Teaching translation: Issues and methods

Bui Le Vy Khue*

*Master of Arts, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Khanh Hoa University

Abstract: *Translation necessitates a thorough understanding of language, specialized fields and cultural nuances. Effective translation training requires an integrated approach that includes building language competence and technical terms and cultural knowledge. To give teachers an insight into teaching translation, this paper will first present prominent perspectives on translation process, then address the obstacles when learning translating and finally recommend useful teaching methods.*

Keywords: *Translation, problem, teaching method*

1. Introduction

Translation is an act of conveying "a message from one language to another" (Nida, 1964, p. 3) and "the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (p. 12). According to Nida, translation is the process of converting a text or speech from one language to another while keeping the original meaning and style. The original text's cultural and contextual references, as well as its words, must all be conveyed. Despite the rise of many translation tools such as Google Translate, the significance of translation and the need for it cannot be denied. Since the study of translation is perceived as distinct, its teaching, in general is a necessary and exceptionally challenging task. This is also the aim of this article, to give teachers an overall view into how translation happens, the challenges encountered by language learners and the teaching methods to help them overcome these challenges.

2. An overview of translation process

The translation process starts from the selection of source text, involves different stages of decision making in the middle and ends with readers' reactions to the translated text (Levý, 2011). Translation requires the translator to make decisions, much like in a game, which entails selecting from a predetermined set of options revolving around the original text, morphology, syntax, terminology, style or pragmatic aspects. Each decision in these aspects is related to, or even results in another move. More specifically, translation is seen as a three-stage process that includes understanding, interpretation, and reformulation in the target language. Decision-making steps can be divided into two categories: those related to the interpretation of the meaning of the source text and those related to the way it is expressed in the target language.

It can be seen that teachers can interfere the translation process of learners right in the beginning by selecting the source text. There are certain genres (e.g. literature, poetry, drama) and certain textual elements (e.g. alliteration, puns, foreignism) to choose from depending on the purpose of the course, the level of students or the set of skills that teachers want students to learn. After choosing the source text, teachers can then decide to fetch students some prior knowledge to make the understanding and interpretation stage easier for them. The interpretation step is influenced by what details students considered worthy or need to emphasized, and certain way of thinking embedded in a cultural environment. Finally, deformation decisions are governed by student's translation and editing skills (e.g. re-organization, deletion, addition, and substitution), teachers' requirement of style and speed.

3. Learners' difficulties in learning translation and teaching-translation methods

3.1. Lack of language competency

Learners, especially the ones at intermediate level, are still building their proficiency in the target language, thus they often face some prominent tendencies and errors at word and sentence level when constructing sentences. The types of linguistic errors are listed as below:

Table 2.1. Common errors in translation (adapted from Presada & Badea, 2014)

Types of errors	Examples
Grammar – subject omission	When he saw his girlfriend approaching the garden, jumped with joy
Grammar – continuous aspect	He **watches** his favorite series on TV now instead of taking care of the baby.
Grammar – verb tense	He **was often reading** books when he was a high school student.
Grammar – sequence of tenses	He said that his name **is** Eric and that he **comes** from nowhere..

Grammar – conditional clauses	If the weather **will be** fine I'll go to the mountains to contemplate the beauty of the landscape.
Word order	I like **very much** English people.
Grammar – uncountable nouns	The money **are** on the table in the corner of the dark room
Grammar – prepositions	He is the most intelligent **from** all the boys she has encountered in her life.
Grammar – double negation	You'll get fat **unless** you don't stop eating all that crap food that your wife is preparing for you.
Grammar – indefinite articles	He is teacher.
Grammar – definite articles	**The** dogs are the most friendly animals on earth.
Word omissions	I **haven't** time to finish my homework today.
Vocabulary – lexical confusion	Paper is made **of** wood.

The study of Presada and Badea (2014), with the main aim being to identify the most frequent types of errors and their causes among Romanian students while learning translation, found that the most common interlanguage errors were the omission of the subject and the incorrect use of tenses. The first mentioned error could be explained by the impact caused by the Romanian language, which did not require the presence of the subject in both basic and complicated sentences, because the ending of the verb in Romanian took the role of indicating subjects. Meanwhile, the fact that Romanian has no fixed rules on the order in which past tenses in main clauses should follow present tenses in subordinate clauses was the source of the improper use of tenses in indirect speech. In brief, a significant number of mistakes made by students in translation classes were caused by negative language transfer. That means there was a major difference between the lexical and grammatical structures of the native tongue and those of the target language.

The research analyzed above suggests that students of different countries encounter major types of linguistic errors differently depending on the dissimilarity between their native tongue and the target language. When these important issues are identified, teachers can base on them to create well-planned lessons that directly address students' needs. Teachers should also consider integrating a variety of approaches such as Grammar-Translation Approach or Communicative Approach. With a focus on translating literary texts, the main focus of Grammar-Translation Approach is on the examination of vocabulary and grammatical structures (Zhao,

2023). Nevertheless, this approach frequently disregarded the improvement of communication abilities. Teachers can compensate for the drawbacks of Grammar-Translation by applying communicative language instruction. This method uses translation to increase language and cultural competency while putting an emphasis on the development of oral and written communication skills. In summary, in order to aid with vocabulary development, grammar, and overall language comprehension of learners, a variety of strategies should be used, as each has pros and cons of its own.

3.2. Ambiguity, Subjectivity in Translation and Cultural Differences

The fundamental differences across languages cause uncertainty and subjectivity in translation. Words and phrases may have several meanings or lack direct counterparts, making it difficult for learners to select the most appropriate translation equivalent. In addition, suitable word choice is influenced by the translator's knowledge on idioms, cultural allusions and cultural quirks (Nord, 2014). Thus, translators should prioritize pragmatic perspectives when translating, taking into account the contexts of the source and target text, as well as the function of the translation. To further assert the idea from Nord, the experimental study of Obdržálková (2016) found out that unlike intermediate students, upper intermediate ones encountered hurdles on the pragmatic side of languages. More specifically, they perceived understanding the original text and lexical aspects, as well as achieving a natural and idiomatic result (or style) were the two most common problems. Having the same perspective, Huong (2020) conducted an experimental research on the translation problems of Vietnamese English-majored students, all of whom were at upper intermediate level. She discovered that given the right instructions, those students would know how to shift their focus from linguistic problems to non-linguistic ones, to avoid word-for-word translation and produce more idiomatic translation solutions.

To help students better comprehend the cultural contexts in which translation occurs, teachers can include cultural studies into the curriculum. More specifically, teachers need to encourage their learners to interact with a variety of cultural materials, such as books, movies, and online resources and different types of tasks. While providing a variety of translation tasks, teachers should bear in mind the principles of Contrastive Analysis approach as this method looks

for and addresses the variations and parallels between the source and target languages with a focus on linguistic patterns and cultural nuances. Additionally, teaching process should not be confined within the classroom. It is crucial to provide students with the chance to interact with native speakers of the language through language exchange programs or online language communities (Zhao, 2023).

3.3. Managing Technical Vocabulary and Specialized Fields

One of the most frequently mentioned issues in translation is lexical difficulty, which arises from the fact that the vocabularies of the source language and the target language do not directly correlate. This challenge has been mentioned in an experimental study by Aksenova and Orlova (2018) conducted on 120 Master and post-graduate students. These high-level students were reported to experience major obstacles in translating technical terms, proper names, and difficult grammatical structures. Thus, the most frequent obstacle appears in polysemantic lexical units and words even towards students who comprehend the subject matter sufficiently and who are proficient in the technical words.

To achieve accurate and efficient translations, teachers need to provide students with the terminology and subject-specific information they need. Implementing a translation course including pre-translation, translation, and editing stages helps address common challenges for learners when translating scientific texts (Aksenova & Orlova, 2018). Besides, through the integration of domain-specific knowledge, guest lectures delivered by corporate executives, and practical exercises, students can enhance their proficiency in utilizing expert language. To prepare students for real-world translation-related issues, educators should also stress the value of lifelong learning and staying current with industry innovations.

3.4. Managing Time Limits and Expectations

Time limitations and deadlines are major problems for the translation industry. Some students even have inflated notions about how simple and quick the translation process will be, which can demotivate and disappoint them (Zhao, 2023). In order to deal with this issue, teachers should offer translation projects in groups or for individuals with deadlines in order to model real-world events and assist students in developing effective time management techniques. Teaching students how to prioritize their tasks, set the time, and effectively use translation technology

will boost their capacity to meet their future work requirements without sacrificing the quality of their translations. Besides, it is important to familiarize students with self-reflection and feedback from other people. Having students to examine translation theories and methodologies, giving constructive feedback or encouraging peer review and critical analysis are some of the effective techniques in evaluating progress, lessen stress and increase self-control.

4. Conclusion

This document-based study provides an overview of translation definition and its process. Additionally, challenges in learning translation including language incompetency, the ambiguity of translation, hard-to-handle technical terms, as well as time limits and expectations are presented. Learners will not face the same challenges at different level. Therefore, by employing appropriate strategies and problem-solving techniques, teachers can prepare their students to become competent and self-assured translators who can overcome linguistic and cultural obstacles in an increasingly interconnected world.

References

[1]. Aksenova, E. E., & Orlova, S. N. (2018). Some basic challenges and strategies in teaching translation to Chemistry majors. *Training, Language and Culture*, *2*(3), 71-85.

[2]. Huong, N. T. T. (2020). Enhancing students' problem identification in translation teaching in an English language program. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, *36*(4).

[3]. Levý, J. (2011). *The art of translation* (Vol. 97). John Benjamins Publishing.

[4]. Nida, E. (1964). *Toward a science of translating*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

[5]. Nord, C. (2014). *Translating as a purposeful activity: Functionalist approaches explained.* Routledge.

[6]. Obdržálková, V. (2016). Translation as a decision-making process: an application of the model proposed by Jiří Levý to translation into a non-mother tongue. *Mutatis Mutandis. Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción*, *9*(2), 306-327.

[7]. Presada, D., & Badea, M. (2014). The effectiveness of error analysis in translation classes. A pilot study.

[8]. Zhao, M. (2023). Teaching translation: Challenges and strategies. *Studies in Linguistics and Literature*, *7*(3), 59-64.