

# TEACHING TRANSLATION AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

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## *Abstract*

Specific teaching methods cannot be developed without association to the theory of the given activity in view of the fact that the teaching methods are influenced by the characteristics of the activity which is to be fulfilled. Therefore, translation teachers should keep in mind not to exclude characteristics of such significance to the communicative theory of translation as the structure of the activity the translator carries out, the contents of which depend upon common and explicit factors of the text and which is in a very close relation with the ability of the translator. The aim of this paper is to illustrate the various ways in which teachers can train the student to comprehend and create texts of varied styles and functional genres by making use of the verbal and non-verbal standards of behaviour and the textual conventions of each culture.

**Keywords:** translation, communication, student training, verbal standards, textual conventions

### *Strategies of teaching Translation as an independent Activity*

The difference between the activity of a professional translator and the activity of teaching translation should be emphasized. The first process is internalized whereas in teaching, the situation is different. In order to teach “method”, we must externalize in so far as possible the successive phases and sub-phases of the process. In her article “The Scope of a Communicative Theory of Translation” Zinaida Lvovskaya is of the opinion that we should subdivide the two phases of translation (the interpretation of the original text and the production of the target text) into the following sub-phases:

- “The phase of interpretation of the OT: the sub-phase of comprehension of the semantic contents of the text; the sub-phase of comprehension of the intentional-functional programme of the author; the sub-phase of comprehension of the meaning “to be received” (with forecasts as to the difficulties of a cognitive-cultural nature that such may present for the receiver of the TT).

- The phase of production of the TT: the sub-phase of development of a strategy for the translation in function of the type of text and idiolect of the author; the search for functional equivalences; the production of the TT; self-correction of the TT”. (Lvovskaya 1998: 35)

The most important aim of the teaching of a language is to teach the student to comprehend and create texts of varied styles and functional genres by making use of the verbal and non-verbal standards of behaviour and the textual conventions of each culture.

Translation can be defined in many ways since it is characterized by many features, but the most important one is the fact that translation is a *skill*. And it can be learned exactly like all the other skills. Translators become experts when they have already mastered this skill.

### ***Types of Translation Activities***

In my translation classes I made use of the activities recommended by Maria Gonzales Davies in “Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom” (2004) and I selected a few of them as examples of successful activities in translation classes.

#### **Activity 1**

##### **Bilingual dialogues: Code-switching**

*Aims of the activity:*

- To develop transference skills such as code-switching and mental agility, pre-interpreting skills
- To practise sight translation
- To encourage creativity and imagination
- To become aware of register, coherence and cohesion

*Level:* pre-intermediate

*Grade:* 7<sup>th</sup>

*Year of study:* 7

*Grouping:* groups of 6 students

*Approximate timing:* 50 minutes

*Steps:*

- 1) The students sit in a circle all having pencil and paper. In the group, the students become Student A and Student B, alternating.
- 2) Student A assumes one personality and Student B another. One character speaks the target language well and the other character speaks the source language well. Nevertheless, they can both understand the other language passively.
- 3) Student A writes a sentence down in the target language and passes it on to Student B on the left, who writes a response in the source language, folds what Student A has written and passes on the paper to Student A on the left, who writes an answer in the target language, folds the previous response and passes the paper on to Student B on the left and so on.
- 4) When the students have completed the circle, they unfold the paper and read the bilingual dialogues written on it.

#### **Sample**

SA: “How are you today?”

SB: „Sunt puțin oboist.”

SA: “But what has happened to you?”

SB: „Nimic, ieri am fost la film cu un prieten și am stat apoi până târziu să învăț.”

SA: “Do you have a test today?”

SB: „Da, scriu lucrare la fizică și nu prea știu lecția.”

#### **Activity 2**

##### **Backtranslation: How faithful can you be?**

*Aims:*

- To become aware of interferences
- To reflect on fidelity in translation and on diverse translation options
- To become conscious of subjectivity and limitations in translation
- To learn to give explanations for choices and make decisions
- To perform indirect translation

*Level:* Upper Intermediate

*Grade:* 10<sup>th</sup>

*Year of study:* 10

*Grouping:* pairs, groups

*Approximate timing:* 50 minutes

*Steps:*

- 1) The teacher or the students choose 2 translated texts. The translations may be situated at any point on the scale of degrees of fidelity.
- 2) Pairs are formed: Student A (SA), Student B (SB). Each student is asked to backtranslate one of the texts, put it back into the source language. Questions about the degree of fidelity usually arise at this stage.
- 3) The teacher gives SA's source text to SB and SB's source text to SA
- 4) All students sit together or, if the class is too big, in groups of four.
- 5) In groups, all students compare their backtranslations without seeing the original.
- 6) A discussion follows related to degrees of fidelity:
  - Is backtranslation the most excellent means to evaluate translation?
  - Is it accurate that the more faithful to the original, the better translated a text has been?
  - Which are the most common changes detected in an ordinary translation?
  - Does having the original help to evaluate translation legibility?
  - Can one always trust the quality of the ST?
  - How many interpretations of a same word or syntactic structure can there be?
  - How useful is backtranslation?

**Sample**

**Target texts**

1. Într-o noapte, o mică rândunică zbură peste oraș. Prietenii lui pleaseră în Egipt cu 6 săptămâni înainte, dar el rămăsese în urmă pentru că era îndrăgostit de cea mai frumoasă trestie. El o întâlnise primăvara devreme pe când zbura în josul râului după o molie mare și galbenă și a fost atât de atras de talia ei subțire încât s-a oprit să-i vorbească. (Oscar Wilde, *Prințul Fericit* )

2. El alterna joggingul și plimbarea, purtându-și coșul de cumpărături și racheta și jucându-se cu mingea de tenis, un bărbat care se răcorea după un antrenament puternic, care se oprise la magazin în drum spre casă. Și-a propus să încetinească; nu ar trebui să alerge cu stomacul plin. Acum putea să își aleagă ritmul. (Thomas Harris, *Dragonul Roșu*)

### Source Texts

1. One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow moth, and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her. (Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince*)

- He alternated jogging and walking, carrying his grocery bag and racket and bouncing his tennis ball, a man cooling off from a hard workout who had stopped by the store on the way home. He made himself slow down; he shouldn't run on a full stomach. He could choose his pace now. (Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon*)

### Activity 3

#### Specialised translation on tape

*Aims:*

- To develop specialised vocabulary and expressions
- To practise listening comprehension in the foreign language
- To translate specialised vocabulary
- To develop resourcing skills and specialised background knowledge

*Level:* advanced

*Grade:* 11<sup>th</sup>

*Year of study:* 11

*Grouping:* individual

*Approximate timing:* 50 minutes

*Steps:*

Many advanced foreign language learning textbooks include listening comprehension activities which can be used in specialised translation classes.

1) The teacher presents the listening comprehension activity as it is shown in the textbook underlining the additional exercises that can be directly applied to translation: specialised language and background knowledge

2) The students should develop the activity by translating the resulting text.

### Sample<sup>1</sup>

| Source Text  | Target Text   |
|--|---|
| Gill has been my best friend for ages! We're in each other's pockets almost twenty-four hours a day. She's the one who always has an ear for my innermost secrets and I know they won't go any further. She's helped me through some really rough times when even my parents couldn't understand how I felt. We share absolutely everything... | Gill este prietena mea de o veşnicie. Suntem împreună aproape 24 de ore pe zi. Ea este cea care îmi ascultă mereu cele mai intime secrete și știu că nu le va împărtăși nimănui. M-a ajutat în niște momente foarte grele când nici părinții mei nu puteau înțelege cum mă simțeam. Împărțim chiar totul... |

<sup>1</sup> Evans, V., Edwards, L., (2003), *Upstream Advanced*, teacher's book, page 125, Newbury, Berkshire: Express Publishing

#### Activity 4

##### Film Titles: Is this the same film?

###### Aims:

- To discuss different translations of film titles and possible grounds for the changes
- To become aware of different translation options and degrees of fidelity
- To practise problem spotting and solving
- To reflect on the translation procedure and result

Level: B1+

Grouping: pairs

Grade: 8<sup>th</sup>

Year of study: 8

Approximate timing: 15 minutes

###### Steps:

- 1) The teacher and the students gather a number of film titles and their translations. It may be helpful to take to class newspapers published in the language combinations studied.
- 2) The teacher prepares an activity called “match the columns”, with film titles and their translation.
- 3) Each pair gives the activity they have prepared to another pair.
- 4) The pairs perform the activity and discuss the answers with each other.
- 5) The translations can then be situated on a point in a continuum of degrees of fidelity and classified in accordance with possible translation principles.
- 6) The potential basis for the changes can be discussed.
- 7) In the end, an optional translation can be suggested when necessary.

###### Sample:

| Source Language             | Target Language                   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. A Streetcar named Desire | a. Un tramvai numit Dorință       |
| 2. The Pursuit of Happiness | b. În căutarea Fericirii          |
| 3. The Hunger Games         | c. Jocurile Foamei                |
| 4. Gone with the Wind       | d. Pe Aripile Vântului            |
| 5. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof    | e. Pisica pe Acoperișul fierbinte |

#### Activity 5

##### Bilingual jumbled texts

###### Aims:

- To become aware of register
- To practise word play
- To apply creativity

*Level: upper-intermediate*

*Grade: 10<sup>th</sup>*

*Year of study: 10*

*Grouping: pairs*

*Approximate timing: 50 minutes*

*Steps:*

- 1) The teacher sorts out an extract of an original script. A percentage of the words and expressions will be in the students' native tongue.
- 2) The students must rewrite the script either in the source language or in the target language depending on the aims of the lesson.
- 3) The students compare their text with the original and the subtitled version of the film and discuss the similarities and differences.

### **Sample worksheet (worksheet, English/Romanian)**

#### ***Eat, Pray, Love/ Mănâncă, roagă-te, iubeste (Elizabeth Gilbert)***

*Happiness is the consequence efortului personal. You fight for it, tinzi spre ea, insist upon it și uneori chiar călătorești în jurul lumii în căutarea ei. You have to participate relentlessly implacabil la manifestările propriilor tale binecuvântări. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, nu trebuie să sovăi niciodată să o păstrezi. You must make a mighty effort ca să continui să inoți în acea fericire mereu, to stay afloat on top of it.*

#### ***Eat, Pray, Love***

*Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings. And once you have achieved a state of happiness, you must never become lax about maintaining it. You must make a mighty effort to keep swimming upward into that happiness forever, to stay afloat on top of it.*

#### ***Mănâncă, roagă-te, iubeste***

*Fericirea este consecința efortului personal. Te lupți pentru ea, tinzi spre ea, insiști asupra ei și uneori chiar călătorești în jurul lumii în căutarea ei. Trebuie să participi implacabil la manifestările propriilor tale binecuvântări. Și o dată ce ai dobândit o anumită stare de fericire, nu trebuie să sovăi niciodată să o păstrezi. Trebuie să faci un efort imens ca să continui să inoți în acea fericire mereu, să rămâi pe linia de plutire deasupra ei.*

### **Conclusion**

Students cannot be experts right from the beginning, although we often expect the translation products of our students to be good. It takes time and exercise to acquire the necessary rules and skills. If they learn from the very beginning of their studies what translation really means and what translation competence consists of, then this knowledge will help them to make accurate choices in producing target texts.

It is important to help students to develop a significant structure for pre-translation analysis of the source text. This construction for source text analysis should become a subconscious method. Throughout the translation class students need to work constantly, their arguments should be supported by valid examples, the teacher should always appreciate their

efforts and emphasize the idea that the original meaning of a certain text can be rendered in many different ways and that there is not just one single suitable translation.

The presented examples of teaching translation show how learners can be involved more in their own learning process and how they can become more responsible in this process. Due to the growing concern in translation studies, teachers should constantly develop new methods of teaching and evaluation, maintaining simultaneously a personalized approach.

There is no precise evidence that translation in the classroom can help learners in their learning process. But every person who learns a foreign language will be expected, at a certain time in life, to be able to translate. Therefore, teachers of foreign languages should plead for the teaching of translation competence as a definite component of the communication competence. Consequently, it is expected that more people will regard the prospective efficacy of translation as a characteristic of language learning.

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