translation is a natural thing to

do in learning a language, and code-switching between L1 and L2 is regarded as naturally developmental. The amount of L1 use by particular students may well have to do with differing learner styles and abilities. Evidence from research into the crucial issue of the L1 use in classrooms around the world is analyzed by Mattioli (2004). For instance, L1 use in the Chinese classrooms offers substantiation that L1 is a precious tool for socio-cognitive processes in language learning. Another reason for L1 use in the classroom relates to the fostering of a positive affective environment. The translation is helpful for L2 acquisition because, firstly, it uses authentic materials, secondly, it is interactive, thirdly, it is learner-centered, and finally it promotes learner autonomy (Mahmoud, 2006). Regarding the use of L1 in the L2 classroom, it is important to find out how students themselves feel about it.

Translation in English Teaching and Learning

Translation in English teaching is vital if we consider it as a means, not as an end. It is said that the twentieth century is the age of translation. And in fact, translation is "the neutral term used for all tasks where the meaning of expressions in one language -the source language (SL) is turned into the meaning of another, the target language (TL), whether the medium is spoken, written, or signed."

Translation is not as terrible as it appears to be and there are reasons for considering translation very advantageous:

- The influence of the mother tongue is at a higher level. L1 shapes the thinking, and translation helps in better understanding.
- Translation is a natural and necessary activity that is going on all the time, and that will always be needed.

- Language competence is a two-way system.
- The reality of language is another important aspect.
- Translation develops qualities that are essential to all language: accuracy, clarity and flexibility.
- The teacher can select materials to illustrate particular aspects of language, and students can see the links between language usage and grammar.

The Skills that Counts in English Teaching and Learning through Translation

For teachers, according to Newmark (1981), a teacher is expected to have the following skills:

- Be confident, admit mistakes, teach students more gifted than the teacher thanks to experience;
- Have a translator's skills;
- Have a good command of pedagogical techniques;
- Be prepared to experiment with new methods;
- Consider translation as a form of linguistic exploration;
- Have a good command of the two languages.

For students, Newmark (1981) highlights following skills:

- Sensitivity to language;
- Ability to write neatly, plainly and nicely;
- Good knowledge of cultural background;
- Master the text being translated;
- Good reading knowledge;
- Think of several things at the same time

Issues and Challenges in English Teaching and Learning through Translation: A Practical Approach in Teaching Vietnamese students

Since English has only recently been introduced in Vietnam, and the education system and country are not yet fully modernized, it may still be quite some time before English becomes as widely used, and the fluency of its population becomes as strong, as it is in other nations. Whatever the case may be, one important fact remains for the future generation of the Vietnamese: English is a must. Teaching of Vietnamese students under such critical circumstances is not only interesting but also requires skills for teaching English for specific purposes. To this context, translation of information and knowledge in their Vietnamese language appears to be a Hobson's choice. But it is not so easy, as it requires good command over source and target language from a trainer. Ironically, the trainers, in this case, are completely ignorant of the Vietnamese language, but proficient in the use of the English Language. So how to initiate the process of translation in the classroom becomes a million dollar question. The work of the translator is not everybody's cup of tea, since the translator has to strike a balance between over- and under-translation. Moreover, one has to make a "deep inner language made outer." During the interaction the trainers face the following main challenges:

Articles and Determiners

The Vietnamese language does not contain articles (definite and indefinite), so the definite and indefinite constructions are expressed by using classifiers or word order. Vietnamese students also have difficulties in using many, much, some, any etc. For illustration, they use

"I have many hairs", "She has not seen some boys" etc., because in Vietnamese there are no countable/uncountable nouns.

Verb Tenses

It is observed that all the Vietnamese students have difficulty in acquiring the past perfect and future perfect tenses. These two tenses caused major problems and mistakes than any of the other verb tenses combined. It is easy to understand because the category of tenses does not exist in Vietnamese.

Voices

It was also observed that Vietnamese students have problems in handling passive voices of Imperative and Interrogative sentences. For example, they are unable to solve and understand "Who broke the chair? /"Do it"/ Please bring a glass of water etc. Some students have difficulty in identifying the tenses.

Punctuation Marks

During the training program, it also became evident that the students have problems in placing punctuation marks correctly. Some of the participants have difficulties in using double inverted comma, hyphen, exclamation point and capital letters. They unnecessarily put the first letter of any new word in capital letter whether it is in the middle or end of any sentence.

Summary

Finally, it was decided that the elite group who possesses average command of the source and target languages should be requested to perform the crucial role of a translator. At this level, the following skills are expected from a translator in the classroom situation:

1. to have good listening skills.
2. to recognize and understand non-verbal cues.
3. to be familiar with synonyms of source and target language.
4. to safeguard oneself from being merely an imitator or interpreter.
5. to have good explanation skills.
6. to manage time during the process of translation.
7. to have technical skills of using software and gadgets for advanced-level translation.
8. to avoid over- or under-translation.

It has been found that translation is a useful tool to learn grammar, syntax, and lexis in both SL and TL. A word-for-word back-translation enables Vietnamese highlight and understand the relationship between the two languages.

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