

# The Challenges of Teaching Translation to Undergraduate Students

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## Abstract

Translation plays a significant role in human communication. It is the channel through which various nations and cultures exchange. Because of the tremendous interest in translation in the global world, urgent needs arise to include translation courses in the teaching program among university curricula, and provide trainee translators with efficient practical knowledge that meets the demands of the work place after graduation.

Besides, it is very necessary nowadays to have a university degree or postgraduate qualifications to get good job opportunities in the field of translation or interpretation, and teaching translation. Academically, it is significant for the aspiring translation teachers to adopt the very methodologies that best serve the process of teaching translation and motivate students of translation to have foundational knowledge of the discipline, learn some useful skills in the learning process and experiencing translation along with learning foreign languages.

However, this paper views the course of teaching translation to undergraduate students and its objectives in the BA program. It tackles the problems of teaching Translation and Interpretation as two independent but integrated components of Translation Discipline. Such problems that might arise at the academic, instructional and students' levels. It also suggests the most modern approaches and methodologies to teaching Translation. Finally, the researcher raises some recommendations and possible solutions to be employed and presented in translation class to improve the quality of teaching translation at the undergraduate level.

*Key words:* Translation Course, Objectives, Translation and Interpretation, Teaching Translation Challenges, Suggested Methodologies & Recommendations.

## **1- Introduction**

Translation plays a very significant role as a cross cultural issue and vivid aspect of international communication of the modern world of today. Because of the tremendous global interest in translation in all prospective of human life, urgent needs arise to more concern about translation career by establishing foundational knowledge of the discipline in university education. Thus, it is demanded to include translation courses in the EFL teaching program among university curricula and constantly approaching and developing teaching translation at all levels to qualify efficient translators at the academic and professional levels.

Throughout my experience as a former instructor, practitioner of Translation and a researcher in Translation Studies, and according to my observation to some BA programs, one of the most challenges of teaching translation in the undergraduate is that translation courses are traditionally and simply taught as part of EFL courses in the BA curriculum. The objectives of these courses have either been misunderstood or misled. Moreover, translation courses are almost tutored by unqualified and inexperienced instructors whose knowledge lack a theoretical framework and are merely reflections of their own personal and limited experiences in teaching translation.

In addition, teaching interpretation is one of the most neglected part in translation class for some BA programs. Little attention is paid to design a more effective interpretation class. For translation is different from interpretation. Both are two independent but complementary aspects of Translation Discipline. Such programs have only academic rather than professional goals (Colina. S., 2003); they do not train students efficiently to pursue a professional career after graduation to meet the needs of the workplace and the rapid development in global communication.

As such, it is in fact very necessary nowadays to have post graduate qualifications or at least a university degree to teach translation and train efficient and competent translators to get good job opportunities in the field of translation or interpretation. In both cases, academically, when learning translation as an art or science, it is significant for the aspiring translation teachers to adopt the very methodologies that best serve the process of teaching translation. These teachers aim at motivating students and trainee translators to have fundamental knowledge of the discipline and learn some useful skills in the process of learning and experiencing translation along with learning a foreign language.

Therefore, this paper briefly views Translation course at the undergraduate level and its objectives in the BA program. It tackles the problems of teaching Translation and Interpretation, in English departments, as two independent but integrated components of Translation Discipline. It also suggests the most modern approaches and methodologies to be adopted in teaching Translation. Then the researcher proposes some recommendations as possible solutions to be employed and presented in translation class to improve the quality of teaching translation at the university level. Finally, the researcher reaches at some conclusion and remarks for further research.

## **2-Translation as an Aid in EFL Learning:**

Due to the role of translation in the global communication and cultural exchange of the modern world, teaching translation receives a great interest when teaching EFL or ESL in the BA program.

Grouped together with the pedagogic of translation course, it has professional targets to achieve. It aims not only to teach translation or interpretation at the academic level, but also to prepare keen, competent and professional translators and interpreters for the workplace after graduation.

Sewell and Higgins state (1996:9), "in recent years universities have been increasingly aware of the needs and practices of professional life, and much of this awareness has been generated by teachers who actively seek to realign their teaching so that it opens its doors to new ideas from outside the university."

According to them, translation is taught for two main purposes. The first is that translation can be taught as an end in itself which focuses on the SL (L1) (i.e. translating into their mother-tongue) as this is how professionals earn their living. For some learners may become translators one day, and the basic knowledge of translation they gain in the classroom can serve as a solid ground for building up translation skills. The second is that translation can be used as a means to an end, a way to learn another language, and therefore focuses on the TL. It helps learners to develop their knowledge about the TL (L2). Thus, translating into the *foreign* language is believed to be beneficial as a language-learning device.

Meantime, learning English as foreign language in this respect is closely tied to learning translation methods where by students convey the meaning of the (SL) into the (TL) <sup>1</sup>. When translating, students will not only learn the grammar, syntax and the lexis of both languages they are working at. But many other skills will be enhanced such as listening, reading, comprehension, interpreting and editing. And the translated text is a result of reconstructing of the original text. As Lefevere in (1992) states that " translating is a sort of rewriting" where by students read, analyze, transfer, and restructure the original. In this sense, the final text stands on its own; it's has its own identity but governed by the rules of the (TL).

Besides, in interpreting, students learn many skills in translation class such as, attentive listening, quick wit, memorizing wide range of vocabulary in all fields of knowledge, good comprehension, fluent and confident speaking skill, time consuming, note-taking, decision-making, fast reacting to oral skills, and thoughtful awareness of both (SL) and (TL) languages and cultures.

### **3-The Objectives of Teaching Translation at the Undergraduate**

The objectives of translation course relatively vary depending on translation program targets, students' levels and needs, learning outcomes, translation problems, design of a translation class methodologies and procedures employed by the instructor. (Gazala, H. 2004) Though they suppose introducing students to:

- the subject of translation, as a *discipline*, as a science, and a *process* (i.e. translating), as a practice or an art, in general and then in specific terms.
- the role of translation to humanity and its contribution to human civilization and international communication on all levels of knowledge.
- the theory of translation, its approaches and its diverse methods as what, how, when and why they are applied for, to transfer the meaning of the (SL) into the (TL).
- the main principles and related issues, as *faithfulness*, *transparency*, *equivalence*, *strategies*
- text types and kinds of translation; literary, technical, legal, commercial...etc.

- the various types of translation problems: *Linguistic* (i.e.): grammatical, lexical, phonological and *Non-linguistic* (i.e.) cultural and contextual, providing solution for each.
- the two main methods of translation: *Literal Translation* (i.e.) word-for-word, and *Free Translation* (i.e.) contextual translation of meaning.

#### **4- Translation and Interpretation**

As human communication across the world expands, translation practice encompasses all fields of social life both at the national and international levels. Teaching translation and interpretation side by side receives a lot of attention in designing translation program among BA curriculum. While *Translation* is defined as ‘‘the communication of the *meaning* of SL text by means of an *equivalent* TL text’’. *Language Interpretation* or *Interpreting* is defined as ‘‘the facilitating of oral or sign-language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively between users of different languages.<sup>2</sup>’’ (Wikipedia)

This implies that the first means to convey the meaning of the original text by means of its lexis, structure and grammar with their equivalents in the targeted text. Whereas the later means to transfer the message of the speaker orally. Interpreting, just like translation, is fundamentally the art of paraphrasing. The interpreter listens to a speaker in one language, grasps the content of what is being said, and then paraphrases his/her own understanding of the meaning by means of the vocabulary, grammar and culture of the target language.

The key skills of the translator are the ability to understand the source language and the culture of the country where the text originated, then using good library dictionaries and reference materials, rendering the content clearly and accurately into the TL. In other words, while linguistic and cultural skills are still critical, the most important mark of a good translator is the ability to write well in the TL.

An interpreter, on the other hand, must be able to translate in both directions (at the linguistic and cultural levels at a time) without using dictionaries or other supplemental references. Interpreters must have extraordinary listening abilities, especially for simultaneous interpreting. They need to process and memorize the words the SL speaker is saying now, while simultaneously outputting in the TL the translation of words the speaker said 5-10 seconds ago. Interpreters must also possess excellent public speaking skills and intellectual capacity to instantly transform fixed forms, such as idioms, collocations, proverbs, colloquialisms and other culturally-specific references into their equivalents to the TL audience.

Both interpreting and translation are two closely related linguistic disciplines, yet they are rarely performed by the same people. The difference is in skills, training, aptitude, and medium: the interpreter translates orally, while a translator interprets a written text. Both interpreting and translation presuppose a good competence and deep knowledge of more than one language.

#### **5- Problems of Teaching Translation at the Undergraduate**

Problems arise in the process of teaching translation could be summed up at different levels:

#### **a- At the academic level**

- BA program in English depts. is not standardized by the Ministry of Higher Education in all universities of some countries. Thus, the content of translation course is almost part of EFL program, has been varied and subjected to argument among translation teachers. Thus translation tasks have also varied among EFL learners in translation class.
- Translation courses are offered obligatory as part of EFL BA program in English departments, sometimes beyond students' will.
- Most English departments do not have unified curriculum or sufficient credit hours to cover all the content of translation course and its fundamentals that students of translation should be acquainted with at different levels.
- The objectives of translation class have been misdirected whether to teach translation for academic purpose or to prepare qualified translators for the workplace.
- Lack of independent translation departments in most Humanities.
- Lack of special learning facilities in translation class; language labs, audio-visual aids...etc for practicing translation, and no out class training programs for students to preforming interpretation in different situational environments, as conferences, institutions and companies.
- Interpreting methods, strategies and training skills, such as simultaneous, consecutive and sight translation<sup>3</sup> are not considered adequately in designing translation class.
- The direction of teaching translation in some curriculum is from L1to L2 and not the reverse.

#### **b- At the instructional level**

- Translation classes are assigned to inexperienced or unqualified instructors who are specialized in English Majors as Literature, or ESOL rather than Translation and show interest to teaching it rather than to be specialized in. Some of them even do not get training courses to teach translation whose knowledge lack a theoretical framework and are merely reflections of their own personal and limited experiences in teaching translation.
- The absence of networking among translation instructors to exchanging knowledge about this vital and sustainable discipline. Others have no contact with professional translators to update their teaching methods and techniques when solving various translation problems.
- They do not employ a systematic approach based on theory and practice when teaching translation. They do not step smoothly from translating to Audio-Visual interpreting, without letting students work on theory first and then practicing different kinds of interpreting, i.e. dubbing, subtitling, sight translation, and machine translation as they may be needed in their future working situation.

#### **c-At the students' level**

- Some EFL students are accepted with inadequate scores in English Language and sometimes are not subjected to language test when admission in English, or translation depts., in particular, if there are any. Students have not always achieved levels of

proficiency in the main language skills required to take translation as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

- Lack of educational, linguistic, cultural and communicative competence among students of translation about the languages they are working at.
- EFL students in English depts. are not trained enough to be keen and skillful translators, and professional interpreters, in particular after graduation.

## **6- Modern Approaches to Teaching Translation**

Recently, the traditional Grammar-Translation approach has been replaced by the Communicative approach<sup>4</sup> in FLT Depts., which focuses on the importance of the students' oral skills to be understood by native speakers of the language they are studying. Simply, there has been change of presenting language as a set of forms (grammatical, phonological, lexical) which have not to be learned only but also practiced, to presenting language as a functional system used to fulfil a range of communicative purposes described as communicative competence. (Shejbalová, D., 2006)

The principal characteristic of the grammar-translation method is its focus on learning the grammar rules and their application in translating texts. And language skills, reading and writing, are preferred than the oral skills, listening and speaking. This lead students to make errors in describing rules and thus producing incorrect sentences and influent speaking.

However, this method has now been approached by teachers to be aware of the need of combing the two methods in translation class which enables students to attain a good command of both L1 and L2. Krashen (1987) emphasizes the importance of the balance between grammatical accuracy and communication to create a more conductive method that relates both *linguistic* and *non – linguistic*; communicative competence<sup>5</sup>.

The interpretive approach, as well, should be adopted in teaching translation. In some universities nowadays, and part of higher education curriculum *Interpreting* is taught as a compulsory and additional subject in all English Programs alongside with *Translation Theory*. Interpreting, as mentioned before, is a verbal process of transferring the meaning of the SL into the TL, by someone acts as an interpreter, directly from the mouth of a speaker, radio, CD/DVD player, television to a listener or an audience of the TL.

In order to overcome such a challenging job professionally and responsibly, an interpreter has to have a good command of the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of both the SL and TL. Such capabilities are acquired consciously and unconsciously through a process of learning, training, and experiencing in formal learning-teaching classroom and in real-life situations.

## **7- Some Suggested Methodologies**

Nowadays, it is increasingly essential for translation instructors to be sensitive to students' career needs. It is the instructors' responsibility to keep learners motivation up by specifying the aims and objectives of translation class to ensure that all learners gain skills useful to them in their respective career choices.

However, there are certain practical methods can be used in translation class to achieve these goals. Students, for instance, are asked to translate 'real world texts'. This will arise their motivation, expectation, and curiosity and enjoying translation class by putting them in different translating situations, activate meaning in contexts, enrich their experience about the real world, exposure to translating challenges of whatever kinds and decision-taking when finding their own solutions.

A Mixed-Method approach, is another method to teach translation. To Jo González Davies (2004), 'there is room for more than one approach to teaching translation'. Valuable training and translation assessment or end-product evaluation methods are currently used to improve translation pedagogy by focusing on the student' achievement and performance. This could be done by dividing the class into groups, asking to translate texts of different types and assessing the end product by each other. As such Students are encouraged to work as a team to; discuss, defend their translations, think about decisions, and serve as guides and critics to each other. The instructor acts here as a monitor and trainer; cheques, comments and reflects on each groups' work at different areas.

To (Dolan: 2005), 'a constant change of learning methods can enrich the students' experience and stimulate their minds, as well as teach them a variety of skills which will serve them well in their future careers.' This shows how much important is to study translation as an end; to learn more about professional techniques in translating more 'real-world' texts, rather than a means to learn merely a foreign language. Besides it indicates students' awareness of the need to be prepared for the market, and how activities done in class can help them build skills up for their future careers.

Communicative approach to teaching translation is also the most modern methodology to be adopted in translation class. Out class activities, as example, is a good way to learn translation skills and experience interpreting. Students are asked to translate from different kinds of outsider references to avoid boredom of taking the traditional translational exercises inside the class. Moreover, they are tackled some tasks as interpreters to make interviews, conversations and attend meetings and conferences in a variety of society institutions. Then they are judged and evaluated for that out of the final grade gained in Translation subject. For it is argued that students learn best through social interactions (Zeng & Lu-Chen 2002) which allow them to work in 'real- world' by communicating various social groups. This helps students to gain 'real world practice', develop their responsibilities as translators and enhance the communicative value of translating process.

## **8- Recommendations**

Below are some possible recommendations to be implemented at all levels in teaching translation:

- Providing students of translation with the required theoretical foundational knowledge of translation science, history, pioneers, development and its basic notions and terminology.
- Introducing students to the academic discipline of translation, trends, directions, kinds, related issues, problems and the most up-to-date techniques and methodologies.
- Applying various translation models and text types.
- Adopting the interpretive approach in teaching translation after investigating translation theories, in order to establish the link between theory and practice, and to present a more practical and systematic teaching of translation,

- Encouraging the spirit of the teamwork and in- and out- class activities.
- Keep the size class as small to be easy controlled, cover as much material and do more practice.
- Training students to become professional translators by conducting in- and out-class practical interpretation tasks.
- Developing EFL skills as editing, reading, writing, listening, text analyzing and interpreting.
- Enhancing transparency, sensitivity and clarity from and into one's mother tongue.
- Training students conduct researches within the domain of translation.
- Providing students with as much 'real-world' practice to become competent and professional interpreters.
- Training qualified instructors for translation courses through joining training and developing courses, seminars, workshops, national and international conferences and forums, and cultural exchange programs among international universities.
- Establishing independent translation along with EFL departments in Humanities.
- Universities must teach translation professionally by starting undergraduate and postgraduate programs granting various professional degrees as Diploma, BA, MA and PH D in Translation.

### **Conclusion**

To sum, is significant for curriculum designers to manage students career needs with the intended aims and objectives when structuring a translation class. It is their responsibility to ensure that all learners are highly motivated and their needs are met in translation class. Research in translation should be more than academic, which limits its scope, to encompass a more practical and communicable discipline as a training process gains students' satisfaction. A combination of methods and most modern approaches can be used by translation instructors to help students and trainees of translation learn different skills when experiencing translation and interpreting. Varied learning methods have shown to benefit students, raise their expectations and promote their success. Socializing at the local and international levels among translation instructors and departments through cultural exchange programs among universities is highly requested to achieve the communicable value of translation practice. Making use of the advantages of modern technology and computing skills and their applications in the field of Translation at all levels. This simple contribution is added to what have been done so far in translation pedagogy is a good step that opens a wide gate for further research, extension and the related issues in this area to more promotion and advancements.

### **Endnotes**

- (1) SL, L1: is the source language, the language to translate from.  
TL, L2: is the target language, the language to translate into.
- (2) In simultaneous interpretation (SI), the interpreter orally renders the message in the target language as quickly as he or she can formulate it from the source language in real time while the source-language speaker continuously speaks. The oral message is rendered to the target-language listeners often be in close proximity. In consecutive interpretation (CI) the interpreter speaks after the source-language speaker has finished speaking. The speech is divided into segments, and the interpreter sits or stands beside the source-language speaker, listening and taking notes as the speaker progresses through the message. When the speaker pauses or finishes speaking, the interpreter then renders a portion of the message or the entire

message in the target language.

- (3) Sight Translation is a supportive interpretation method and a pedagogical exercise for getting started in the techniques of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting by which interpreter trainees can learn to react quickly and improve their oral skills. (Jean Herbert, 1952) However, sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting are performed under different conditions. Even though there are similarities in the mental process, the overall process is different. In sight translation, the translator reads a written text, whereas the interpreter, in both consecutive and the simultaneous modes, listens to a speaker.
- (4) Communicative approach refers to classroom activities in which students use language as a vehicle of communication, and the main purpose is to complete some kind of task. Students are required to use any and/or all the language that they know to develop their language skills.
- (5) "Linguistic competence is the spontaneous, flexible, and correct manipulation of the language system. While communicative competence involves principles of appropriateness and a readiness on the part of the learner to use relevant strategies in coping with certain language situations. (Rao, Zhenhui, 1999). To Rao, linguistic competence is the basis of communicative competence. But communicative competence does not automatically result from linguistic competence. Forms of classroom activities such as role playing, simulations, and real-life interactions should be used to provide as much practice as possible for students to develop communicative competence while practicing linguistic competence.

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