Translation in language teaching: insights from professional translator training

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The past three decades have seen vast changes in attitudes towards translation, both as an academic discipline and as a profession. The insights we have gained in recent years, in particular in the area of professional translator training, call for a reassessment of the role of translation in language teaching. Drawing on research and practices in the field of translation pedagogy and on our own experience in using translation in the language classroom, our article aims to map the interface between translator training and language teaching, with particular reference to a task-based approach in the context of a communicative framework. After a brief account of the controversy surrounding the role of translation in language learning, we begin by setting out the reasons why we believe language teaching can benefit from engaging in dialogue with the discipline of translator training. In the second section, we examine the recent application of a task-based approach to translator training and how this can, in turn, inform our practice in the language classroom. Finally we provide some sample translation-based tasks used in language undergraduate degree classes to illustrate the discussion.

Translator training and translation in language teaching: points of convergence

In this article we draw on research and practices in the field of professional translator training and aim to identify what approaches and techniques can be usefully applied to the design of translation activities for use in the language classroom. After a brief account of the controversy surrounding the role of translation in language learning, we begin by setting out the reasons why we believe language teaching can benefit from engaging in dialogue with the discipline of translator training. In the second section, we examine in some detail the recent application of a task-based approach to translator training, and how this can, in turn, inform our practice in the language classroom. While some of the principles and activities we discuss could be applied in other settings, for the purposes of this article we will focus on translation classes in specialist language undergraduate degrees. Even though the activities we propose could be used in practising translation into the mother tongue, they were designed with inverse (L1 to L2) translation in mind. The teaching of translation into L2 has often been criticised on the grounds that it does not reflect professional reality. However, various translators and scholars have challenged that argument (see for

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instance Rommel 1987: 13; Mary Snell-Hornby, quoted in Weatherby 1998: 21; Beeby 1996; Stewart 2008). In our view, translation into L2 is not only an important skill in translation training, but also a pedagogically valuable tool in language learning (for a detailed discussion on the specifics of translating into L2 in the language classroom, we refer the reader to Carreres 2006).

Translation in language teaching: not whether but how

The controversy around the use of translation in language teaching has a long history and is not, to this day, fully resolved. We do not wish to enter the debate here – a detailed account of the arguments offered by the two sides would detain us too long, and there are several good summaries available (see for instance Cook 2010; Schjoldager 2004; Malmkjaer 1998). Most teachers now agree that the traditional, teacher-centred grammar–translation method did not make much pedagogical sense, at least not for most learners in most learning situations. And yet in the past few decades translation has been, at least in part, reinstated as one among a range of language learning activities (Cook 1998: 118). Accordingly, the focus of reflection and research is now not so much on whether translation has a place in language teaching, but on how best to use it in the classroom.

Even after translation was virtually banished from language classrooms in schools in the 1960s and 1970s, translation courses still continued to have a strong presence in undergraduate degrees in modern languages in the UK. Translation classes in this context differ from both general language classes with a translation component and from the teaching of translation for professional purposes. As Schjoldager points out, in designing syllabi it is difficult to get away from the fact that in such courses translation is still, ultimately, used as a means of teaching and assessing L2 competence (Schjoldager 2004: 130). However, the fact that translation is given a more independent status allows us – in particular at more advanced levels – to focus on translation as an end in itself, rather than just as a means of learning the language.

Already in the mid-1980s a number of voices stressed the need to link translation teaching to professional practice, even in general undergraduate teaching. According to Keith and Mason, even though the undergraduate course is no place for professional translation training, 'many feel that, if the exercise is to assume meaning and purpose within a degree course in modern languages, it should be taught with "real-world" criteria in mind' (Keith and Mason 1987: v– vi). A similar view is expressed by Lavault (1985: 108). As we will see, translation as it takes place in the real world is inextricably linked to a communicative purpose and therefore, learners certainly benefit from contextualized, real-life translation tasks.

Feedback questionnaires on the translation courses taught in the Modern and Medieval Languages degree at the University of Cambridge in the UK consistently show that learners identify translation almost unanimously as one of the exercises they believe to be most conducive to language learning. While there is some evidence to suggest that translation activities contribute to language acquisition, we recognise the need for more empirical research in order to determine how the pedagogical value of translation compares with that of other types of language-learning activities (a review of the few empirical studies that are available can be found in Schjoldager 2004: 137–145).

Translator training and language pedagogy: the basis for dialogue

Much effort has been put by the translation studies academic community into singling out translation and, consequently, translator training as independent areas of study in their own right, different from other disciplines and, notably, from language teaching. We are not about to argue here against treating translation and language teaching as separate fields. What we want to do is to remind ourselves that there are important points of contact between the activities of learning to translate and learning a foreign language which, we believe, make mutual exchange in the area of pedagogy meaningful and productive.

People wishing to take on a career as professional translators are not lacking in opportunities for institutional training, be it in the form of undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, or through courses offered by institutions outside the university. When contemplating this landscape, it is easy to forget that translation training is a relatively recent phenomenon which, with few exceptions, began in the mid-twentieth century. Why turn to translator training for inspiration when language pedagogy is, arguably, a more established discipline with a far longer history? Ever since the grammar–translation method was subjected to thorough-going critique by the proponents of the communicative approach in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a marked reluctance and often open hostility regarding the use of translation in language teaching (Cook 2008: 248; Cook 2010: 3–19; Malmkjær 1998: 2; Sewell and Higgins 1996: 9). The word translation is equated in the minds of many language teachers with all the evils that accompanied the grammar–translation method, namely, a teacher-centred approach, a focus on grammar to the exclusion of other aspects of language, a disregard for oral and aural skills, de-contextualisation of language and student de-motivation.

This negative disposition towards the use of translation in language teaching has had the undesirable consequence that the association between translation and the traditional, teacher-centred, methodology has not been challenged, thus discouraging the emergence of more creative approaches, with only a few notable exceptions appearing in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lavault 1985; Duff 1989; Grellet 1991a). In the context of translator training, on the other hand, much innovative work in the area of translation pedagogy has been carried out in the past two or three decades, as scholars in the field have incorporated insights both from language teaching and from other branches of the flourishing discipline of translation studies and worked to make classroom activities ever more relevant to the professional practice.

Translation as communication: the notion of translation competence

In 1980 Canale and Swain published a landmark article on the nature of communicative competence and its implications for second language acquisition. They identified three basic components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Let us take a look at the definition of communication they propose:

> We understand communication to be based in sociocultural, interpersonal interaction, to involve unpredictability and creativity, to take place in a discourse and sociocultural context, to be purposive behaviour, to be carried out under performance constraints, to involve use of authentic (as opposed to textbook-contrived) language, and to be judged

as successful or not on the basis of behavioural outcomes. (Canale and Swain 1980: 29; partially quoted in Kiraly 2000: 178)

As Kiraly points out (2000), this notion clearly corresponds to the current understanding of professional translation as a communicative process and, we would add, of the translator as, essentially, an expert communicator. Speaking from the field of language teaching, Grellet (1991b), one of the few early advocates of the use of translation to come from within the communicative method, also saw translation as inextricably linked to a communicative purpose.

With this idea of the translator as communicator in mind, let us now turn to the notion of translation competence: what exactly are the skills that we expect a good translator to possess? There have been numerous attempts at answering this question (see for example PACTE 2005; Kelly 2005: 32–33; Beeby 2004: 44–45; Hurtado 1999: 42–44; Neubert 1994; Bell 1991: 35–43). Kelly's definition of the main subcomponents of translator competence seems to us one of the most comprehensive (Kelly 2005: 32–33):

- Communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and cultures.
- Cultural and intercultural competence.
- Subject area competence (basic knowledge of specialised fields).
- Professional and instrumental competence (use of documentary resources).
- Attitudinal or psycho-physiological competence (self-concept, self-confidence, attention/concentration, memory, initiative).
- Interpersonal competence (team work, negotiation skills).
- Strategic competence (organisational and planning skills, problem-solving, monitoring, self-assessment and revision).

Putting the notion of competence in a wider context, Kelly invites us to consider the conclusions of the Tuning Project, an initiative that grew out of the Bologna Process with the remit of defining the competences, both generic and subject-specific, that graduates of European universities should be equipped with. Kelly makes the interesting observation that, in comparing the subject-specific competences of translation graduates as detailed above and the generic or transferable competences as defined by the Tuning Project, a striking coincidence can be observed. For Kelly, this versatility of the skills offered by translation degrees is a strong point of these programmes, and it means that graduates in translation are 'almost uniquely qualified as flexible, adaptable and highly employable citizens' (Kelly 2005: 34).

Writing over a decade ago, Neubert vindicates the idea of the translator as a generalist 'in this age of specialisation' (Neubert 1994: 420) and points out that translational competence is an elusive concept because of its extremely multi-layered nature. He makes the polemical but thought-provoking claim that 'it is an almost futile attempt to give a precise definition of what translation is and what it is not, or to state succinctly where "normal" monolingual communication ends and translation, i.e. *bilingually mediated communication* begins' (Neubert 1994: 418). Even though Neubert's claims may appear somewhat extreme – and, in particular his call against specialisation, impractical – he makes the crucial point that translation cannot be understood without reference to its communicative purpose, and that the boundaries between monolingual and bilingual communication are more fluid than we might think. We have palpable examples of this fluidity in instances of language

use where speakers combine two languages in an unconscious manner, as is the case for speakers of 'Hinglish' in India or for speakers of 'Spanglish' in the US.

The interface between translator training and language teaching: the task-based approach

Task-based translation teaching: defining task

The literature on task-based learning applied to foreign language teaching is extensive (Ellis 2003 and Nunan 2004 offer excellent accounts). Even though fully fledged task-based courses are still rare, most language teachers are familiar with the methodology and incorporate task-based activities in their courses. However, the application of the task-based approach to translator training is a fairly recent phenomenon. The work of Hurtado Albir (1999), Allison Beeby (1996) and, in particular, González Davies (2004) has, in our view, made a very valuable contribution in taking the leap from telling us how to teach translation to actually *showing* us how to do it, by means of a rich selection of carefully designed classroom activities.

In her book *Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom*, González Davies explicitly acknowledges her indebtedness to the area of language pedagogy:

> ... in some countries, the Communicative Approach substituted the Grammar–Translation Method in foreign language learning, with the result that, since the late eighties and nineties, concepts such as learner autonomy, self-confidence, peer work, decision-making, learning to learn, meaningful learning and student-centred classes have taken over. All of these can certainly be relevant to translation training. (González Davies 2004: 3, see also p. 11)

Further proof that González Davies regards the boundaries between language teaching and translator training as somewhat more fluid than other scholars is that her book is explicitly 'addressed to translation trainers and students, and also to foreign language teachers who wish to include translation activities in a communicative and interactive way in their classrooms' (2004: 6).

In González Davies's terminology, *activities* are understood as 'concrete and brief exercises that help to practice specific points, be they linguistic, encyclopedic, transfer or professional' (2004: 22). *Task* is defined as:

> ... a chain of activities with the same global aim and a final product. The full completion of a task usually takes up several sessions. In each of these, the activities lead along the same path towards the same end. On the way, both procedural (know *how*) and declarative (know *what*) knowledge are practised and explored. (González Davies 2004: 23)

There is not complete consensus in the literature on task-based language teaching as to what kind of activity constitutes a task. We would like to complement and expand the definition given by González Davies with the more detailed one offered by Ellis in his substantial work *Task-based Language Teaching and Learning* (2003):

> A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to

result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and also various cognitive processes. (Ellis 2003: 16)

This definition includes all the elements that Ellis considers 'criterial features' of a task, i.e. the conditions that an activity must fulfil in order to constitute a task. Following Ellis (2003: 9–10), these are:

- A task is a workplan: that is, a plan intended to get learners to engage in communicative activity.
- A task involves primary focus on meaning: language use must be pragmatically oriented, that is, learners must use language in order to convey meaning rather than to display linguistic forms.
- A task involves real-world processes of language use: even where tasks present instances of language activity that are not found in real life, such as spotting differences between two pictures, the kind of linguistic use or interaction they elicit, will correspond to those that occur in real situations.
- A task can involve any of the four language skills: even though there is an emphasis on oral tasks in the literature, a task may involve comprehension and/or production of oral or written language.
- A task engages cognitive processes, such as selecting, classifying, ordering, reasoning and evaluating information.
- A task has a clearly defined communicative outcome: this outcome is specified in the workplan and it constitutes the goal learners aim for.

Drawing on the definition of task offered by Nunan, we would add one further feature to this list:

- A task should have a sense of completeness, in the sense that it constitutes a communicative act in its own right, with a beginning, a middle and an end (Nunan 2004: 4).

Even though all these criteria must be present in order for an activity to qualify as task, it is clear from the literature that, if one had to choose one key feature, that would be the focus on meaning, that is, the need for language use to be pragmatically focused. In order to complete a task, learners must engage in meaningful language exchange as opposed to using language to display linguistic forms. It is interesting to note that, in defining task, Nunan alludes explicitly to the role of form: in carrying out the task, the attention of learners 'is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning' (2004: 4).

The debate around the focus on form

The emphasis on communication that characterises a task-based approach does not in itself preclude the targeting of specific linguistic features, but it does mean that these features cannot be made explicit in the instructions given to learners at the start of the task. Tasks in which the choice of language is not in any way pre-planned or pre-conditioned are termed *unfocused tasks*. *Focused tasks*, in contrast, aim to steer language activity towards the use of specific linguistic features (Ellis 2003: 16). The latter, in Ellis's words, require 'a sleight of hand' on the part of the task designer, as

s/he needs to maximise the chances of influencing learners' choice of language without making this obvious to them (Ellis 2003: 8). Ultimately, learners retain the freedom to choose the linguistic forms they wish to use, which makes it difficult – and often impossible – to ensure that learners will indeed display the features we wish to target.

It would be beyond the scope of this article to enter into a detailed discussion of the benefits and potential pitfalls of avoiding an explicit focus on form as a matter of principle. The strong version of task-based, as opposed to task-supported, teaching, to use Ellis's distinction (2003: 27), firmly rejects the idea of any kind of explicit reference to specific linguistic features. However, Ellis himself recognises that there is insufficient empirical evidence to demonstrate that task-based courses do result in better learning outcomes than those using more traditional methodology. Nunan and others go further in supporting the view – which they regard as sufficiently backed by research – that declarative knowledge of certain structures does contribute to their acquisition, and that, far from being a hindrance, grammar constitutes 'an essential resource in making meaning' (Nunan 2004: 9). It seems to us that the principled and systematic exclusion of any explicit reference to linguistic structures is hard to justify on the basis of empirical evidence. Indeed, the available research points to the desirability of including an explicit focus on form at some point in the teaching sequence.

The debate concerning the focus on form in task-based language learning is, in our view, particularly relevant to translation tasks, given the enhanced role that accuracy plays in such tasks. As we have shown in the first section, translation is by definition a communicative activity and, as such, language use is bound to have a strong pragmatic focus in any well-designed, real-world translation task. However, due to the nature of translation as it takes place in the real world, learners are well aware that the goal of a translation task, as well as conveying meaning, must of necessity include the need for conveying that meaning in language that is not only pragmatically adequate but also, crucially, grammatically accurate. This does not mean, of course, that all translation tasks must be focused, i.e. that they must target, implicitly or explicitly, specific linguistic features. But it does mean that we do need to attend to accuracy in a more assertive and conscious manner. If for no other reason, the focus on accuracy is fully justified on the grounds of making classroom translation tasks as authentic as possible, given that accurate language use is a basic requirement in any professional translation commission. In this sense, translation tasks in language teaching afford us particularly fruitful ground to bring home to learners the need to combine effective communication with accurate language use.

Benefits of task-based translation teaching

A useful summary of the benefits that a task-based approach can bring to translation training can be found in Hurtado (1999: 56, translated and adapted by us here). According to Hurtado, the task-based approach:

- Bridges the gap between theory and practice that is present in other approaches by offering a truly active methodology.
- Focuses on process rather than product, enabling the student to progress through a series of graded tasks to the completion of the final task.
- Allows the student to learn by doing, solving problems and acquiring translation strategies.

- Facilitates a learner-centred methodology, fostering autonomy and self-evaluation.
- Allows the introduction of formative assessment tasks.

Some of these features, it must be said, are not new or exclusive to the task-based approach. However, we believe that task-based teaching does provide a fruitful context for their integration. We would like to discuss here in more detail three of the aspects listed by Hurtado that we consider to be particularly important, namely, focus on process, learner-centredness and methodological adaptability.

Focus on process

Task-based methodology links up with and supports the move in translator training towards emphasising the process of translation rather than the end product. In Ellis's words:

> In fact, the actual outcome of a task may be of no real pedagogic importance. For example, whether learners successfully identify the difference between two pictures is not what is crucial for language learning. *It is the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in reaching the outcome that matter*. (Ellis 2003: 8; our italics)

The emphasis on process rather than product has been propounded by various scholars in the field of translation pedagogy, notably Delisle (1980), Nord (1991) and Gile (1995), and is one that clearly stands in stark contrast with the approach adopted in the grammar–translation method. Rather than telling students what is right or wrong in a text they have translated, 'the process-orientated approach indicates to the student good translation *principles, methods*, and *procedures'* (Gile 1995: 10).

Clearly, in the context of teaching translation into L2, where accuracy is bound to be an issue, it is challenging to move away from a focus on the product, but there are clear benefits to be gained from process-orientated learning. Gile believes that students are likely to implement translation strategies faster if such strategies are taught explicitly at an early stage than if they advance by trial and error. In his view, the process-orientated approach minimises the risk of dispersion in teaching that comes from reacting to the products, allowing for problems requiring a similar methodological approach to be dealt with together. Interestingly, Gile points out that, despite all these advantages, a rather long period of product-orientated guidance is necessary for fine-tuning, with instructors commenting on the trainees' choice of words and structures as such, and making suggestions for better formulations. Finally, he recommends that the process-orientated approach is applied in the initial stages of training, then moving on to a product-orientated approach (Gile 1995: 10–11).

Learner-centred methodology

In our view, a task-based approach lends itself particularly well to a learner-centred environment that fosters interaction and collaboration as well as autonomy. Kiraly's (2000) proposal is ground-breaking in its commitment to learner-centredness. From a social-constructivist perspective, Kiraly makes a radical critique of traditional transmissionist teaching practices, in which the teacher is seen as the transmitter of

knowledge and learners as passive recipients of that knowledge. He places a particular emphasis on collaborative work, and is a strong advocate of the embedding of real translation commissions in training. In this model, the class takes the form of a workshop where students and teacher engage in collaborative knowledge-building (as opposed to knowledge transmission). Kiraly places the notion of viability, which he takes from the thinker Richard Rorty, at the centre of pedagogical activity: 'The goal of each class is to construct multiple and viable (rather than "correct") solutions to problems that emerge naturally from authentic projects' (2000: 67). Kiraly's model represents an ambitious and thought-provoking statement in support of learner autonomy and collaborative learning, even though some of the practices he advocates would be challenging to implement in many, if not in most, teaching contexts.

Kiraly's approach has been seen in opposition to the task-based methodology, but we agree with Kelly when she points out that, in her view, the two are compatible and 'simply different points on a cline of student progress' (Kelly 2005: 18). As we saw above when reviewing the criterial features of tasks, the notion of authenticity in tasks is 'soft' rather than 'hard', i.e. even where the activity proposed may appear artificial, language activity is considered authentic when it reflects language processes that take place in the real world (such as selecting or extracting information, classifying data, constructing a text, etc). In our opinion, translation tasks provide a flexible enough framework to include real-world assignments as well as more controlled activities that can serve as stepping stones to help learners progress towards more demanding tasks.

Methodological adaptability

Robinson (2003) emphasises the need for institutional training to acknowledge the fact that different people learn best in different ways, and consequently advocates a methodology that is as flexible, rich and varied as possible. Sewell, in a self-avowedly polemical paper, also looks to the literature on educational psychology and learning styles (Busato et al. 1999; Vermunt 1994) in order to try and explain why, despite all the hype about communicative language teaching, the optional translation module in her institution (Birkbeck College, London) remains ever popular with students. In her words: 'Communicative methods would seem to favour *risk-taking, extraverted personalities* and high levels of *interaction*, whereas, translation seems to favour *reflection, introverted personality traits* and low levels of interaction' (Sewell 2004: 159). Her conclusion is that translation appeals to students with a certain personality profile because it suits their psychology and learning style. As she points out, any teaching method taken in isolation by definition assumes an undifferentiated learning style, which of course masks the reality of a real-life classroom where many different personality types are grouped together.

As we said above, it seems to us that one of the strong points of a task-based methodology is its versatility. González Davies (2004) advocates an eclectic approach to translation pedagogy, arguing that in our 'post-method condition' our focus should be on responding to the needs of learners rather than espousing a particular approach (2004: 6). We believe the same principle applies to language teaching and, by extension, to translation-based tasks used in the language classroom.

Translation in the language classroom: examples from in-class practice

The material presented here corresponds to translation tasks from English into Spanish that we have used in our translation courses for second- and final-year undergraduates in modern languages taking Spanish as one of their two degree languages at the University of Cambridge. Our courses run throughout the year and are taught in one-hour fortnightly classes combined with intensive guided individual work outside the classroom. Students taking the translation course in Year 2 are those who began Year 1 with an A level qualification in Spanish. Those who take the final-year course have just returned from their year abroad and usually have very good knowledge of grammar and a good to very good grasp of idiom and style. The emphasis in the following tasks, however, is on transferable translation skills rather than on a particular language pair or direction (L1 to L2/L2 to L1), or on a specific level. Therefore this material could be adapted to a variety of languages and learning contexts.

We have followed Nunan's framework of task components in our design. This includes *goals, input* and *procedures*, supported by *roles* (teacher's and learner's) and *settings* (Nunan 2004: 41):

- *Goals* provide a link between the task and the broader curriculum. They may relate to a range of general outcomes (communicative, affective or cognitive) or may directly describe teacher or learner behaviour (though Nunan specifies that the most useful goal statements are those that relate to the student not the teacher, 2004: 44).
- *Input* refers to the spoken, written and visual data that learners work with in the course of completing a task. Nunan advocates the use of authentic materials.
- *Procedures* specifies what learners will actually do with the input that forms the point of departure for the learning task. When analysing learning procedures, it is important to consider the development of both accuracy and fluency. To these two aspects, following Skehan (1998), we would like to add a third: complexity.
- As regards teacher's and learner's roles, we envisage a student-centred approach for our tasks. We aim to promote interaction and collaborative learning in the translation classroom in line with Kiraly's model. Our tasks involve activities that aim to help participants develop an awareness of themselves as learners by getting them to reflect on their learning strategies, processes and styles.
- Finally, in Nunan's framework, 'settings' encompass learning 'mode' – whether the learner is operating on an individual or group basis – and 'environment' – where the learning actually takes place (Nunan 2004: 70–73).

Sample translation tasks

Task 1: Intralingual translation of a film
Goals:

- Introduce principles and key concepts of translation theory.
- Raise students' awareness of translation as a communicative activity that is not wholly different from monolingual communication.

- Raise students' awareness of register, style, geographical variety, medium and target audience.
- Practise reformulation.

Input:

- Short theoretical texts that offer definitions of 'translation' by different authors (Ortega y Gasset, Octavio Paz, Valentín García Yebra, Amparo Hurtado, George Steiner, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Derrida, etc).
- Film in Spanish (*Un lugar en el mundo*, Adolfo Aristarain, 1992). Any other film could be used, though a scene with speakers of different varieties of Spanish in an informal context is particularly useful for this task.
- Worksheet: task instructions and transcript of film scene.

Procedures:

(1) Students start by working in small groups discussing a number of short passages on translation theory by different authors. They discuss the various notions of what translation is and especially the concept of translation as communication. Plenary discussion of their findings.
(2) Students are given the transcript of a film scene, in this case from the Argentinian film *Un lugar en el mundo* by A. Aristarain. They watch the videoclip that corresponds to the scene (a chat amongst a Spaniard and his new Argentinian friends after a meal) to become aware of the kind of register (colloquial) and targeted linguistic features (Argentinian accent/vocabulary, Spanish accent/vocabulary).
(3) Working in small groups, they are asked to rewrite this fragment in a more formal style as if for a film magazine. They need to consider the 'translation' from oral to written form, from colloquial to formal, and the different audience. They are asked to pay attention to verbs of language and reported speech.
(4) The whole class discusses the strategies adopted during the translation and the most challenging aspects (ironic tone, certain terms and images which are difficult to interpret, how to reflect in written form the Argentinian/Peninsular varieties, etc).

Settings:

- Mode: groups of three or four students in class; whole class.
- Environment: classroom; alternatively the intralingual translation (step 3) can be carried out outside the classroom as an individual task, marked by the teacher and then discussed in the following class.

Commentary:

This task works well as the initial session of a translation into Spanish course for final-year undergraduates (after their year abroad experience). The group discussion on definitions of translation makes them reflect on the nature of translation and how to approach their work. The intralingual translation activity is then used to apply the concept of translation as a communicative act that all speakers perform routinely

within their own language. Students become aware of key concepts to consider in translation such as audience, medium and register.

In our experience using this task, presenting translation as a form of target language writing linked to communicative competence has a beneficial effect on students' motivation and self-confidence when approaching the translation course (see Alexander Gross 2003 for an insightful article on teaching translation as a form of target language writing).

Task 2: Film subtitling

Goals:

- Consider pragmatic factors when translating (medium, function, audience, etc).
- Practise subtitling.
- Discuss translation challenges and strategies.
- Raise awareness of different possible translations.
- Focus on register and stylistic adequacy.
- Provide practice in a real-life situation.

Input:

- Film in English with the option of having subtitles in Spanish. A scene is selected that offers specific challenges (for example, regarding register, language, cultural aspects, etc); historical films can work well. In this case we used a scene that shows the first meeting between Columbus and Queen Isabella from the film *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (Ridley Scott, 1992).
- Worksheet with transcript of the scene.
- Transcript of the subtitles in Spanish.

Procedures:

(1) Whole class considers which aspects need to be taken into account when subtitling a film (limitations imposed by the physical constraints of the subtitle, audience immediacy, etc).
(2) Students watch a scene from a film in English and work in groups with the transcript of the scene. First they consider which will be the main difficulties in translating it (genre, register, language from a specific time period, forms of address, vocabulary, etc).
(3) The whole class discusses briefly the main challenges of the translation and strategies that can be adopted.
(4) Students work within their group to write a translation for subtitling the scene.
(5) Second viewing of the scene this time with subtitles in Spanish (students are provided with a transcript of the subtitles).
(6) Whole class discusses the differences between the group translations and the subtitles, and comes up with a range of possible valid translations.
(7) If time allows, two volunteers can perform the dubbing with their own translations against the silent clip.

Settings:

- Mode: whole class; groups of three or four students.
- Environment: classroom with AV facilities.

Commentary:

This task works well either at the beginning of the course with second-year students to make them reflect on different aspects of translation that they must consider (context, genre, register, source/target audience, aims of the translation, etc) or at any moment during the course to incorporate some change in the practice of the translation of written texts. Students enjoy working with different media and experiencing a professional application of their translation skills.

Task 3: Translating press articles and political speeches
Goals:

- Discuss approaches and strategies when translating written press articles and oral political speeches.
- Identify rhetorical devices in an oral speech.
- Raise awareness of structure, tone and rhythm.
- Use research tools to deal with specific cultural and historical references.
- Raise intercultural awareness.

Input:

- Press article in English on Obama's 2008 election victory.
- Videoclip of president Obama's victory speech (November 2008).
- Worksheet with three or four fragments of the speech; sheet with published translation.

Procedures:

(1) Students are asked in advance to translate a press article on Obama's election victory from English into Spanish, and submit it for marking by the teacher. Before tackling their translation, they must consider specific features of articles on current affairs and reflect on their translation approach.
(2) The marked individual translations are returned in class and the whole group discusses the main challenges of the translation. Exercises with focus on form can be completed (e.g. on political vocabulary).
(3) Students watch a videoclip from Obama's victory speech (November 2008).
(4) The whole class discusses the characteristics of political speeches and the main challenges faced when translating them.
(5) Students work in pairs/groups with a different fragment of the speech: they discuss their approach and translate it on an OHT. They have access to reference tools.
(6) Whole class discusses the group translations one by one. The published translation is made available as a text for comparison.

Settings:

- Mode: individual work; pairs or groups of three–four students
- Environment: outside the classroom (Step 1); classroom (Steps 2–6) with AV facilities, internet access and reference tools (dictionaries, online encyclopedias, etc).

Commentary:

This task provides an opportunity to pay special attention to specific cultural and historical references that students may find difficult to translate (e.g. 'the dust bowl', 'a New Deal', 'the buses in Montgomery', 'the hoses in Birmingham'), and to encourage the use of research tools. Similar tasks can be devised to analyse intercultural differences in rhetorics, for example comparing speeches by British (Tony Blair, David Cameron, etc) and Latin American political figures (Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro, etc). Obama's speech is also useful to analyse and practise interpreting, as students can work with the videoclip and the simultaneous translation by the Spanish interpreter.

Task 4: Contrastive analysis of students' translations
Goals:

- Provide practice in error analysis and editing, a key skill in professional translation.
- Learn to justify choices.
- Discuss issues of translation loss and compensation.
- Raise awareness of marking criteria.
- Emphasise the importance of revising the finished translation.

Input:

- Text for translation from a previous exam paper.
- Worksheet with three students' translations taken from a real exam.
- Official marking criteria for the course.

Procedures:

(1) Students are given as homework a past translation exam paper to complete in exam conditions. They are asked to bring their translation to the class.
(2) In class, they are given versions by three students of a previous cohort completed during the real exam.
(3) In groups, they have to work with the texts to: (i) discuss what are the main key aspects to consider when translating the text; (ii) analyse each translation: overall approach; strengths and weaknesses; linguistic errors; (iii) agree on a mark for each translation, basing their evaluation on the official assessment criteria for the course.
(4) The whole class discusses each translation, the marks that would be awarded and why. The teacher explains the real marks given in the exam.

Students have the opportunity to clarify any queries about their own translation of the text.

Settings:

- Mode: individual work; pairs or groups of three or four students.
- Environment: outside the classroom (Step 1); classroom (Steps 2–4).

Commentary:

A useful task to get students to discuss different options in a translation they have previously prepared individually. It works very well as preparation for the exam as it helps students to familiarise themselves with the marking criteria and become more aware of what is expected from them. The task can be adapted to different levels, from more basic, with a stronger focus on identifying grammatical and lexical errors, to more advanced levels, where the focus is on finding the most idiomatic expressions and most natural and precise translations. This task also helps students with practising a final stage of editing that they often skip when doing their homework.

Conclusions

Translation as it takes place in the real world constitutes, in essence, a communicative activity. Indeed, the various definitions that have been given of translation competence back up the notion of the translator as an expert communicator. Therefore, the use of translation activities in language teaching, far from being incompatible with a communicative framework, can work to support and enhance communicative classroom practices. As we have seen, the objections levelled at the use of translation in language teaching are not necessarily relevant to translation itself, but rather arise from the transmissionist approach applied in the grammar–translation method. With this in mind, we can begin to explore more productive ways of incorporating translation as one among a range of language learning activities.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion:

- Even though translator training and language teaching are separate fields with specific concerns and objectives, the two can benefit from mutual exchange. In particular, we as language teachers can draw inspiration from recent innovative proposals coming from translator training. These proposals all share the notion of translation as a communicative activity as well as a commitment to a learner-centred, profession-based approach.
- While there have been many valuable contributions in translator training in recent years, we regard a task-based approach as particularly relevant to translation pedagogy in the context of language learning. Moreover, a task-based method provides, in our view, an inclusive and flexible enough framework that allows for the integration of a variety of techniques and learning strategies.
- In particular, we believe that task-based translation activities in language teaching contribute to the enhancement of our practice in three important areas: one, focus on process rather than product; two, learner-centredness; and

three, methodological adaptability. This insight is borne out by our experience in applying this approach in our teaching.

- While there is some evidence that translation can play an important role in language acquisition, and learners often identify translation as a very useful language learning device, few empirical studies have been carried out to date. There is therefore a need for further empirical research on the precise impact of translation tasks on L2 acquisition.

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