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TRANSLATION PRACTICES AS AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING INSTRUMENT FOR IELTS & DALF STUDENTS IN INDIA: A CASE STUDY

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The article outlines the results of using translation as a tool to help students learn English and French in the multicultural environment of Chandigarh, India. An anonymous group of eight students was observed from 2013 until 2015 to reveal the main concepts of the use of translation in helping Indian students to strengthen their language competence. Based on a brief overview of the current linguistic situation in India, these findings serve as a further insight into pedagogical translation nowadays. The case study features semi-structured interviews showing participants' views on translations tasks in the classroom. In the conclusion, the case study reports the weaknesses of this approach as well as recommendations on how to avoid it.

Keywords: student feedback, translation practice, language competence, teaching English, teaching French, language teaching, India.

ПРАКТИКА ПЕРЕВОДА КАК ЭФФЕКТИВНЫЙ ИНСТРУМЕНТ ПОДГОТОВКИ ИНДИЙСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ К СДАЧЕ ЭКЗАМЕНОВ IELTS И DALF: ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ

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В настоящей статье представлены результаты использования упражнений на перевод как вспомогательного инструмента подготовки студентов Индии к экзаменам по английскому и французскому языкам в г. Чандигарх. Особое внимание уделяется атмосфере мультикультурализма и многоязычности в Индии. На основе этого было проведено тематическое исследование, включающее полуструктурированные интервью с группой из восьми учащихся и их мнения об упражнениях на перевод как методах преподавания языка. В заключении статьи описываются недостатки применения перевода в педагогических целях, а также приводятся рекомендации по его использованию в процессе обучения иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: Индия, преподавание языка, английский, французский, мультикультурализм, перевод, обратная связь студентов.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, translation technique, known as a professional teaching instrument since the 1980s [4], has highlighted the need for a reassessment of current methods for teaching foreign languages in view of the culturally richer learning environments of the 21st century with a plethora of languages in the classroom. However, as an instructive means, translation has always been heavily criticized by both teachers and scholars [5]. It was considered “counterproductive” and “boring” as compared to pragmatic or psycholinguistic methods, mainly due to its detrimental effect on the language competence of learners—they obtained pseudo-native mental processing skills and were strongly influenced by their first language [9, p. 212].

Despite the shunning of translation method in teaching foreign languages and the controversies around it, the last few decades have been marked by a renewed research interest with the advocacy of Cook [5; 6] and Tsanagari & Floros [15]. These researchers describe multiple areas where such a method is suitable: language acquisition control, reading skills and lexical improvement, team-building and engagement. Resurgence of translation methods into teaching studies offered new insights with experimental researches proving that translation practices are more essential than detrimental as they raise awareness of both the teacher and the learners about the language,

“expanding vocabulary, while at the same time paving the path for a profounder understanding and more conscious use of translation at a later stage” [15, p. 147].

One of the key research questions was whether this translation is distinctive from a professional translation practice. The findings suggested that there are two types of translation—pedagogical and real. Unlike professional practice, the pedagogical translation is an instrument that serves to promote consciousness among learners and test their knowledge as well as illuminate students and facilitate their memorisation [18, p. 83]. Apart from its goals, both types have different addressees and results, while the real translation deals with providing new information to a reader, translation exercises are meant to be a checking system for evaluating learner’s language proficiency because they are aimed at educators.

The present preliminary research explores how a young assistant teacher of English and French can benefit from translation tasks educating students whose native language is different from the native language of the educator. Presented in the form of a case study, a “teaching case” with a goal “to establish a framework for discussion and debate among students” [19, p. 5], this study aims to prove that translation practices are useful under certain circumstances in India and describes the activity of an anonymous group preparing to pass IELTS and DALF in Chandigarh, state of Punjab, India.

TRANSLATION AS AN EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE FOR INDIAN LEARNERS

Multilingualism is a daily routine for most Indian learners in Chandigarh with English used as the first teaching language [1], thus making it a "formal" language associated with school curricula and government. Secondly, English language marks a higher social status as it symbolizes education [1] and empowers people willing to show that they are educated and polite. Overall, such code-switching between languages seems to perform communicative and cognitive functions and employs a situational model to build a social image of speakers in the particular context. In other words, the communicative integrity of languages in India directly affects people's identity.

Moreover, during the last five years learning a third language from at least Class V to Class VIII became compulsory in Punjab due to the promotion of the three language formula [14] by the Indian government offering the choice between many European languages, including French and German. The European Union and its multilingual policy illustrate the fact that teachers are very enthusiastic about translation exercises and "a number of countries that score highly on L2 tests use translation frequently in the classroom" [11, p. 135]. This experience can be taken into account by Indian secondary education institutions in order to facilitate the acquisition of the third language.

The degree of language competence varies greatly among students and depends on many factors, such as social stratification, access to education which differs from state to state, motivation, attitude, exposure, examples of their peers [2]. The drawback of this situation at Indian schools is that during the last decades many states failed to accept any policy to guide this process in the face of globalisation. An overview of the current situation on linguistic rights in India [17] shows the lack of linguistic policy regulating linguistic identity and protecting indigenous dialects, which in turn leads to a fight for the status of officially spoken language within the state.

From this perspective, in view of linguistic pluralism, Indian speakers perform mental translation every day. As Baldridge [2] cites Sahitya Akedemi President, there are different languages for various situations in India, each of them serves its function according to the social context, thus providing a cohesion of a linguistically diverse society due to the hierarchical nature of this linguistic phenomenon: "We speak one language at home, one language of the street, another of the province, besides the language of communication. Even while speaking, we are always translating from one language to another" [2]. As such, the regularity of this process makes Indian learners very familiar with translation tasks as it is sustained by its social institutions.

Being a capital of two states, Punjab and Haryana, the city of Chandigarh stands out as a unique city on this matter because it accepts languages of both states as official but English is mainly used as the medium for Chandigarh departments. Youths speak a mixture of local languages and English: Hinglish and Punglish. Thus, with regards to English teaching, Crystal sees India as "a linguistic bridge between the major first-language dialects of the world <...> and the major foreign-language varieties" [7].

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

There were eight participants aged between 16 and 44 in this project, with four males and two females having the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels of English, and two females with the beginner level of French. The author taught English and French from June 2013 until September 2013 on a full-time basis and until September 2015 on a part-time basis

in Chandigarh. There were two main goals of the course: 1. To prepare students to successfully pass IELTS and DALF A1/A2 exams; 2. To explore basic research results and effectiveness of pedagogical translation, which was used as an instrument of teaching out of necessity because there was no common language between the teacher (native in Russian) and students (native in Haryanvi, Punjabi, Hindi).

The first two weeks were dedicated to translating main ideas and concepts surrounding the process of passing IELTS and DALF with the use of consecutive interpreting and translation of phrases written on the blackboard. Three types of translations tasks were chosen:

1. Individual translation tasks aimed at developing the 4 skills: reading (translation of small text pieces); writing (translation of single sentences taken from IELTS sample tests); listening (interpreting of English and French phrases into Hindi and local dialects); speaking (interpreting with the help of other teachers speaking Hindi and local dialects).

2. Translation tasks in pairs: learners wrote a short description of their weekend and the other person had to translate and proofread it; comparisons of difficult grammatical forms and words and discussion in pairs.

3. Full group activities: interactive translation of Bollywood movies' dialogues and suggestions of the best translation choices from all group members; translation of Punjabi and Hindi jokes into English and French (for proficient students)

These tasks were influenced by a broad range of factors, such as different levels of proficiency in languages, students' age and background differences, various learning goals. Six participants had different levels of language, from pre-intermediate to advanced in English, and two were beginners in French. Before the end of training, semi-structured interviews were conducted to document Indian learners' feedback on using translation in the classroom to build a holistic picture of this case study. The study is primarily descriptive. The methods of the case study are coding approach and an analysis of semi-structured interviews and observational notes.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The total amount of teaching was 600 hours. Each lesson was approximately 120 minutes. The author, as an assistant teacher, had supervising teachers, native in Hindi and local dialects, to help with translation and additional explanations. All participants were interviewed once to ask for their feedback on the use of translation and code-switching during lessons. Short observational notes were taken after each lesson.

The data collected were analysed with the help of a generic three-step coding approach [12] that was employed to find similar patterns and group it according to the appropriate category related to students' views on the translation practice as a strategy to improve their language proficiency.

RESULTS

The data revealed three main conceptual categories affecting the use of translation strategy in teaching.

Concept 1: Collaborative learning

The first concept that the analysed data revealed was a collaborative experience that six students marked in their feedback. A significant number of codes indicated that translation strategy adopted by a student teacher helped Indian learners get a deeper understanding of English grammar. Six

participants had experience in a word-for-word translation from Indian schools, usually done by the teacher himself but were surprised by a collaborative technique that the author introduced. The group was asked to translate together two sentences with words "people" and "peoples" which students usually mixed because most of the official governmental speeches are translated into English and are the main source for the layperson to hear English-speaking persons live. As such, many students used "peoples", which has a meaning of a subgroup united by a common culture, traditions, etc., as a plural form for the "person" instead of uncountable neutral noun "people". The author intentionally gave two opposite contexts and asked learners to translate sentences into their own languages preserving the meaning. It sparked the group analysis, as Sanjay reported:

We put... compared two sentences and translated into our mother tongues. <...> Together <...> we discussed the differences between two forms, and then Ms. Ekaterina [the teacher] showed the video with a speech at the Parliament to help us understand where should be "peoples" and where "people". My friend was very surprised because this is how everybody speaks here.

Due to the flexibility of the task, collaborative translation with comparisons and suggestions coming from all learners and little guidance from the teacher's side facilitated understanding and a better grasp of grammatical rules and areas of language where Indian learners made most mistakes: differences between Present Simple and Present Continuous, Active and Passive Voice (excessive use of the auxiliary verb "to be" in Active Voice forms), mixing the words like "tomorrow/yesterday" (the same word for both is used in Hindi), phonetic writing ("lukiing very pritty").

Concept 2: Motivation

Translation technique proved to be effective for raising individual motivation of learners studying English and French. Two female participants mentioned their raised motivation level during the interview after English lessons. They were two housewives who were dreaming about a trip to the islands of Bora Bora which was very expensive to them and did not actually fit in their schedule and family budget. Using tourist brochures and translating simple slogans from Hindi into English helped evoke many of the emotions, memories and hidden desires of the learners which resulted in acquiring confidence in knowing the functions of the imperatives in English.

Male students were highly motivated and eager to interpret phrases even outside the classroom. Evidence of it was found during the presentations that college representatives from New Zealand and Australia conducted. The author observed three cases of an *ad hoc* consecutive interpreting session during college presentations. Those students who did not fully understand native speakers asked their peers to translate it because they were highly motivated to get hands-on experience on their admission to higher education institutions.

Concept 3: Weaknesses

Three students mentioned weaknesses of using translation in the classroom. During the interview, they reported the lack of willingness to perform such activity ("I don't want"), seeing no point in doing it because it contradicted with the exam structure ("I do not know how it may help me") and finally, feeling simply unable to do it ("It is hard to understand").

Collaborative translation produced valuable output in a large group of 10–15 students but it impeded understanding of

students who were coming for private lessons from September 2013 until September 2015. Conversely, one female student who was studying basic French appeared to be strongly motivated and did well when translating simple phrases from French into English saying that "it helped her switch between both languages" and in her future career in Canada. The translation between two languages with somewhat similar syntactical structure and grammar facilitated an acquisition of both. However, translation technique in groups was time-consuming and took away attention from exam preparation—the reason why two students refused to perform such exercises at home. Thirdly, while translation helped beginners in improving their score in a reading module, this technique cannot be extensively used in IELTS speaking where the main emphasis is laid on the use of idioms and natural expressions.

As for the results, two students who have been working consistently on their translations between English, French and Hindi have been admitted to chosen universities. Three students have dropped their studies due to insufficient funding. The rest of the participants have failed to pass IELTS and DALF exams.

DISCUSSION

Three concepts revealed in semi-structured interviews with participants show that translation technique can be an effective instructive means but only if it plays a supportive role [10, p. 59] with an aim to assist a young educator in developing more productive approaches at the early stage of teaching a class of multilingual students. Translation tasks are helpful not only for face-to-face teaching but in groups where students with a higher level of proficiency can explain the particularities of this or that word to beginners. Thus, this is a process-oriented activity rather than a result-oriented one. According to Vandergrift, it is especially helpful for less skilled students in their listening tasks [16]. Secondly, translation can be used regularly as a controlling method to ensure the correct understanding of phrasal expressions, idioms and sentences. Moreover, in the case of advanced learners translation may be a source of language enrichment—the process that helps achieve a higher command over a foreign language. Finally, much emphasis was laid on the importance of student-centered learning in an increasingly globalised world. As the works of Davies [8] and Butzcam & Caldwell [3] show, translation as a method becomes a core concept to the communicative approach in learner-centered classes given its popularity among beginners in Ireland: they labelled it as "engaging" and "practical" [3, p. 10].

Another significant result revealed that subtle connotations of meanings can only be understood through contextualisation, comparison and further translation into the mother tongues of learners. An example of "people/peoples" demonstrates that students used to listening to the word in one particular context found it hard to acquire proper grammatical rules. Furthermore, some researchers call translation a "fifth skill" [6; 13], along with reading, writing, speaking and listening, which develops accuracy and communicative competence. To that end, learners would benefit from gaining translation skills, should they decide to enter that profession because a significant number of language learners choose linguistic professions in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the results clearly demonstrate, translation can be effective only when coupled with other teaching methods and not as a stand-alone practice because it contradicts with outcomes that students preparing to pass IELTS and DALF

expect to get. Translation tasks are effective: 1. For triggering group discussions and engagement among learners having very different levels of English and backgrounds; 2. As a motivating tool for less motivated learners such as housewives; 3. For mastering two foreign languages for those students who want to perceive the meaning in multiple contexts.

CONCLUSION

Simple translation tasks from one language into another, such as from French into English for a Hindi speaker, can lead to a full understanding of similarities between language structures and cultures. It seems that dialogues and group translations give the impetus to understanding not only the formal aspects of languages but of the language in use. Translation practice can progressively improve the language skills of the students living in a multicultural and multilingual environment such as the one in India. The educators that do not share the same culture and language with their students can employ a pedagogical translation as a teaching strategy for effective language acquisition. The approach can be useful in studying a third language such as basic French to facilitate the understanding of simple and somewhat similar syntactical and grammatical structures. In a nutshell, pedagogical translation is unavoidable in an increasingly multicultural society where languages are sometimes taught by non-native speakers. Further investigations in this area of research can be beneficial to both language providers and learners and should be carried out to gain a deeper understanding and concomitant potential insights into learners' expectations and needs.

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