

Function and Significance of Teaching Translation in ELT

Abstract

This article explores the role and significance of teaching translation and particularly teaching creative translation in the process of *Teaching English as a Second Language*.

The issue of creative (real) translation, which is usually preceded by a *pedagogical translation* defined as information about the language learner's level of language proficiency (Vermes, 2010), has been underestimated as part of *teaching English as a second language* in the higher education system. The information regarding this issue in Georgian academic publications on the topic is scarce whereas more supporters of this idea among specialists from overseas (Higgins & Ryland, 2019; Machida, 2011, amongst others) have appeared.

The empirical data this article is based on were collected from the electronic questionnaire filled out by the teachers delivering practical courses in English at the Department of English Philology at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The questionnaire included questions about the importance, advantages or disadvantages of teaching translation to students. The analysis of the data revealed specific advantages of creative translation regarding enhancing students' command of the language, boosting self-confidence and preparing them for the challenges they may have to deal with in their future careers. On the other hand, among the disadvantages, several factors were mentioned including assessment issues, the status of the course and difficulties of its incorporation into the curriculum of the program.

Keywords: pedagogical translation, real translation, creative translation, ELT

1. Introduction

Two types of translation are distinguished - pedagogical and real translation. They differ due to their function, object, and the addressee of the translation (Klaudy, 2003: 133). Discussing the main functions of pedagogical translation, Klaudy distinguishes the following: raising consciousness about the source and target languages and practising and testing language knowledge. Lesznyák (2003: p. 61 (cited in Vermes [2010]) adds two more functions of pedagogical translation specifically, those of illumination and memorisation. On the other hand, in the case of "real translation, "the translated text is not a tool but the goal of the process (Vermes, 2010). As well as this, Vermes also maintains that the object of real translation is information about reality contained in the source text, whereas in pedagogical translation it is information about the language learner's level of language proficiency and is therefore strictly language-knowledge oriented.

This qualitative research examines the role and benefits of teaching translation as a pedagogical tool and explores the possibilities of expanding its significance by introducing a course in creative (real) translation using the data taken from the questionnaires filled out by the teachers of English working at the Department of English Philology at Tbilisi State University.

2. Data and Methodology

This research was based on the data taken from the electronic questionnaire filled out by 14 teachers of English working at the Department of English Philology at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Apart from the demographic data, the questionnaire included questions about the goals and functions of teaching translation at the Department and the possibilities of expanding this direction by introducing more variety regarding the activities and/or a course of creative translation. At the final stage of the research, the findings were analysed and the results were discussed.

3. Findings and discussion

The teachers working at the Department of English Philology and teaching practical courses in English to the BA students of English Philology filled out the questionnaire (they were all female and their ages varied from 20 - 30 (20%), 31 - 40 (20%), 41-50 (4%), 51 - 60 (28%) and 61 - 70 (28%). The teachers participating in this research taught various practical courses regarding developing and enhancing practical English skills, such as Phonetics, Grammar, Reading, Writing and Speaking skills, as well as Text Analysis and Interpretation. 3 teachers taught Business English and Press English courses.

The questions about whether they used translation activities or not in the process of teaching English, were answered positively by 12 teachers. The question about the specific translation activities revealed a variety of activities. More specifically, the translation exercises ranged from grammar translation to a paragraph of creative translation and longer ESP texts (press, business and legal). Interestingly, 13 teachers maintained that teaching translation was important whereas one teacher believed that it was not advisable to include translation exercises in the curriculum of the program.

Those teachers, who answered positively regarding the employment of translation exercises in their practical courses of English, indicated that they mainly used translation at three levels: (1) Sentence-level translation, which helps students practise grammatical structures, vocabulary usage and sentence construction; (2) text-level translation, which aims at translating longer paragraphs or texts where students try to convey the meaning of the original text while maintaining coherence in the target language and (3) vocabulary and idiomatic expressions' translations, which help students enhance their vocabulary and encourage creative phrasing.

Interestingly, the answers to the question regarding the main function of teaching translation varied. Specifically, 28% of teachers maintained that teaching translation increases understanding of how English functions. In addition, 20% of teachers believed that translation activities improve vocabulary skills. 14% of teachers answered that doing translation exercises (1) helps students develop clearer and more nuanced English (14%), (2) gives students more knowledge about the cultures of both languages (14%) and (3) develops or enhances students' translation skills (14%).

Interestingly, although several teachers indicated that they utilize grammar-translation exercises, none of them indicated directly that these types of exercises improve students' grammar skills. However, the importance of the double (back) translation was discussed which, among other aspects, covers the grammatical-structural aspect of translation. Specifically, it was stated that back translation is one of the tools that can be employed with learners of all levels; it was also believed that double translation makes students focus on details of structure, figurative language, various idioms and set phrases.

Differences of opinion were obvious when answering the question of whether it was advisable to do more creative translation exercises. 11 teachers maintained that they thought that teaching creative translation would be a positive addition to the curriculum whereas 3 teachers did not think that it would be beneficial for the program. One teacher specified that she used very few

exercises of translation, and explained that the activities she employed “are limited to translating certain concepts to make the course content clear”.

While contemplating whether creative translation should be taught at the University or not teachers mentioned several advantages. For instance, it was mentioned that this would enhance cultural skills and English learning skills as well as giving students an opportunity to interact with the authentic language (“Using authentic texts in a world language classroom brings the target language’s culture to life and improves English learning skills. Also, students interact with the living, vibrant language, a rich gift to all students of another language”). It was also suggested that some elements of creative translation would increase the depth of understanding of the text (“We need to include the elements of creative translation in order to better comprehend the content and gain a more in-depth, accurate understanding of the message conveyed.”). It was also mentioned that teaching creative translation would enhance the students’ command of English, especially vocabulary skills. It was also pointed out that “students often discuss the importance of linking the right meanings in two different languages highlighting the role of culture in this context”. In this respect, it was indicated that “teachers use creative translation and some fun activities with translation as a warmer to boost the skills and also help students bond during the lesson”. Several teachers emphasised that “while teaching text interpretation, students enjoy translating interesting paragraphs from texts and comparing and editing their partners’ versions”.

To the questions about what translation activities would the teachers add to the ones already employed, the following was mentioned: a) the activities that enhance the application of creative translation in the process of teaching; (b) new word logs created by the students independently to promote autonomous learning; (c) teaching how to use a bilingual dictionary properly; (d) comparing and analysing existing translated passages etc.

Quite interestingly, the role of creative translation was linked with the essence of cultural translation during which “students translate not only the texts but also the cultural nuances” was also foregrounded. One teacher suggested including creative translation exercises in ELT at the Department as it fosters creativity, critical thinking and language expression. The creative translation was also referred to as an asset – owing to the extent it may explore cultural issues (“how widely it covers cultures”).

Several advantages of including creative translation in the curriculum were enumerated. For instance, teachers believed that using authentic texts in a world language classroom brings the target language’s culture to life and improves English learning skills (“While translating creative texts, students interact with the living, vibrant language, a rich gift to all students of another language”).

On the other hand, the teachers who were against introducing creative translation elements into the ELT classroom named the following factors: (a) this type of translation would be difficult to incorporate into an existing curriculum; therefore, it would be advisable to include it into the program as an independent course, (b) it would be difficult to assess this skill by the current assessment system, and thus this attempt would call for fundamental modifications in several directions. It was also maintained that it is not easy to teach creative translation to all of the students as it comes from language experience, age, etc. As well as these factors, it was also suggested that teaching creative translation is “a matter of one’s personal interest”, therefore, it would be difficult to “modify and adjust it according to the demands of an academic course, especially, at the BA level”. Amongst additional factors that should be considered while contemplating introducing a course in creative translation, were mentioned as follows: a) level of knowledge of English (60%) and b) specificity of the course taught (30%).

However, some teachers still considered the possibility of introducing only an elective (not a compulsory) course in creative translation due to the reasons mentioned above.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative research has revealed that the issue of integrating creative translation as part of the curriculum of the program at the BA level is still debatable and depends on numerous positive and negative things discussed above.

However, despite the controversy revealed by this study, more teachers were positive about the validity of using translation exercises, including creative translation exercises in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. The significance of enhancing language skills through translation was also foregrounded as well as the advantages of the act of translation being an act of cultural communication.

Overall, although being quite limited, this research has shown that translation exercises as well as a possible (elective) course in creative translation have an ability to play a positive role in ELT as they tangibly improve students' overall understanding of the English language and strengthen their professional skills and self-confidence in reference to multiple aspects concerning their future professional aims.

References:

1. Higgins, J. & Ryland, Ch. (2019.) *Creative Translation in the Classroom*, The Queen's College, Oxford.
2. Machida, S. (2011). Translation in Teaching a Foreign (Second) Language: A Methodological Perspective. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 740 - 746a.
3. Klaudy, K. (2003). *Languages in Translation*. Budapest: Scholastica.
4. Lesznyák, M. (2003). A fordítási kompetencia értékelése: helyzetkép és kutatási feladatok. *Fordítástudomány* 5.1, 60-80
5. Vermes, A. (2010). Translation in Foreign Language Teaching: A Brief Overview of Pros and Cons. *Eger Journal of English Studies X*. pp. 83 – 93.

Author's email: lel.dumba@gmail.com

Author's biographical data

Lela Dumbadze is a lecturer at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia. Her article deals with the significance of creative translation in the process of teaching English as a second language to Georgian students. She has also rich experience in literary translation of British and American writers, among them J. K. Salinger, E. A. Poe, Saul Bellow, Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf's two novels To the Lighthouse and Orlando, for which she was awarded the most prestigious Georgian literary prize "Saba" twice (in 2015 and 2019).