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A Full Irish Breakfast: Interlanguage Perspective, Intercultural Perspective, or Both? Translation and Second Language Teaching

Introduction

What would happen if we twist the storyline and translation is no longer the Cinderella of language teaching? Would translation be, not only an adequate, but also an exceptional tool in the curriculum for teaching languages at University level? In this paper, I will not dispute the continuous dismissal of translation in second language teaching. I will rather prove that translation has been most unfairly ignored and I will demonstrate its real value through a case study of the teaching of translation to University Students.

Many of us can recall some type of translation in the language classroom as students. For a long time, there was a firm rejection of the practice of translation within the classroom. This rejection was extraordinarily articulated across various academic fields and was always based on categorical terms¹.

In recent decades there has been a significant twist towards a generalised acceptance of translation. However, no common space between Translation and Language Teaching has been established². Many of those who acknowledge and defend the practice of translation in

1 See Brumfit (1988), Chaudron (1988), Gamboa Belisario (2004), García-Medall (2001), Holmes (1972), Lightbow/Spada (1999), Malmkjaer (1998), Mitchel/Myles (2004), Richards/Rodgers (1986), Weller (1989).

2 See Colina (2002), Gibert (1989), Hurtado Albir (1998, 1994), Pisarka (1988), Sánchez Sarmiento (1997).

language teaching, lack a set of principles to successfully apply the practice of translation within the classroom.

Nowadays, the use of translation in language teaching relies on each educational institution and the teachers who wish to implement it. In some cases, the inclusion of translation into the curriculum does not reflect a genuine interest but rather academic trends that represent isolated and ephemeral tendencies. The curriculum has to be meticulously planned and ready to incorporate translation. Translation needs to be integrated in accordance with clear principles, solid objectives and aims that validate its teaching.

Translation Studies and Translation in Language Teaching

At University level, we come across some barriers that deter the inclusion of translation into the curriculum of different language degrees.

To begin with, we face a complex map of Translation Studies all over Europe³. This field should be a springboard for the inclusion of translation in language curricula. But this is not the case. In some countries Translation is offered as a Degree Course as well as various Masters Programs, while other countries only offer translation in Masters Programs or Postgraduate Diplomas.

Some countries fear, on the one hand, an imminent endangerment of losing the Degree in Translation to a saturated market, while on the other hand, there are new degrees created in which translation is their main strike. In other countries the practice of translation is just beginning to enter the university sectors.

The lack of status in Translation Studies and the traditional rejection to translation in second language teaching does not improve the situation of teaching translation.

3 See Bueno García (2005), Toury (1995), Mayoral Asensio (2000), Motas et al. (1994).

Nonetheless, translation has found a place in many language degrees⁴—despite the fact that there might not always be a rationale behind the decision of including it⁵. Also, this inclusion tends to come with the essential aspects of translation being entirely forgotten.

We should certainly start by specifying the pedagogic context in which translation is being implemented. I will now outline general guidelines for the practice of teaching translation in second language curricula for University students:

- The objectives of translation
- Why it should be used in language teaching
- How it benefits the students
- How we can integrate translation in the curriculum
- How we can implement translation in the classroom

Objectives, Usage and Benefits of Translation

What are the objectives of translation? Why should it be used in language teaching and how does it benefit the students?

- Translation is an interdisciplinary field. Deliberately used as a controlled learning tool or resource, translation allows the student to develop and improve skills such as writing and reading in a multidirectional way⁶.

4 See Fawcett (1987), Tinsley (1974) and Wilkins (1974) *apud* Valverde Zambrana/Comitre Narváez (1997).

5 See Durieux (2005), Ballard (2005).

6 As well as looking at translation as an interdisciplinary field, it is often regarded also as a skill. As such, authors look at it as a separate skill—although not completely independent— from the rest of the skills or as part of other skills. In the first case we would talk about translation as a macro-skill, while in the latter we are referring to translation as micro-skill. For further discussion about this see De Arriba García (1996b), Drosdov (2003), House (1980), Johnson (1982), Kiraly (1995), Weller (1989).

- Students take part in a communicative process. The teacher has to circumscribe the nature of the translation classroom to a pragmatic environment in which the students use the language effectively⁷. As part of a communicative situation, students also activate underlying elements of the language that have been fossilised or just forgotten, using both their passive and active knowledge of the language⁸.
- Students discover and become familiar with a set of strategies⁹. These strategies are the student's personal set of resources used strategically rather than the well-known strategies listed in Translation Studies.
- Using strategies as part of a communicative domain helps the student approach negotiation principles that comply with the requirements of the translation exercise¹⁰.
- All the mentioned elements lead to the foundation of a space for intuition¹¹, self confidence¹², auto-criticism and creativity¹³. These are very important qualities for the student to be ultimately motivated¹⁴ and make the most out of the suggested translation activity.

See also Coffin (1982).

- 7 See De Arriba García (1996a), Hatim/Mason (1990, 1997), Hurtado Albir (1987), Hurtado Albir (1998), Kiraly (1995), Valero Garcés (1996).
- 8 This also relates to Hewson/Martin's (1991) *Variational Approach*, which establishes a link between L1 and L2 and also LC1 and LC2 in different stages.
- 9 See Al-Kufaishi (2004), Krawutschke (1989), Oxford (1990, 1993).
- 10 See Hewson/Martin's (1991) *Variational Approach*.
- 11 See Lavault (1985).
- 12 *Intuition* and *self confidence* are closely related to Oxford/Ehrman's (1993) concept of *risk taking*.
- 13 Sauvignon (1983) *apud* Kiraly (1995) establishes *creativity* as one of the communicative principles in the teaching of a L2 in the classroom. See also Dulay/Burt (1977), Kussmaul (1995), Roiss (1998).
- 14 For further discussion on the role of *motivation* in language learning see Crookes/Schmidt (1989), Oxford/Ehrman (1993), Samimy/Tabuse (1991).

Integrating and Implementing Translation

How can we integrate translation into the University curriculum?
How can we implement it in the classroom?

- A detailed translation programme throughout degree courses should be created. It would allow students to get a fair idea of the translation process gradually; to see it as a booster of language learning rather than an unbeatable enemy. It would also allow teachers to conduct the subject in a structured and manageable way.
- A reassessment of the role of translation in second language teaching should make us reconsider the implementation of the practice of translation within the classroom. We have to create a collaborative environment between the students, the teacher and the text in order to have a dynamic setting. It cannot be taken as an isolated element or ability that only skilful, advanced learners are capable of. Only seldom is it seen as an exercise that integrates basic skills such as reading and writing, and which enhances a real use of the language.

As a former translation student and current back translation teacher I will now present some brief notes on how translation can be successfully implemented in the classroom.

Back translation is part of the translation component in one of the Spanish modules in the University of Limerick, which only final year language students undertake.

No one can deny the difficulties that are involved in translating into a second language¹⁵. Such difficulties increase given that most students in the module I teach only do translation in the final year of their degree course. Due to this, it is not surprising that students are and find translation particularly difficult.

15 See Beeby Longsdale (1996), Campbell (1998), Grosman (2000), Kiraly (2000), Pokorn (2000).

Working plan

All texts used in the translation classroom are in English and are related to the Hispanic world. This is done deliberately so students do not dissociate the second culture and language that they are presented with.

In the classroom, we use a different text every week. The topic and syntax gets increasingly more difficult as the semester advances –although some items cannot always be controlled since we use authentic material; we hardly ever adapt it, and we certainly do not manipulate it.

We do not use literary pieces in the translation classroom –for they have previously proven to be extremely difficult and not very effective for language learners. Literary pieces have also proven to contain unappealing random sentences. For example, Beeby in her book *Teaching Translation from Spanish to English. Worlds Beyond Words* (1996), illustrates this with an interesting example. In secondary school Latin classes in Spain, students have to translate sentences such as: “Acies planitiem occupat” which translates for “The army in formation occupies the plain”. As she highlights: “Which army? Where was the plain? Who cares?”

We work on the morphological, syntactical and the semantic levels of each text simultaneously. Students are given general guidelines of how to work with the source text as well as how to produce a translation, but they often do not feel totally capable of dealing with such high demands, especially at the start of the semester. They tend to stick to their first language structure and grammar –possibly because they are not confident enough to take risks and try to make any changes or (re)create new cultural items according to the rules of the target language.

Normally, texts are not subjected to an intense linguistic analysis –students are not linguists, and the approach is fairly moderate¹⁶. They are taught to read the text and interpret the sense of it, as well as become aware of the tone, the register and the style –which are intentionally

16 There are a number of proposed text analysis for translation such as García Izquierdo (2000) and Nord (1991).

neutral in most cases to facilitate the task of translating. Also, students are usually asked to detect possible translation problems, so they can foresee the type of problems they will deal with before they start to translate. Both the top-down and bottom-up approaches to the text are followed, depending on the elements we focus on in the first place.

Students are encouraged to follow the process of reading and interpreting the source text, de-verbalise it, rewrite it into the second language, and finally verify their translation, to confirm whether the text they have reformulated is appropriate according to the original one and to the potential reader –who again is a neutral, general reader¹⁷. Students interact with the text pragmatically; they are part of the communicative act of translation. This way, students get the gist of the requirements, the nature of the translation competence and the translating exercise.

Students, Challenges and Motivation

Students have to overcome not only a language but also a culture barrier. Usually they are not aware of the cultural component and they tend to reduce all the difficulties they encounter down to language. They have to grasp how to transfer the content by means of their second language. For these and many more reasons, I do not blame students for becoming tense in spite of a rather relaxed approach to the subject in my classes.

Despite the language and cultural problems students encounter, I always thought that, if interested, they would have the motivation to somehow overcome most of the obstacles –since accuracy can be sacrificed in terms of communicative and creative principles.

Realistically speaking they have one week to work on a rather short text –they translate it at home and we comment and correct it in the class. Amongst some of the basic strategies, I thought that they might exchange personal views on the problems with each other, check parallel texts, or

17 See Hurtado Albir (1998).

else look on the net for approximate translations. But this never happens. Certainly, I tend to blame a general lack of motivation amongst the students. Possibly, this emerges as a result of the fact that the curriculum does not always take into account the students' interests and progress when it comes to working on translation –although there could be more to it!

In order to uplift their interest I decided to include as part of the existing material two texts semantically charged with expressions, references and items exclusive to the Irish culture –as opposed to the sole use of Hispanic references. I chose to do so because I felt that students might be genuinely interested in such an assignment; they could easily identify the concepts and feel some kind of connection with the text. The content would not be alien to them or their identity.

I got two texts from the Irish Times in August 2005 from a section on Irish readers talking about Spain. The two texts include a reasonable level of grammar with quite specific cultural items. The content and the expressions make the texts more appealing to Irish students. There is an immediate bond between students and text. And it is fascinating what the connection between the text and the reader can lead to in terms of motivation.

TEXT 1: **No Rain in Spain**

The Irish must be the world's greatest optimists. We stare at the rain lashing down on the barbecue, waiting patiently for our allocation of one hot summer's day. Like Bono, we keep our sunglasses on indoors. We even use the smoking ban to make every pub doorway look like part of a new outdoor café culture.

But is Spain more than just a giant patio heater by the sea? Speaking to a range of Ireland's new lovers of Spain, it seems people are going there for more than a bit of heat and cheap wine. Irish people are beginning to build up a connection with the country and its culture: it's not all Bullymun in the sun.

Sorcha Hamilton

TEXT 2: “You Won’t Get a Full Irish Breakfast”

The idea of farming in the pouring rain was enough to make Bernardette Doorly leave Ireland with her husband and three children to leave in a pueblo blanco in Southern Spain. “We wanted to move from Bray, and had considered moving to the countryside, but Spain seemed like a much better idea. Here the kids have more of an outdoor life. In Bray they never played undersupervised, but here they can run around all they like, because it’s very safe”. It took a while to get used to the slow pace of life and the small-community atmosphere of the town. “But they are very friendly here, and now I feel like we have a place in the community”. Alozaina, which is only an hour from Málaga, is different to the coastal hot spots. “Here you are surrounded by orange farms and orange grooves. You won’t get a full Irish breakfast or the papers, and you have to speak Spanish, but that’s what I love about it”.

Bernardette Doorly, Alozaina, Málaga

To my surprise, these texts work extremely well in the classroom. At a syntax level they experience the obvious problems of the reformulating phase. Nonetheless, because the L1 structure does not represent a major understanding problem, it usually interferes less with their production.

As a result of the interest in the text and the challenges that students find, we encounter excellent translation classes. The classes turn into a real forum, like a theatre where students no longer just sit looking at the teacher for approval or taking down notes on other students’ versions of the text translation. There is interaction; they become real actors and therefore real mediators of a communicative activity.

These situations generate an environment in which culture and language go hand in hand. They integrate all the elements of a classroom: the students, the text, the language, the culture and the teacher. It is an essential to have a collaborative space in which to work.

In these texts we opt for a bottom-up approach because we concentrate mainly on the semantic level and the possible strategies to

solve the problems before getting to higher levels like syntax. However, the students have to be aware that microstructure is constantly related to macrostructure; for instance, choosing one or another lexical item will definitely affect the bigger map of the text that students are translating¹⁸.

At a semantic level, many students leave aside their fears of not complying with reality and their level of risk-taking actions increase highly. They make semantic or syntactic adjustments when they think it is required.

After reading and interpreting the sense of the text students are asked to focus on concepts, words or expressions which are alien to Spanish culture -“a giant patio heater”, “Ballymun in the sun”, “a full Irish Breakfast”- or even to Irish culture -“a new outdoor cafe culture”. By doing this they detect possible translation problems and they also learn to classify them according to their nature. Students then decide whether the concepts are closer to the source or to the target culture and whether they have an equivalent in Spanish and act accordingly. They will have to find the term or create a new one. Strategies play an important role in the whole process, not only in the outcome.

Students also come across other type of problems which are normally classed under a linguistic category as they seem to involve word *formulae*: “stare”, “rain lashing down”, “indoors”, “farming”, “pouring rain”, “outdoor life”, etc. However, since there is not an entire cultural or conceptual correspondence –*only camouflaged* linguistically-, students will most likely have to exploit once more their creativity to find an appropriate solution.

Recalling Pym’s (1992) binary errors, students learn to judge if their option is correct, not only grammatically, but also appropriate according to the context, for some options might be perfectly correct yet inappropriate in a given setting¹⁹.

18 Beeby Lonsdale (1996b: 59).

19 See Dingwaney/Maier (1995).

Interlanguage or Intercultural Space?

I will only comment briefly on one of the elements highlighted before to illustrate the objective of this paper:

A full Irish breakfast: a concept inherent to Irish culture, that leads us to an image almost tangible immediately. Should we turn to language? Is there an interlanguage space for *A full Irish breakfast*? “Un desayuno irlandés completo” -*A complete Irish breakfast*? Complete? Of what? With what? Are words always sufficient to agree upon a translation? I honestly do not know any Irish person who does not think of *a fry*²⁰ when *a full Irish breakfast* is mentioned. So how are we going to translate in Spanish what it means and its connotations? Should we explain the content? Rashers, eggs, sausages, black pudding, white pudding, maybe more? Can we afford to waste such precious time and energy to get such a poor creation?

Students realise in these types of situations that we cannot sacrifice content to language since the deeper meaning is at risk. They turn to an intercultural space looking for a reliable and accurate expression which will keep the real meaning: “un desayuno irlandés tradicional” -*a traditional Irish breakfast*. And, somehow, they have learnt that language and culture are inseparable and that their mission is to reconcile them.

Conclusion

Students can discover a communicative entity through translation. They learn to employ their various skills, to gradually establish networks between all the relevant levels -dealing ultimately with the discourse, and to manipulate their knowledge strategically. They develop a sense of

20 *A fry* in Ireland refers to a number of food items fried –it can include sausages, rashers, tomato, mushrooms, onions, egg, etc.- and usually consumed for breakfast.

creativity, imagination, intuition and self-confidence. They create a space for criticism and interaction.

Both direct translation and back translation confer language classrooms a much needed association to reality. Texts offer contexts in which real language is used.

Students become conscious that different cultures have different realities. And they organize such realities by means of language. Through translation they get to experience how to deal with different realities.

Using back translation as a pedagogic tool for learning a language proves to be useful when implemented reasonably and appropriately.

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