

Translation as a pedagogical tool in the foreign language classroom: A qualitative study of attitudes and behaviours

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Abstract

A review of the literature on language teaching reveals predominantly negative attitudes towards the use of translation in language teaching (TILT) (Cook, 2010). The purpose of this paper is to explore the question of whether this negativity is reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of university lecturers engaged in language teaching as well as to consider the background and contextual factors associated with these attitudes and behaviours. A case-study of one Irish Higher Education Institution was conducted and qualitative interviews carried out with six lecturers in Japanese and six in German in conjunction with a review of the relevant documentation including course outlines and module descriptors. The results indicated widespread support on the ground for the use of TILT in some form suggesting a need for further research on the impact of the use of TILT on the language learning process.

Keywords

Translation, language teaching, L1, Grammar Translation

I Introduction

Criticisms leveled against translation have had a negative impact on academic opinion regarding its use in language teaching (Cook, 2010). Most notable is the association of Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) (Cook, 2010) with the Grammar Translation approach to language teaching.

The insidious association of Translation in Language Teaching with dull and authoritarian Grammar Translation, combined with the insinuation that Grammar Translation had nothing good in it at all, has lodged itself so deeply in the collective consciousness of the language-teaching profession, that it is difficult to prise it out at all, and it has hardly moved for a hundred years. The result has been an arid period in the use and development of TILT, and serious detriment to language teaching as a whole (Cook, 2010, p. 156).

However, as Schjoldager (2004), Cook (2009) and Lems, Miller and Soro (2010) point out, TILT continues to be used in practice in many parts of the world. This paper uses a case-study approach to begin to address the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of university language lecturers towards the use of TILT?
2. What behaviours in terms of the use of TILT are associated with more positive or negative attitudes towards its use?
3. What background factors are associated with more positive or negative attitudes towards its use?

In order to frame these questions, the following section reviews the pertinent literature, outlining the events that led to the demise of translation in the classroom, and presents the case for and against the use of translation as a language learning tool.

II Literature review

1 The demise of TILT

Despite the widespread popular assumption that translation should play a major and necessary part in the study of a foreign language, recent theories of language teaching and learning have at best ignored the role of translation, and at worst vilified it. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards almost all influential theoretical works on language teaching have assumed without argument that a new language (L2) should be taught without reference to the student's first language (L1) (Cook, 2009).

The demise of TILT can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, when Wilhelm Viëtor (1850–1918) led the Reform Movement in Language Learning, criticising the state of language teaching, arguing that it ignored the spoken language. His work *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren! Ein Beitrag zur Überbürdungsfrage*, which he published in 1882 under the pseudonym 'Quousque Tandem', is often credited as the watershed between the modern period and everything it preceded. *Quousque Tandem* translates as *How long more?*, referring to how much longer the Grammar-Translation (GT) method of language teaching had to be endured. Viëtor published widely on language pedagogy, emphasising the importance of spoken rather than written tasks (Viëtor, 1880a, 1880b). Other members of the Reform Movement advocated an approach that focused on authentic language use. As a result, the Direct Method of language teaching replaced the GT method and became popular in France and Germany in the 1900s. For more detailed discussion on the historical background that led to the rejection of the GT method and the development of the Direct Method, see Howatt and Widdowson (2004, p. 187-210). While the GT method approached language learning through the language learners' mother tongue (L1), the advocates of the Direct Method approached language learning through the target language (L2) in a manner analogous to the way a first language is learnt. Meaning was directly related to the target language, without translation from or into the L1 and students deduced rules based on examples and illustrations. The use of the L1 in the classroom ranged from a total ban to its use as a "last refuge for the incompetent" (Koch, 1947, p. 271).

In addition, over the last thirty years, the emergence of new pedagogical approaches, which derived from the Direct Method of language learning, further repressed the role of TILT. Focus on meaning rather than on the form of the language was advocated by the proponents of the Natural Approach and derived from early SLA theories. This Focus on Meaning approach was in direct contrast to the Focus on Form approach which placed the emphasis on the grammatical components and rules of the L2 (accuracy). Advocates of the Focus on Meaning school (e.g. Krashen & Terrell, 1998), on the other hand, prioritised the meaningful communication of the L2, paying attention to the meaning of the message to be conveyed (fluency). A pedagogical approach that also pursued meaning, though for different reasons, as well as stylistic and syntactic accuracy, emerged with the Communicative Approach (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979) and its emergence also contributed to the demise of translation in the classroom. This approach was based on language learning theories that were informed by both a pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective.

However, while the English-speaking world has tended to shun the GT method since the middle of the twentieth century, Schjoldager (2004) points out that in some areas in the world translation continues to

be widely used in the language classroom. It is used particularly in secondary schools (Cook, 2009), and in countries where there are not many native speakers of the target language (Lems, Miller & Soro, 2010).

2 The case against TILT

Cook (2009) lists several reasons why TILT was rejected: the widespread influence of the Grammar-Translation method which has become stereotypical of the use of translation in language teaching, the difficulty associated with translating from the L1 into the L2, the reinforcement of a reliance on processing the L2 via the L1, L1 interference as learners seemed to be heavily influenced by the L1 and, finally, a detrimental effect on the acquisition of native-like processing skill and speed. Similarly, Schjoldager (2003) cites Lado (1964) who states that the use of translation in the language classroom encourages a word-for-word rendering between the L1 and the L2. Irons (1998) cited in Schjoldager (2003) supports this criticism, stating that it can lead to a flawed and unidiomatic L2 production. Newson (1998, p. 64-65) also lists a number of disadvantages of translation as a teaching and testing tool including interference and the implication that word-to-word equivalence between languages exists. He also suggests that its use hinders the achievement of such aims as the development of initial fluency in spoken language, the controlled introduction of selected and graded structures or communicative competence strategies, the controlled introduction of and mastery of selected and graded lexical items, the use of contextualized language, communicative language use and learner-centered language learning. Additional empirical studies that point to its shortcomings when used as a tool to test language proficiency include Kalkkvist (1998), Klein-Braley and Franklin (1998) and Klein-Braley (1987).

3 The case for TILT

Despite reasons cited above for the rejection of TILT, there is a new wave of advocacy of TILT in the foreign language classroom (Malmkjaer, 1998; Cook, 2010, 2013; Butzamm & Caldwell, 2009). Cook (2009) argues that the criticisms that have been leveled against translation overlook the fact that translation can also be used in ways that can complement the Direct Method of language learning. Indeed, Gonzalez-Davies (2004, p. 3) points out that concepts that are central to the Communicative Approach, such as learner autonomy, peer work, meaningful learning, learning to learn, decision making and student-centered classes, are all concepts that are relevant to translation training too. She claims that translation assignments can be designed to develop a number of competencies, including reading and writing skills (Gonzalez-Davies, 2004, p.2). Butzamm and Caldwell (2009, p.197) argue that translation should be regarded as a fifth skill, whose efficacy for communicative development has been disparaged in the past. Further evidence to reinstate TILT is found in a study conducted by Brooks-Lewis (2009), which reports on student resistance to a monolingual classroom and challenges the theory and practice of the exclusion of the learner's L1 in the classroom. Cook (2013) points to a growing literature which supports a return to bilingual teaching for a number of acquisitional, pedagogic, political and educational reasons. For a full review see Hall and Cook (2012) and for further discussion on bilingual theories in the foreign language classroom see Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) and Edstrom (2006).

Other studies highlighting the merits of TILT include a study conducted by Laufer and Girsai (2008) which showed that incorporating explicit contrastive analysis and translation activities into a text based communicative lesson made a significant difference in acquiring new vocabulary. An earlier study by Celik (2003) found that code-mixing was an efficient and effective method when used to introduce vocabulary into the classroom. Other studies that acknowledge the efficacy of translation to introduce new vocabulary include Harmer (1991) and Ur (1996). As a controlled task, translation is regarded as a time-efficient way to teach and test the L2 (Duff, 1989) and Cook (2009) argues that TILT is one of the few methods which can be adopted in large classes. In addition, its structured and predictable nature gives students a sense of attainment and achievement, and, in his view, it is suited to teachers who may have a limited command of the L2. It promotes the linguistic agility and accuracy of the student, particularly at a more advanced level and is a useful tool in increasing language awareness in terms of contrastive

stylistics (Snell-Hornby, 1985). Other empirical studies supporting TILT include Scherer and Wertheimer (1964), Buck (1992) and Berggren (1972), cited in Schjoldager (2003).

Finally, feedback questionnaires on the translation classes taught as part of a degree in Modern Languages at the University of Cambridge show that students identify translation almost unanimously as one of the tasks they feel most conducive to language learning (Carreres & Noriega-Sanchez, 2011, p. 282). Cook (2010) calls for the reassessment and reintroduction of translation as a pedagogical approach to language teaching which is grounded in language-learning research and informed by educational philosophy.

III Methodology: The Case-Study

1 The Irish context

At the heart of this case-study are interviews with 12 language lecturers, 6 of Japanese and 6 of German, located in a Higher Education Institute (HEI) in Ireland. Therefore, we begin by considering the context within which these lecturers operate. For example, there are no official guidelines relating to TILT published for third level institutions in Ireland. Instead, these institutions operate autonomously enjoying academic freedom and designing their own courses and modules. However, there are a number of indicators that TILT is used to some, if not to a significant, extent. For example, the proceedings of a recent conference (2008) on this topic edited by eminent scholars in the field of language learning in Ireland (Witte, Harden & Ramos de Oliviero Harden 2009) contains 24 articles detailing how translation can be meaningfully integrated into language learning primarily at third level.

2 Setting

This case-study took place in one Irish HEI and focused on two languages, German and Japanese, both of which are offered on two, four year undergraduate degrees: the BA in Applied Language and Intercultural Studies and the BA in International Business. Within these degrees six German and six Japanese language modules were selected and these, together with their coordinators/lecturers and the students taking them, formed the heart of this study. The modules (Table 1) were selected as they span both degrees from first to final year and involve almost all of the staff involved in the teaching of German and Japanese language at this institution. Third year language modules do not form part of this study as students enrolled on these degrees must spend their third year in a partner university in a country in which their L2 is one of the official languages.

Module Code / Name	Year	Hours per week	Year-long / semester-long module	Beginners track or Intermediate track
German				
GE110 German Language 1	1	6	Year-long	Beginners track
GE268 German Language 6	2	3	Semester-long	Intermediate track
GE238 German for Business	2	2	Semester long	Intermediate track
GE267 German Language 6	2	3	Semester-long	Beginners track
GE478 German Language 8	4	2	Semester-long	Both tracks
GE488 German Language 8	4	2	Semester-long	Both tracks
Japanese				
JA110 Japanese Language 1	1	8	Year-long	Beginners track
JA242 Japanese Reading and Translating	2	2	Semester-long	Beginners track
JA240 Japanese Language 3	2	4	Semester-long	Beginners track
JA267 Japanese Language 4	2	4	Semester-long	Beginners track
JA470 Japanese Advanced Language 7	4	4	Semester-long	Both tracks
JA480 Japanese Advanced Language 8	4	4	Semester-long	Both tracks

Table 1: Modules used in the study

3 Participants

Twelve language lecturers (see also Table 2, Section IV.1) participated in this study, six taught German language and six Japanese. Of the Japanese lecturers, three were non-native Japanese speakers and spoke English as their L1, and therefore shared the same L1 as the majority of students in their classes. The other three were native Japanese speakers, two of whom were highly proficient in English, and had spent a considerable portion of their lives in an English-speaking country. One native speaker of Japanese had limited English proficiency and had not spent much time in an English-speaking country prior to this study. Three of the German lecturers were native-speakers of the students' L2, two were non-native speakers of the L2 and shared the same L1 as the majority of the students, and one teacher's L1 was different to both the L1 and L2 of the students.

While the lecturers were the primary participants, the study also explored the attitudes of the language learners, and to this end, opinions were elicited from first and second year German and Japanese language students whose language modules contain a translation component or who take a translation module designed to complement their core language module. These opinions were extracted from anonymous questionnaires used to collect student feedback at the end of each academic year.

4 Data collection

Data collection took place primarily by means of individual, semi-structured interviews involving each lecturer and one of the researchers. The interviews with the lecturers were conducted in spring 2013, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were guided by the research questions outlined in the Introduction (see also Appendix A for a complete list of the sub-questions used to guide the interviews). In particular, they dealt with the following issues around whether the participants use TILT, and if so, why and in what way is it used, the potential advantages and disadvantages associated with its use and the lecturer's own experience of learning an L2.

Students' attitudes were measured using their anonymous evaluation of the relevant module for the academic years 2011-12 and 2012-13 (Appendix B). Finally, in order to complement this material, an analysis of the documentation relevant to the language courses was conducted. This documentation primarily took the form of course outlines and module descriptors.

IV Results

1 Overview: key themes emerging from the data

An initial profile of each language lecturer is outlined in Table 2. The profile includes elements relating to attitude towards TILT in general terms, background factors (i.e. whether they are native-speakers of the L1, L2 or neither, as well as their own personal experience of TILT when learning a language) and behaviour in relation to TILT (i.e. the use of TILT and/or its formal assessment or otherwise).

	Attitude towards the use of TILT	Background Factors		Behaviour in relation to TILT	
Participant	Positive/Negative	Native speaker of students' L2	Personal experience of TILT	Uses TILT	Assesses formally
German lecturers					
1	positive	non-native	yes	no	no
2	positive	non-native	yes	yes	yes
3	positive	non-native speaker of students' L1 and L2	yes	no	no
4	positive	native	no	no	no
5	positive	native	yes	yes	no
6	positive	native	yes	yes	no
Japanese lecturers					
7	positive	native	yes	yes	no
8	positive	non-native	yes	yes	no
9	positive	native	yes	no	no
10	positive	native	yes	yes	yes
11	positive	non-native	yes	no	no
12	positive	non-native	yes	yes	yes

Table 2: Summary profiles of language lecturers

Building on the information contained in Table 2, richer, qualitative data obtained from the interviews is presented below under each of the main headings contained in this table. However, attitudes and behaviour are combined in these sub-sections in order to better reflect and categorise the qualitative responses of the participants. Thus, the first sub-section considers the attitudes and behaviour of the respondents regarding the use of TILT. Considerations around the advantages and disadvantages of the use of TILT and its formal assessment or otherwise are also included in this section. The second sub-section considers the potential role played by background factors including the native language of the lecturer in question and their personal experience of TILT in their language learning. A third sub-section provides additional complementary information in the form of the attitudes of students towards the use of TILT while a fourth details the presence or otherwise of references to translation in the formal documentation around the modules in question, i.e. their descriptors, guidelines etc.

2 Attitudes towards the use of TILT and behaviours in this regard

a Use of TILT

This section considers attitudes and behaviours of the lecturers interviewed regarding the explicit use of TILT. Attitudes among both the German and Japanese lecturers were overwhelmingly positive. The

primary note of caution sounded concerned the need to find a balance in terms of its use and the importance of not overusing it.

The reasons given by the participants for their positive attitudes towards TILT echo many of the arguments put forward in Section II.3 and include the value of translation in aiding the acquisition of vocabulary, something that was referred to directly by seven of the twelve lecturers with comments such as the following representative of those made by the sample as a whole.

In fourth year it is useful as a vocabulary-building exercise.
Translation helps to expand vocabulary and increase familiarity with structures in line with module learning outcomes.

Its value in assisting students in developing an understanding of the context in which certain terms and phrases can be used was also emphasized by three of the respondents. For example, in response to the question as to why they engage with TILT, one replied that ‘...in first and second year it can be helpful to contextualise the language use’.

Similarly, three of the lecturers in this study spoke of the usefulness of TILT in insuring that comprehension is occurring successfully with one commenting that they use it ‘To check comprehension and for extra confirmation’.

Three lecturers further stressed that it increased their students’ familiarity with particular grammatical ‘structures in line with module learning outcomes’, while two of those interviewed emphasised the fact that students appear to enjoy explicit forms of TILT stating that:

The exercise is very popular among students and always features positively in their evaluations of the module.

Finally, one lecturer also stressed the usefulness of translation as a pedagogical tool in highlighting gaps in learners knowledge, in particular with regard to vocabulary, expressing this view in the following terms:

It is useful in highlighting to students what it is that they don’t know in a language.

In addition, two lecturers (one Japanese and one German) described how they use TILT to add variety to their lectures and also to highlight particular cultural issues, with one Japanese lecturer describing how students translated ‘...a Japanese short story to highlight some cultural issues’. This point was further developed by one of the two lecturers in question who explained that, in their view, ‘translation has a role to play as a component of an eclectic approach to language teaching’ further arguing that such an approach recognises the fact that every group ‘is made up of students with a range of learning styles and preferences and an eclectic approach allows you to suit as many of them as possible at least some of the time’. This lecturer also emphasised that she would use translation more frequently with intermediate students than with beginners in order ‘to avoid the problem of over-translation from the mother tongue with ab-initios’.

The second lecturer emphasised in this regard that, in their view, translation primarily aids comprehension rather than production and should be used in moderation in conjunction with other approaches. Similar views were reflected in the following comments which together underline the need, in the view of the participants in this study, to use translation in moderation in conjunction with a variety of other pedagogical tools and approaches:

If students do too much translation, it can be problematic. Students get used to translating the whole time and this can deprive them of a chance to work things out for themselves.

Students don't think through Japanese. It reinforces the idea that everything has to be filtered through English, and this might give them the idea that everything in Japanese can be mapped onto English, but I don't think this is the case.

Students might get into the habit of thinking in English first and working from the L1. I want students to find the Japanese phrase without having to access the L1 first.

It can be helpful as a tool to facilitate the language learning but there is a danger of overdoing it. If you overdo it, essays can read like a google-translate text, which I sometimes find is the case with 4th year language.

I think it can facilitate language learning, if not, I would not have used it in the classroom, but I wouldn't rely on just using it as the only method.

Furthermore, as one of the German lecturers pointed out, their attitude towards the use of TILT in Ireland is positive for more pragmatic, contextual reasons in that the students have a common language also spoken by their lecturer, i.e. English or in their words 'because of the largely monolingual nature of the groups'. They stress that it would not be as easy in, for example, 'a DaF¹ context in Germany'. In addition, the fact that many of the students on the core language degrees in this institution are training to become translators is viewed by three of the lecturers as underlining the value of engagement with TILT as an additional form of translation practice for them commenting, for example, that TILT is '...good training/practice for ALIS students who become translators later', with ALIS referring to the BA in Applied Language and Translation Studies or similarly:

Many of the students on this module are training to be translators in any case so it is useful to them even into the target language as opposed to their mother tongue.
...the main purpose of the degree is translation, so from that point of view, it can be beneficial.

These positive attitudes towards the use of translation in the language classroom translate into its actual use in the case of seven of the twelve lecturers involved in the study. Those who do not actually use it gave pressure of time as the principal reason for this, combined with 'a negative press' associated with TILT in the literature and the fact that many of the students in their classes also take dedicated translation modules.

In terms of the concrete manner in which TILT is employed by seven of the language lecturers who participated in this study, analysis of their responses reveals considerable variation and variety. For example, the majority of the German and Japanese lecturers described how they translate short texts both into and out of the L2 for all levels from beginners to final year undergraduate students. As the following comments indicate, the text types vary depending on the students' proficiency levels and on the focus of the module.

In fourth year, I use business agreements and contract documents and in first and second year, I use transcripts of a conversation which has been written in manga style, where the situation has been put into Japanese manga or I use a transcript of a conversation from a text book

I mostly use samples from the Japanese text book Genki. I did use an article from a Japanese children's newspaper on Obama's re-election, but found that it was too difficult for them, I thought using a newspaper

¹ DaF refers here to *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* or German as a Foreign Language

article would motivate the students, and while it did motivate the stronger ones, it seemed to intimidate the weaker ones.

I use short stories (fiction), websites (news), current affairs websites. I used to use film, by first showing students the film without any subtitles and then I would subsequently show them the film with English subtitles- and while I didn't discuss the translation as such, I used the subtitles to facilitate my explanation.

I use authentic language for all my language classes, and these range from fliers, advertising campaigns, survey results, screen-shots that contain L2 subtitling and book covers.

...use pre-prepared sentences from a textbook, which are related to a particular situation.

One German lecturer also described how they ask their students to edit and improve machine-translated texts translated from the L2 into English, while others described how they ask their students to paraphrase orally in English what they see written in the L2.

b Assessment

A translation element is only included as part of the formal assessment by three of the lecturers interviewed, two Japanese (teaching the same module) and one German (see Table 2). For example, in one of the German modules taught to second year students, the written example includes a requirement that the students translate an English text into German. This is worth 40% of this paper and 20% of the overall grade for this module. The lecturer in question commented that 'Yes, translation used as an integral part of the course, one hour out of the three hours per week is devoted to translation into German. This is also assessed'.

The Japanese modules in question require students to translate from the L2 into the L1, while another section requires them to translate text into the L2. This section accounts for 20% of the first year exam paper which is worth 25% of the total grade for the module while for the second year module approximately 25% of the grade is for translation.

In terms of reasons given for not including a translation element in module assessment, two predominate. Firstly, the 'negative press in the literature' or a '...possible hang up from negative press in the literature around the use of translation in the language classroom' (see Section II.2 in particular) around the use of TILT is mentioned. While as we have repeatedly seen (and will see again in Section IV.5), many lecturers in this case study favour the use of TILT, they do not officially highlight this in terms of module descriptors, course guidelines and formal assessments.

The second reason given is that some of the students in these language modules, i.e. those enrolled on the translation strand of the BA in Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, also take modules in translation and the lecturers report attempting to avoid duplication of assessment types stating for example that they 'do not want to overlap with the work being done by colleagues in translation'.

c Personal experience of TILT

Eleven of the twelve lecturers interviewed for this study had experience of translation as a language learning tool from their own language learning history (Table 2) and described it as something that contributed positively to their language learning in terms of '... the acquisition of vocabulary and the understanding of grammatical concepts as well as sometimes the content issues being covered in class'. Indeed, of those who had learned more than one language, one involving the use of TILT and one not, they expressed regret that TILT had not been an element of the language learning experience in the latter.

3 Students' attitudes towards the use of TILT

a Japanese students

As part of a first year, beginners Japanese language module, students were provided with screen shots that contained subtitles, images and slogans from advertising campaigns as well as book covers and flyers and were asked to translate these from Japanese into English. This translation component of the language class proved very popular with the students, and typical responses which formed part of the anonymous feedback include:

Specifically, I enjoyed the Japanese ads, book titles etc. at the end of every [grammar] handout. It enhanced the feeling of learning real Japanese.

Translating and reading things a Japanese person would encounter daily gives a sense of really understanding the language for me.

I found [translating] signs and book titles also useful as it helped to see the grammar points in action.

Helpful, especially for vocabulary.

In addition, semi-structured questionnaires distributed to students taking a two-hour translation module designed to complement their more general language module reveal that students consider language acquisition to be an integral part of the translation process, with the following being representative of responses to the question: What did you find interesting and useful in this module?

This translation module helped me to improve my reading skills- I liked learning more about Japanese society and culture through the translations that we did in class.

Practical, engaging method to learn Japanese.

Learning Japanese as it's used in Japan (not using textbooks designed for foreigners).

I learned about many of the intricacies of the language, built up vocabulary and got to familiarise myself with Japanese newspaper styles.

I found the application of grammar rules in context interesting and useful.

Vocabulary is learnt through translating.

It built my confidence and strengthened my understanding of Japanese.

b German students

Results from the anonymous feedback forms completed by students taking a second year German language module shows that the translation element has proved consistently popular over a number of years with representative comments below from the student's anonymous evaluation of this module in 2011-12 in response to the question: Please explain briefly what you liked and what you didn't like about this module. In particular, please note any changes that you think should be made to this course for next year.

Our Friday (translation) class was the best part of the module. We had to do something we have never done before and I feel this really improved my German.

Translation was my favourite part of this module, it was very interesting and we learned a lot of new vocabulary and sentence construction.

I really enjoyed the translation lectures every Friday. It helped me to practise in a very effective way all what [sic] I have already learnt.

4 Documentation

In addition to the data obtained from teachers' interviews and student feedback, a detailed analysis was carried out on the relevant language module descriptors to determine whether reference is made to translation or translation skills in 1) the description of the module, 2) the stated learning outcomes or 3) the indicative content and learning activities. A summary of these results is provided in Table 3. To complement this data, a similar analysis was conducted on relevant translation module descriptors to establish whether language learning or language skills form part of the translation module (Table 4).

Module Code and Name	Year	Translation mentioned in module descriptor	Translation skill mentioned in Learning Outcome	Translation mentioned in Indicative Content and Learning Activities
German				
GE110 German Language 1	1	no	no	no
GE268 German Language 6	2	no	no	no
GE238 German for Business	2	no	no	no
GE267 German Language 6	2	no	yes: translate a short English text into German	no
GE478 German Language 8	4	no	no	no
GE488 German Language 8	4	no	no	no
Japanese				
JA110 Japanese Language 1	1	no	yes: Translate simple sentences from Japanese into English and English into Japanese	no
JA240 Japanese Language 3	2	no	no	no
JA267 Japanese Language 4	2	no	no	no
JA470 Japanese Advanced Language 7	4	no	no	no
JA480 Japanese Advanced Language 8	4	no	no	no

Table 3: Reference to translation in language module descriptors

Module Code and Name	Year	Language skills mentioned in module descriptor	Language skills mentioned in Learning Outcome	Language skills mentioned in Indicative Content and Learning Activities
German				
GE208 German Translation Practice	2	yes: The module introduces the student to a wide range of texts with a view to ...developing German and English language skills	no	no
GE501 German General Translation	4	no	no	no
GE502 German Economic Translation	4	no	no	no
GE504 German Scientific / Technical Translation	2	no	yes: Create native-speaker, domain-specialist level target language texts, which are fluent and accurate translations of the source text	no
GE478 German Language 8	4	no	no	no
GE488 German Language 8	4	no	no	no
Japanese				
JA208 Japanese Translation Practice	2	no	no	no
JA220 Japanese Reading and Translation	2	no	no	no
JA242 Japanese Reading and Translation 2	2	no	no	no
JA401 Japanese Specialised Translation	4	no	no	no
JA412 Japanese Advanced Translation 2	4	no	no	no
JA502 Japanese Economic Translation	4	no	no	no
JA504 Japanese Scientific / Technical Translation	4	no	no	no

Table 4: Reference to language skills in translation module descriptors

V Discussion

The association of TILT with ‘dull and authoritarian’ Grammar Translation (Section I) was, without exception, not reflected in the views expressed by the language teachers interviewed for this study. Indeed, in terms of the questions at the heart of this paper we can conclude that the attitudes of the lecturers involved in our study towards the use of TILT were overwhelmingly positive with the majority (n=7) also actually using translation as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. There was general agreement that there are a number of advantages associated with its use particularly in a context where all of the students and the lecturer share a common L1.

These include enhanced vocabulary acquisition, a greater understanding of the context in which terms are used, ensuring comprehension, acquisition of grammatical structures, enhanced enjoyment of the learning process, noticing of gaps in knowledge by the learner, increased awareness and understanding of cultural issues and an ability to cater for the different learning styles present within any group as part of an eclectic approach to language teaching and learning. The need for a balance of activities was also recognized and the role of translation as one potentially useful pedagogical tool among many acknowledged.

In terms of the influence of background factors, it would appear that personal positive experience of TILT outweighs the ‘negative press’ associated with TILT in the academic literature in this field. However, it does not appear to sufficiently outweigh it to enable lecturers to feel comfortable including elements of translation either in assessments or in module descriptors/guidelines. There were a small number (two out of twelve) of exceptions to this rule.

Our findings relate to twelve lecturers only involved with just two L2s in one HEI in Ireland. Clearly, generalization is not possible and the findings are merely initial pointers suggesting the way for future research. Bearing this in mind, this section concludes by further developing the central findings discussed in Section II. For example, as we saw, linguists led the Reform Movement and advocated a move towards a language teaching approach based on authentic language use rather than a Grammar-Translation pedagogical approach. However, this would suggest that a pedagogical approach that favors authentic language use and a translation-based approach are mutually exclusive. One participant in the current case study uses translation as an effective way to incorporate authentic language materials into the classroom. The ability of a beginners-level language group to access authentic material in the L2 has proved to be extremely popular amongst students, who consider it to be very motivating. However, it should be highlighted that the lecturer avoided the use of the word ‘translate’ or ‘translation’ when using this approach, favoring instead expressions such as ‘If this book was published in English, what would it be called’ or ‘what would be a suitable slogan for this advertisement if it were to appear in an Irish newspaper’. By avoiding the word ‘translate’, the lecturer felt that students went beyond rewriting the L2 task in the L1, and approached it from an angle that considered L1 register, style and expression. Additionally, the lecturer admitted that, subconsciously, she avoided the word ‘translate’ because of its negative connotations in the academic discourse around foreign language learning. She further emphasized that the authentic language material was effectively used in the classroom, and was done in a manner that placed equal emphasis on both the form of the language and the meaning of the language.

The lack of reference to translation in documentation relating to five out of seven first and second year module descriptors is significant, particularly as translation is covered to some extent in all of these modules and features as part of the examination process. Only one first year module descriptor and one second year module descriptor refer explicitly to translation in the modules’ learning outcomes, and no module descriptor lists it as part of the indicative content and learning activity, where the skills of listening, reading, writing, oral and role play are listed. Such practice is at odds with Butzkamm and Caldwell’s (2009, p. 197) and Stibbard’s (1998) view that translation skills should form part of language ability. As classes at fourth-year level are conducted in the L2, it would appear reasonable not to find a reference to translation in these module descriptors. Also worth highlighting is that out of thirteen translation-specific module descriptors, only one states that the translation module (GE208) will develop L1 and L2 skills.

Feedback elicited from student questionnaires echoes the findings of Carreres and Noriega-Sanchez (2011), with translation identified as one of the key tasks that facilitates the language learning process. Additionally, students feel that it is an enjoyable way to approach the target language. It should also be highlighted that students specifically mentioned translation and its role in vocabulary building, which is at odds with one of the disadvantages cited by Newson (1998, p. 64-65), when, based on a study of German learners of English, he states that, when translation is used as a language learning tool, there is no observable learning effect, either of new vocabulary or structural items.

VI Concluding comments

TILT continues to be perceived officially as a teaching approach synonymous with the teacher-centered GT method. However, it would appear that practitioners regard it instead as a useful teaching and learning tool which can complement existing pedagogical approaches as one component of an eclectic approach to language teaching and learning. The use of TILT was supported by the lecturers who participated in this

study all of whom expressed positive attitudes towards its use albeit unsupported by sufficient research or guidance from the literature. The actual use of TILT by the majority of the participants was however somewhat covert in that it did not overtly appear, in the majority of cases, in relevant documentation or assessment schedules.

Schjoldager (2003, p. 200) points out the discrepancy that exists between practitioners and theorists in the field of language learning and teaching, stating that while most teachers and policy makers believe in translation as a useful language learning tool, most theorists either ignore or regard it as an inadequate, even harmful teaching tool. The findings from this case study support this view and in addition the argument that if translation is to be used in the classroom, it should, ideally, be grounded in a principled theoretical framework. Otherwise classrooms run the risk of falling into the trap of the GT Method (see for example Stibbard, 1998) and/or the potential overuse or misuse of TILT. Theoretical principles around the use of TILT should also, ideally, be embedded in a language learning theory from the field of SLA which accepts that a second language can be learned in a manner which does not need to mirror how a child acquires their L1 and that, fundamentally, a difference exists between L1 and L2 acquisition processes.

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Appendix A

Case study and attitudinal survey on the use of translation in the classroom

Module Code:

Module-specific questions

- Do you use translation in the language teaching?
- Is it L1 →L2, L2→L1, L1 ↔L2?
- Is it spoken or written translation?
- Is it explicitly mentioned in the module descriptor or course outline?
- Why do you use it?
- In what way do you use it?
- What type of texts do you use?
- Do you ever use it as a tool to test proficiency?
- Is there a translation component in the exam or assessment?
- If yes, what is the weighting?
- If no, why not (why use it but not assess it)?

General Questions

- What are the potential problems with using translation in the language classroom?
- What are the advantages / disadvantages of using translation in the language classroom / can it facilitate language learning?
- What is your own experience of learning an L2?

Appendix B

(Sample) Student Feedback Form

Module Code:

What did you like about this module?

What did you find interesting / useful / good in this module?

Were there any particular elements that you did not like?

What are your opinions on the Facebook element of the course?

How many times on average (per day or week) did you check your Facebook page?

What elements helped you most in learning the language?

Do you have any suggestions that could be made to improve the course?

Did you find class enjoyable?

Would you have liked more homework, in addition to Facebook?

Did you enjoy the Oral assessment?