

Language Teaching Through Translation

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Abstract:

Mastery in a foreign or a second language is considered to be a symbol of status and to many others it widens the scope for employability. Acquisition of language becomes more effective when a method employed is interactive, participatory and stimulate the cognitive abilities of a learner. The methods integrated shall help the learners to acquire, develop, and strengthen their knowledge and competence in any foreign language. In this perspective, the present article looks at the advantages and challenges of integrating translation as a method to promote second or foreign language acquisition and the possibilities of reinstating translation as a component in teaching and learning a language.

Keywords: SLA, translation, cross linguistics interference, cognitive activities

Introduction

Incorporating translation as a method to teach a foreign or a second language has always brought diverse debate among the researchers. Most of the researchers agree to the use of translation and argue that the method as a tool helps a learner to comprehend words and expressions in target language and enable him to express his ideas very confidently. On the other hand, some researchers argue that incorporating native language in the classroom would handicap the learner and will influence negatively. It often remains a serious threat to effective language use and an undesirable supporting pillar for learning the target language, Kern (1994). Translation has lost its importance both as a teaching and as an assessment tool ever since the adoption of communicative approach to language teaching. The situation witnessed an immense change with the developments in translation studies. According to Duff (1989) translation has impact on how people learn a new language. Researchers like Whyatt (2009), Weydt (2009) and O'Muireartaigh (2009) comment that the application of translation tasks improves L2 learner proficiency in language control. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) observes translation as a convenient method to verify the comprehension of the source text. According to Cambridge dictionary, translation is an act of changing the words of one language into the words in another language that have the same meaning. Therefore, the success of the transition is measured against the words selected to retain the meaning and the expression.

Review of Literature

Newmark (1991), Hussian (1994), Kern (1994 and Omura (1996) suggest a positive and facilitative role of translation in learning a foreign or second language. Lavault (1985) points out that

students asked for exercise on translations and enjoyed it. Liao (2006), in his study on Taiwanese junior college students found that students most frequently use translation to learn English vocabulary words, idioms, phrases, and grammar, to read, write, and speak English, and to check their reading and listening comprehension. Carreres (2006) found that learners overwhelmingly perceive translation exercises as useful for language learning. Bagheri and Fazel (2011) observed that translation contributed substantially to the acquisition of their writing skills. The learners also demonstrated medium to high use of translation as a learning strategy to learn writing in English. The study conducted by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo (1985) identified 11 cognitive strategies to learn English and found that translation constituted 11.3% of all strategy uses by beginner and intermediate ESL learners, preceded only by well-known strategies, such as repetition (19.6%), note-taking (18.7%), and imagery (12.5%). Karimian and Talebinejad (2013: 609) observed that students used translation for memorizing and retrieving English, language comprehension, self-assessment, and used translation as a social strategy to interact with others in English. Translation strategies also helped them to remove the learners' class anxieties and worries and make them feel more self-confident and relaxed.

Advantages

For translating content from target language to first language and vice versa, the learner is expected to possess a minimum command of language in both the languages. As a learner starts applying translation as a method to acquire proficiency in a second or foreign language, he practices all the languages skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. The cognitive aspects of the learner get activated. Thus, the comprehensive skill of the learner is stimulated and controlled. It also ensures proper comprehension of the text which is essential for articulating and communicating the message. The satisfaction and enthusiasm translation constructively assist language learning. When a learner efficiently translates first language content to target language and vice versa, he develops proficiency in both especially in the target language. For a learner struggling to comprehend an idiom or a phrase, translation aids the process of second language acquisition by systemizing a learning mechanism which is already intact or in other words 'translate silently' (Titford, 1985: 78). A controlled use of mental translation, though it occurs automatically, constructively promotes the benefits of conscious learning and enable the learner to comprehend the logic in the target language structures. By translating, learners also get access to new vocabularies, grammatical structures and words which widen the opportunity to avoid the redundant use of same words and structures. As a result, the learner becomes aware of the nuisances of the language structures and produces more accurate forms that are acceptable and marked satisfactory. Thus the learners acquire proficiency in structuring sentences in the target language without structural deviation. In other words, translation helps the student to learn, comprehend and coin new words and enhances the process of vocabulary retrieval and retention by simplifying the memorization process.

Negative and positive influence of a first language is essential to learn the complex structures of the target language. A learner's approach to target language with his first language knowledge eliminate error prone target language production as learner acquires competence in the target language, particularly in grammar which at time remain affected by the negative interference. Learning

vocabularies is limited not only to the understanding of the meaning but also extend to its familiarization and usage. As a learner improves the vocabulary usage, he creates more accurate syntactical structures and controls negative interferences. Switching between two or more languages is a natural phenomenon and learners' prior knowledge and experience offers a starting point for language learning, comments Lewis (2009). According to Cook (2010: 55), learning to translate is not a special purpose or an add on to general learning, but should be an integral part and major aim of learning a language- to operate bilingually as well as monolingually. The language anxiety of the learner is controlled. The use of mother tongue aids the learner to understand the expression used and eventually he produces appropriate sentences with confidence. According to Calis and Dikilitas (2012) translation promotes the receptive and productive skills of the learners. Translation also reveals unique details about how two languages compared operate, which in turn gives the learner more awareness on both first language and second language structures and its usage. Translation, in developing the reading skills, is most recognized and used cognitive strategy (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 3).

Challenges

Every language is known for its unique structure. Failure to comprehend this distinction often leads a second language learner to produce error prone structures. "...languages cut the meanings of words differently; a word in language A can have more equivalents in the language B", observes Swan (1997: 157). Confirming completely to the mother tongue rules and generalization often pollute target language production. Syntactical structures defer from one language to another. The word order in English begins with subject followed by verb and object. For example, *Practice makes a man perfect*. when a learner of another language with different word order tries to generalize his mother target language to English, he produces in turn inappropriate structure. Translation is sometimes considered counterproductive and unsuited to the average learner.

Conclusion

"Translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?" observes Duff (1989: 6). Translating authentic texts for a purpose is a communicative activity. Indeed, it is more natural and necessary than of many of the activities invented for language learners, comments Beeby (1996: 13). The way translation is used makes the difference. It is always argued that if it is taught in a real life activity of translating, a learner may show constructive progress in learning a language. Incorporation of translation in learning a second language can be initiated by asking the students to translate lyrics from movies, music albums and short folklore tales which learners are familiar with and motivated to translate in a foreign language. The learner always stays motivated to transport his cultural and traditional values to a foreign language and believes his world is now heard by others. Bidirectional translation methods can also prove effective in teaching a language. This method invites the learner to translate and retranslate the text from first language to target language and vice versa. Translation shall be an integral and essential part of learning a language. A second language learner may find translating from mother tongue to target language difficult in the initial process but his continued attempt and exposure to the syntactical structures of the target language provides him with an opportunity to internalize the target language patterns. Thus translation can be used as an effective

medium for developing the communicative competence of the learner and for teaching the structures and meaning of words underlying semantics relationship, discourse value and sentence structures.

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