

Teaching through Translated Audio-visual Programmes

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Abstract:

Teaching through translation is a traditional method since the Greek times. As a teaching approach among others, it has developed with the development of times, especially with the amelioration of the technological means. The increasing use of modern technologies in teaching methodology has brought remarkable successes. Besides it is a must in nowadays world, since learners have to immerse themselves in modern technology itself as part of the contemporary life. In this respect, audio visual aids have been extensively employed since their invention, given the success that they could have in the learning process. Using audio visual aids in teaching English to university students is widespread nowadays. However, the use of translated audiovisual aids (together with the original ones) in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is still not yet employed in the teaching of English in the Algerian universities. Hence, this article discusses the feasibility of the employment of this technique, examines the possibilities of its application and, and highlights its benefits.

Key words : Teaching; Translation; Audio-visual; Programmes Technologies; Learners; Learning process; English; Algerian universities.

The Debate over Translation in L2 Teaching:

Contact between English and Arabic has become very frequent. In the Arab countries learning English is no longer limited to the academic circles. Larger social categories seek to learn English for different motives, especially professional, and cultural ones. They learn it to conduct business, travel or simply satisfy a personal ambition. Yet, teaching methodology differs from one classroom to another. Learners as well as teachers still depend on what theorists have prescribed. In this regard, there has been much debate among theorists of EFL/ESL teaching about the suitability and usefulness of teaching through translation.

A number of theorists and ESL teachers have always warned teachers and learners from the possible drawbacks of this method. They insist on the necessity to urge teachers and learners alike to use English alone in the ESL classrooms. They see that this will guarantee that learners won't have the risk of thought interference, and get rid of the influence of L1 on the target language. Forbidding learners from using L1 drives them to make more effort to discover and use L2. They always say that the best way to learn English is to go to Britain or America where learners would hear and speak only English.¹

Fortunately, the opposite opinion stands on solid grounds of argument. A number of experts in the ESL

field are drawing attention back to the benefits of the translation method if properly employed. For many, “translation is no longer a sin”.² In today’s teaching environment, it can bring much to a successful process of teaching. First, EFL theorists who insist on the use of English as a sole medium of communication in the classroom consider that it is the only important language to be taught, and seem to suggest that the focus should be made on it alone. For them, English should be purchased as a precious commodity that should remain pure from any vestiges of other languages. This can be true if we know that most English learners seek opportunities (jobs, business negotiations, tourism...etc) usually where English is the only medium of communication. Obviously, here they need L1 very little. However, this approach of refusing translation totally changes when teaching Arabic, for example, to English speaking learners. The latter would be often allowed to use their background of English to understand the target language. In Britain or America, one can hardly think that the use of English in Arabic learning classrooms is a sin.

Hence, why should our students be deprived from the benefits of translation to help them get better results? Nowadays, the importance of Arabic as a medium of communication is increasing and its frequent interaction with English is very obvious. Learners in their turn seek now to have an easy shift from L1 to L2 and vice versa, because of practical needs of commerce, science,

diplomacy, tourism ...etc. Thus, the needs of the learners could impose translation in the process of teaching. According to pro-translation in classrooms, EFL teachers can expect to see signs of a global village in their classes with students expecting to use English as a vehicle for their own specific purposes.³

Besides the needs of learners for translation approaches, the professional field nowadays urges learners to master an easy shift from one language to another. Learners of English today are expected to involve themselves frequently in translation tasks. The LMD system that has been recently expanded to different parts of the world must look at the preoccupations of present learners. If learners of English, particularly those seeking a “license”, have in the past years mostly concentrated on the discovery of the target language without a necessity to refer to the mother tongue, nowadays learners are in a certain need to combine mastery of both languages. The former were primarily formed to teach the language they have learned, while the latter must respond to a variety of jobs that require a combined mastery of both languages.

In brief, translation can be “a useful tool to learn grammar, syntax, and lexis”.⁴ In developed countries, the method is being successfully used in some institutions. In Japan, a “Functional-Translation-Method” was introduced, and is based on the use of students’ native language in an EFL classroom.⁵ In the United States,

there are bilingual programmes, the most popular of which are the “50/50” model and “90/10” model.⁶ Research also revealed that learners get close to their teacher because the contact obstacles would be reduced.⁷

Why Teaching through Translated Audiovisual Aids?

The use of translated audiovisual aids side by side with the original version is one of the techniques of benefiting from translation in the ESL classroom. The proposed technique is simple. It includes two stages:

- Introduction of an audiovisual programme in the native language (L1) –translated from English to Arabic- and the assimilation of its content.
- Employment of the original version for the discovery of the characteristics of the target language (L2).

This technique is intended in particular to university students preparing a “licence d’anglais”. However, students preparing for a translation diploma can equally benefit.⁸ My personal experience led me to realize two main findings in this regard. First, learners always try to discover the target language starting from their own native language background. They often ask: how do we say this ... in English? What is the meaning of this word in Arabic? I don't understand, explain in Arabic? These questions show that translation is an expectation of learners of English. Since they are able to

assimilate in the native language they expect teachers to help them understand the target language using the conceptions they already possess. A class “which is used to receiving all explanations and instructions [in the previous learning stages] in the native language is likely to resent the intrusion of English into an English class”.⁹ Second, students are fond of modern media and technology. When used in teaching, they arouse considerable curiosity and motivates even the lazy ones. Hence, teaching through translated TV programmes seems to offer many benefits with regard to the objectives of L2 teaching. Students’ main obstacle seems to be topic understanding. They can’t focus on grammar syntax or lexis, if they are disappointed to grasp meaning. However, with the obstacle of topic understanding thanks to the use of L1, all effort will be devoted to discover the target language. The translated material is used to foster a solid ground that allows the learner to start the learning of English with more energy.

Getting the Teaching Material:

The teacher must rely on the same audiovisual material in the native language and in the target language. Nowadays media opportunities offer easy, cheap and effective material to be used in teaching. Teachers can rely on the numerous TV channels that broadcast programmes (many of which are originally in English) that are translated to Arabic. These fortunately are widely available. Any teacher can record programmes

from the BBC, ALJAZEERA INTERNATIONAL, CNN and other channels. Then he turns to the various Arab channels that usually broadcast the translated versions of the original programmes. Some examples are the BBC Arabic, ALJAZEERA, MBC, ALARABIA and JSC documentary. Established teaching institutions are able to use their available resources to purchase the original material and the translated one. Translated programmes may appear in two versions: through voiced translation and through subtitling. Both can be used. A teacher can also rely on the net to pick up programmes originally in English and other ones that are translated into Arabic.

In addition to programmes that cover political, economic, cultural or technical issues, the teacher has the choice to use news as his primary focus. The news is more attractive since it is the interest of people at large including learners. The same world news can be broadcasted in tens of TV channels, yet in different languages. This is an opportunity to use the content of news in the teaching process.

The Method in Practice:

The teacher is able to employ this method in a variety of ways, according to the material he uses and the students' accessibility to that material. Students are required to see and listen to the material translated into Arabic in order to grasp the overall meaning of the content (news, documentary...etc). One method is to

have the original material as well as the translated one in class. Here, the teacher focuses on documentaries concerning general topics easy to assimilate by the students: historical events (Margaret Thatcher), political issues (American policies in the Middle East), current issues (global warming, nature concerns...etc). The teacher begins by giving opportunity to students to watch the material translated into Arabic. Watching and listening can be done once or twice so that the teacher is satisfied that students have fully taken hold of the topic. Then, the teacher passes to the transitional phase where he incites students to express what they grasped in English. For example, he prepares comprehension questions that test students' ability to explore their own repertoire of English grammar and vocabulary. This can be done through oral or written exercises. Fill in the gaps exercises can also be very useful. Alternatively, students are simply asked to write a detailed composition about what they got. Naturally, group work is highly recommended here since that allows students to share and exchange vocabulary and sentence structures. After having explored their minds, they now compare their own understanding to the original script by having the opportunity to watch the material in English. After that, the possibility is open for the teacher to consolidate by explaining particular vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure...etc. At last, students are required to submit a final copy prepared at home, taking advantage of all the previous stages.

If students are able to use the translated material outside the classroom, this will save time. The teacher asks his/her students, for example, to watch news about current issues (Iran's nuclear programme, Israeli attacks against Palestinians, visits by Western officials to the Middle East, or other major events) on one of the channels that broadcast in Arabic. Preferably, students are recommended to follow channels that have sister channels broadcasting in English (BBC Arabic, Aljazeera International) or those that broadcast in both languages (France 24). Students are required to prepare written compositions in English of what they see. Meanwhile, the teacher records news about that particular topic in its English version. In class, students are asked to present their written compositions, or exchange them with classmates. The aim is to make the student test his understanding, his vocabulary and grammar through comparison. Then, the teacher introduces the material to the students two or three times. Here of course a variety of consolidation exercises are possible. The teacher is able to reinforce students' repertoire of vocabulary, sentence structure, pronunciation skills...etc.

Conclusion

Obviously, this technique serves the teaching of writing more than any other skill. However, other skills can remarkably be reinforced thanks to the use of the material in English. Once the main obstacle of topic understanding is overridden, phonetics, speaking, and

listening will be easy targets. In the first place, listening skill would be outstandingly developed. When they previously get the idea, they find little difficulty to follow. An improved listening skill leads to a better seizure of phonetic rules. Pronunciation drills can accompany comprehension exercises and students will have only to imitate what they hear. They learn intonation rules, weak forms, assimilation and other phonetic rules in context. Grasp of phonetic rules, in turn, allows students to understand quickly while listening. Consequently, students would be greatly encouraged to use their phonetic knowledge to improve their speaking abilities. In addition to phonetic rules, students will use their enriched background of vocabulary and sentence structure to further consolidate their oral skill.

In spite of criticism against the use of translation in L2 teaching classrooms, experience has shown a number of benefits especially if wisely exploited. For that, the technique proposed in this article avoids dull and frequent translation of words, phrases, sentence structures that may cause the learner to be lost between the two languages. Students benefit by using translation only to create a world of clear and coherent ideas in order to rush into the world of English with more strength. With this technique, the teacher of English is able not utter a word in Arabic, and may also instruct his students not address him in Arabic. In this way, translation in the ESL teaching becomes a tool without thorns.

Notes

1 - Jane Willis, "Teaching English through English (England, Longman, 1981) p. 02.

2 - Tommaso Urgese, "Translation: How, When, and Why", *Forum*, Vol. XXVII, N 3, July 1989, p. 38.

3 - Ron Post and Isyle Rathet, "On Their own Terms: Using Student Native Culture as a Content in the EFL Classroom", *Forum*, Vol. 34, N 3-4, July/October 1996.

4 - Valeria Petrocchi "Translation as an Aid in Teaching English as a Second Language", *Translation Journal*, Vol. 10, N 4, October 2006. www accurapid.com/journal

5 - Walter Kasmer, "The Role of Translation in the EFL/ESL Classroom", Module 2, MA TEFL/TESL, University of Birmingham, UK, May 1999. p.1.
www.cels.bham.ac.uk/resourses/essays/kasmer2.pdf.

6 - Ibid., p. 03.

7 - Lewis Augusto Reis, "The Myths and the Practical Needs of Using L1 in EFL Classes: A Learner Training Experience", *Forum*, Vol. 34, N 3-4, July/ October 1996.

8 - One has to remember early Muslim scientists and philosophers' approach to translation: translation of ideas rather than literal translation. They grasp the idea in the original language and then reproduce in Arabic.

9 - Jane Willis, op. cit., p. 01.