

The Postmethod Pedagogy as a Postcolonial Construct: A Climate of Revival of Translation as a Fifth Skill in FL Classrooms

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Abstract: This article argues for a rehabilitation of translation in the FL classroom. Recently, many researchers have questioned the monolingual principle and argued for a bilingual approach in the teaching of foreign languages. Questionnaires for teachers and students were used to investigate the views that teachers and students hold in the Department of English, University of Constantine about the use of translation as a teaching and learning strategy and as a fifth skill alongside Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. First, the students' questionnaire proved the fact that translation is a naturally-occurring activity in learning foreign languages. Second, both teachers and students' questionnaires showed that the majority of teachers and students believe that translation improves the other four skills and deserves to be integrated as a fifth skill.

Keywords: translation, students, teachers, class, University Mentouri Bros

Résumé: Cet article plaide pour une remise en état de la traduction dans la salle de classe FL. Récemment, de nombreux chercheurs ont mis en doute le principe monolingue et ont plaidé en faveur d'une approche bilingue dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères. Questionnaires pour enseignants et étudiants (département d'anglais, Université Les Frères Mentouri. Constantine) ont été utilisés pour étudier les points de vue qu'ils détiennent sur l'utilisation de la traduction comme une stratégie d'enseignement et d'apprentissage et en tant que cinquième compétence aux côtés de lecture, l'écriture, l'écoute et la parole.

Mots clés: traduction, étudiants, enseignants, classe, université Les Frères Mentouri, questionnaire

Introduction

Whether or not to use translation as an aid in the teaching and learning of foreign languages caused heated debate throughout the history of foreign language (FL henceforth) teaching. However, recently many scholars (G. Cook, 2010; Leonardi, 2010; Malmkjaer, 2010) have questioned the outright dismissal of translation from the FL classroom and asserted that what has been rejected is a teaching methodology (Grammar-translation Method) and not translation in its real sense. Furthermore, some of them have considered it as a fifth skill alongside Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. This article is an attempt towards the rehabilitation of the role of translation in the FL classroom. It argues that translation has been rejected in principle and that it deserves a comeback, especially as a skill at the advanced level.

1. Translation in Language Teaching

The main transition that characterised the history of language teaching methodology was the shift from the search for the best method (which is referred to as the method era) to the break with the method concept (that is referred to as the postmethod era). So, this section revises the roles assigned to translation under each era.

1.1. Translation in the Method Era (19th and 20th centuries)

During the twentieth century, language methodologists were obsessed by the search for the best method, a method that could fit all people in all contexts, and to meet that goal they drew on theories of language and language learning. So, to mark the ups and downs that translation knew in the method era, one can talk about two periods, before and after the 1960s.

1.1.1. Translation from the 19th Century to 1960s

By the nineteenth century, there was an interest in studying modern languages and they were taught using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM); teaching grammar rules using isolated sentences, providing lists of vocabulary, and translating sentences (Howatt, 1984). So, as its name suggests, translation assumed a major role under the GTM. However, by the late nineteenth century, trade made of oral proficiency an asset in Europe which was totally neglected by the GTM. And as a reaction to that, a Reform Movement (RM) emerged and emphasised communication in the target language. Drawing from the RM, the Direct Method

(DM) came into existence and emphasised the *'don't translate'* maxim i.e. a FL should be taught using that FL. The impracticality of the DM (non-availability of native-speaker teachers) led to the emergence of the Reading Approach which reaffirmed the GTM, 'the handmaiden of reading' (Bowen et al. as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 74) and so it tolerated the use of translation and first language (L1 henceforth). However, during the first half of the twentieth century, behaviourism and structuralism were flourishing in America, creating a fertile ground for the Audiolingual Method (ALM) to develop. So, drawing on behaviourism, its basic premise was that learning a language was a matter of habit-formation and so avoiding the use of L1 and translation was thought to resolve the problem of interference. So, translation was strictly rejected from the FL classroom. Parallel to ALM, the Oral-situational Approach emerged in Britain which drew on the DM and behaviourism. The result, of course, was also an outright dismissal of translation.

1.1.2. Translation from the 1960s to the 1980s

By the mid-sixties, the pendulum swung back to traditional approaches. Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) in which he explained his theory of transformational generative grammar, and his review (1959) of Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* (1957) led to the decline of behaviourism and structuralism (Johnson, 2008), the underpinnings of the ALM and the Oral-situational Approach. Chomsky revolutionised the concept of habit-formation in learning languages and acknowledged the role of mental processes and human creativity. Drawing from Chomsky's work, the Cognitive Approach emerged and considered errors as developmental rather than detrimental and so it held a positive attitude to translation and L1. In the 1970s and as a reaction to the marginalised role of affective factors, some humanistic methods emerged and only Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia (Crystal, 1987) made use of translation and L1. By late 1970s, and based on Krashen's theories of language acquisition, Terrell developed the Natural Approach which took the ability to communicate with native speakers of the target language as its ultimate goal, it emphasised the role of comprehensible input and so no role was assigned to the use of L1 and translation (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). During the 1970s and 1980s Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Instruction, and Content-based Instruction evolved and no role was given to L1 and translation as they fostered communication in the target language.

From the above sketch, it is legitimate to say that the rejection of translation was 'a logical sleight of hand' (G. Cook, 2010, p. 15) that should be reconsidered. First, it becomes clear that the main source of the rejection of translation was the GTM, which, in fact, misused and overused translation. In effect, G. Cook (2010) refers to it as the 'villain'. Second, the

first dogmatic dismissal of translation was by the DM which drew on the work of reformers of the 19th century who campaigned against the GTM for commercial purposes and that employed native-speaker teachers who did not know the learners' L1. Third, the method era was a top-down pedagogy in which language teachers applied what theorists theorized. Applied linguists extrapolated research findings in linguistics and psychology which, in fact, are concerned with how L1 is acquired rather than how the FL is learned and forgot about other factors as teachers (natives or non-natives), learners' needs, learners' L1, their cultures, etc. For example, the ALM and Oral-situational Approach rejected translation and L1 from a behaviourist point of view in that it caused interference errors which were considered as developmental and inherent in the leaning process when Chomsky challenged the idea that language learning is a matter of habit formation. CLT also ignored the role of translation in that it focused on developing communicative competence and reaching a near-native proficiency, a point which V. Cook (2007) considered as a fallacy, and did not take into account L1 competence which resides in the learners mind and the needs of FL learners who may need translation in their work or work as translators. Finally, the above historical account reveals that even if translation assumed a role with the rise of cognitivism and humanism, it remained forgotten in the communicative era.

So, there were some other factors that contributed to the rejection of translation from the FL classroom. Many authoritative writers in the field of language teaching, as we will see, claimed that what helped the monolingual principle to be entrenched in language teaching were political and economic factors rather than linguistic and pedagogic ones.

1.2. Translation in the Postmethod Era (1980s–present)

In the postmethod era translation has assumed a role in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Many researchers re-considered the monolingual tenet and called for a reinstatement of translation.

1.2.1. Criticising CLT

Late in the 20th century, many researchers addressed some of CLT limitations and misconceptions (Spada, 2007; Swan, 1985) and considered the rejection of translation and L1 in CLT as a fallacy. Furthermore, many researchers observed that what teachers practised in the classroom did not resemble the method they pretended to use (Stern, 1983) which led many researchers to shift to the search for an alternative to the method concept rather than an alternative method. Different labels have been used to refer to this transition in language teaching. Richards (1990) referred to it with 'beyond methods', Widdowson (1990) used 'pragmatism', Kumaravadivelu (2006) coined 'postmethod pedagogy'.

1.2.2. Questioning the Monolingual Principle

Recognising the importance of context (learners' needs, cultures, L1, etc.) in constructing language teaching pedagogy and noticing the gap between theorists and practitioners, many researchers proposed a bottom-up pedagogy. One of the issues that gained more attention by researchers was the fallacy of teaching 'a bilingual subject by means of a monolingual pedagogy' (Widdowson, 2003, p. 154). Reputable literature attributed the monolingual principle to political and commercial factors rather than to linguistic and

pedagogic ones as claimed above. Canagarajah (1999) and Phillipson (1992) argued that the 'Centre' (Western native English countries and America) used the monolingual and the native-speaker teacher tenets to dominate the world in the postcolonial period and to meet its economic goals, for example, to assure that 'the fountainhead of global employment opportunities for native speakers of English does not dry up any time soon' (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 543). So, the postmethod era, one may say, is the realisation of what Howatt anticipated about three decades ago when he said that if 'there is another 'language teaching revolution' round the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power [to the monolingual principle]' (Howatt, 1984, p. 289).

Questioning the monolingual tenet, has, in fact, opened a gateway to the revival of translation in FL classrooms. Researchers re-examined the rejection of translation and considered the 'no translation assumption' as a myth (V. Cook, 2009; Cummins, 2001). Furthermore, many researchers went to consider it as a fifth skill alongside Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking.

As for the Algerian context, translation has assumed a role in the context of foreign language teaching in the 21st century. As a matter of fact, El-Nasr daily newspaper (2010) announced the decision of the Ministry of Education to use translation activities in the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools. Besides, at the advanced level, translation is taught as a subject in departments of foreign languages (Thèmes et Versions Module).

2. Disadvantages of the Use of Translation in Language Teaching and Learning

Malmkjaer (1997) reviewed the history of translation in language teaching. She summarised arguments against translation by claiming that it:

1. is independent of the four skills which define language competence: reading, writing, speaking and listening
2. is radically different from the four skills
3. takes up valuable time which could be used to teach these four skills
4. is unnatural
5. misleads students into thinking that expressions in two languages correspond one-to-one
6. prevents students from thinking in the foreign language
7. produces interference
8. is a bad test of language skills
9. is only appropriate for training translators

(59-60)

3. Advantages of the Use of Translation in Language Teaching and Learning

Malmkjaer commented that the above objections ‘have survived with a doggedness which suggests that there must be some truth in them’ (Malmkjaer, 1997, p. 60). She refuted them stating that good translation entails good reading, writing, listening, and speaking (1), so translation is dependent on the four skills (2) and it is not a waste of time (3). The number of bilingual and multilingual people outnumbers the monolingual people, so translation can be considered as a skill (4). Real-life translation demands not only formal equivalence but also dynamic equivalence (5) and so it draws learners to think in the two systems (6). Interference is an inherent problem in the process of learning a second/foreign language and so translation can be a remedy to it (7). Based on (1), translation can be used to test students’ ability in using the other four skills (8). Finally, training students in translation may help them in their careers; EFL students may work as translators (9)

4. A Climate of Revival of Translation as a Fifth Skill

Recognising the merits of translation as a communicative activity (Widdowson, 1979); as a cognitive learning strategy that learners may employ in learning a foreign language (Oxford 1990); as a useful remedy to interference (James, 1996); as a way to enhance pragmatic competence (House 2008); and as a way to improve the other four skills (Leonardi, 2010), researchers argued for its comeback and talked about it as a fifth skill (Gaspar, 2009; Leonardi, 2010; Naimushin 2002; and Stibbard, 1994).

5. Methodology of the Study

For the sake of this research, I administered questionnaires to teachers and to students. The population was from the Department of Letters and the English Language, as it will be fleshed out presently.

5.1. Subjects

This study investigates teachers and students’ views about the use of translation (Arabic-English-Arabic) in English language teaching and learning. For this, 14 teachers of Translation Practice Module (Thèmes et Versions, TV for short) and 90 third year Applied Language Studies students in the Department of Letters and English Language at the University of Constantine were invited to participate in this study.

5.2. Instruments of the Study

Questionnaires were administered to teachers and students. The teachers' questionnaire aimed to elicit information about the views teachers hold about the use of translation in the FL classroom and about its integration as a fifth skill. For the students' questionnaire, it aimed to see the extent to which students employ translation strategy in their learning and also to investigate their views about the idea of integrating translation as a fifth skill.

5.3. Teachers' Questionnaire

14 teachers of Thèmes et Versions Module kindly filled in the questionnaire. Probing their attitudes to translation, this section will show whether they are for or against the idea of integrating it as a fifth skill in the FL classroom. We will also see the extent to which teachers' answers support the advantages of translation put above by Malmkjaer (1997).

5.3.1. Data Description

Table 6.1: On the Rationale for the Implementation of TV in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Answers	Frequency
To train students to be professional translators	00
To teach English vocabulary	05
To raise the problem of transfer by comparing between the two systems (Arabic and English)	08
To improve students' level of English proficiency	10

Table 6.2: On the Importance of TV Module

Answers	Frequency
An important and useful technique for teaching/learning/assessing the target language	08
A suitable remedy to interference	08
Additional and useless	02

Table 6.3: On the Usefulness of Translation in Vocabulary Learning

Yes	No	Total
14	00	14
100%	00%	100%

Table 6.4: On the Usefulness of Translation Classes in Developing the Skill of Using the Dictionary (Monolingual and Bilingual)

Yes	No	Total
13	01	14
92.85%	07,15%	100%

Table 6.5: On the Usefulness of Translation in Developing the Four Skills

Yes	No	Total
12	02	14
86%	14%	100%

Table 6.6: Teachers' Attitudes towards the Idea of Integrating Translation as a Fifth Skill

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
03	07	03	01	14
21.42%	50%	21.42%	7.14%	100%

5.3.2. Data Discussion

As the above tables show, the majority of teachers hold positive views about the use of translation in language teaching. They acknowledged its role, mainly in raising awareness of the problem of interference (Tables 1 & 2), in vocabulary learning (Table 3), and in developing the skill of using dictionaries, which is totally ignored in the curriculum (Table 4). Of the total respondents (N=14), 86% believe that translation helps in developing Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking (Table 5); 50% endorse the idea of integrating translation as a fifth skill (Table 6); against only one teacher (7.15%) who strongly disagrees to this suggestion. So, the majority of the respondents welcome translation as a fifth skill. Some teachers' responses are in support of the advantages stated above by Malmkjaer (1997) while Tables 1 & 2 support advantage 7 and Tables 5 & 6 back advantages 1, 2, 3, and 8.

5.4. Students' Questionnaire

Students completed questionnaires under the researcher's supervision during their class and they were given enough time to respond. Students' responses will demonstrate the extent to which they employ translation strategy in their learning and their attitudes towards integrating it as a fifth skill. We will also see whether students' responses back arguments for the use of translation stated above by Malmkjaer (1997).

5.4.1. Data Description

Table 6.7: Students Use of Translation as a Strategy in Reading

Yes	No	Total
80	10	90
88.88%	11.11%	100%

Table 6.8: Students Use of Translation as a Strategy in Listening

Yes	No	Total
71	19	90
78.88%	21.11%	100%

Table 6.9: Students' Use of Arabic Subtitles to Check Their Comprehension

Yes	No	Total
81	08	89
91.01%	08.98%	100%

Table 6.10: Students Use of Translation as a Strategy in Writing

Yes	No	Total
70	19	89
78.65%	21.34%	100%

Table 6.11: Students Comparing of Arabic and English as a Learning Strategy

Yes	No	Total
68	22	90
75.55%	24.44%	100%

Table 6.12: Students' Curiosity to Know the Equivalents of English Words in their L1

Yes	No	Total
68	20	88
77.27%	22.72%	100%

Table 6.13: Students Use of L1 in the FL Classroom

Yes	No	Total
82	08	90
91.11%	08.88%	100%

Table 6.14: Students' Attitudes to Translation Classes

Well motivated	Motivated	Bored	Total
18	59	13	90

20%	65.55%	14.44%	100%
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Table 6.15: Students' Opinions about the Usefulness of the *Thèmes et Versions* Module

Important and interesting	An additional subject	Not important at all	Total
78	12	00	90
86.66%	13.33%	00%	100%

Table 6.16: Students' Views on the Usefulness of Translation in Improving the other Four Skills

Yes	No	Total
74	16	90
82.22%	17.77%	100%

Table 6.17: Students' Attitudes towards Translation as a Fifth Skill that they Need in Their Learning and in Their Careers

Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
21	56	11	02	90
23.33%	62.22%	12.22%	2.22%	100%

5.4.2. Data Discussion

Tables 7, 8, 9, and 10 reveal that translation is a naturally-occurring cognitive activity in learning a foreign language. Of all the respondents (N=90), 89% use it in reading, 91% to check comprehension, 79% employ it in listening, and 79% in writing.

About 76% of respondents draw comparisons between the target language and their L1 and 77% of them admit that they are always curious to know the Arabic equivalents of the English words, which proves to some extent that 'the L1-L2 connection is an indisputable fact of life' (Stern, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 188). Furthermore, 91% of the respondents use Arabic when they work in groups -a fact that proves that whatever the directions given by teachers of how their students would work, the latter use their L1 in foreign language learning. All this refutes objection 6 mentioned above by Malmkjaer (1997).

Many students enjoy translation classes and conceive *Thèmes et Versions* as an important and interesting module, a fact which reveals that they hold a positive view about the use of translation. In effect, 82.22% of students find translation helpful in improving Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking in that it includes them and to a certain extent depends on

them (good translation, in fact, entails good command of the four language skills). Finally, about 86% of the respondents (Table 17) welcome the idea of translation being a fifth skill in that it helps them as learners and in their future careers. Some of students' responses also back some of the assumed advantages put above by Malmkjaer (1997). Tables 16 and 17 back the assumed advantages 1, 2, 3, 8, and 9.

6. Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on language teaching, it has appeared evident that the rejection of translation in the method era was illegitimate and it was a result of the method concept as a colonial construct. The issue of translation was in fact glossed over for about one century without providing convincing reasons. It is also important to acknowledge that the literature in favour of the use of translation in FL classrooms is an abundant and growing one. In the postmethod era, for example, many researchers refuted the arguments against the use of translation in language teaching and learning and attributed them to political and commercial factors. Moreover, some of them endorsed it as a fifth skill.

Teachers and students' questionnaires reveal that the majority of teachers and students hold positive views about translation and welcome it as a fifth skill. Students' answers also demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of them use translation strategy in the operation of learning which proves that translation is indeed a naturally-occurring activity in learning the foreign language, irrespective of whether teachers encourage or discourage it. So, it is suggested here that integrating translation as a skill helps in eradicating problems of interference and enables students to use it in their future careers. The act of translating depends to a certain extent on the [other] four skills. So, it can be considered as a macro-skill that can further enhance them.

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