

TESL Undergraduate Student Teachers' View on Translation in a Rural School

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Abstract: This study was conducted to better understand TESL undergraduate student teachers' view of translation in ESL teaching in a rural school. The aim of this paper is then to build a bridge between two fields: translation pedagogy (the knowledge about correct decoding of the original text and idiomatic encoding into the target text) and pedagogical translation (use of translation in language classroom (Zabalbeascoa,1997). Duff's (1989, 1996) three qualities essential to all language learning; accuracy, clarity, and flexibility was adopted as the framework of this study. Participants in the study were 18 final year TESL student teachers who were involved in ESL outreach teaching project in a rural school. The phenomenological approach used allowed the participants to describe how they made meaning out translation in ESL classroom. Data was collected using online interview containing 7 questions, followed by focus group interview. The data were categorized and then coded based on the repeated patterns of students' definitions of new words and expressions and their responses to open-ended questions. This study has revealed some evidences to support the idea that effective instruction for English as A Second Language using translation in rural school context should take into considerations the following: (1) developing proficiency in natural language or conversation through understanding the meaning at word and sentence level via translation to relate to the learners' everyday experiences, (2) providing ample opportunity for learning, even over-learning, through translation via recitation, repetition, and practice toward automaticity of knowledge and skills, and (3) scaffolding for understanding and development of thinking skills through the methods of translation. Specifically, the findings from this study revealed pertinent areas to be focused on when using translation in ESL classroom i.e. learner proficiency level, scaffolding, content of the materials, relevancy to the context, and spiral learning.

Keywords: translation, rural schools, phenomenological, TESL, student teachers

INRODUCTION

Translation plays a role in the development of communicative abilities since ESL speakers are often engaged in the work of sharing and negotiating meaning depending on the interpretative community and context. Besides, translation fosters speculation and discussion, and it helps the development of abilities considered fundamental for communication, such as interpretation, negotiation, and expression of meaning. According to Alan Duff, "translation develops three qualities essential to all language learning; accuracy, clarity and flexibility. It trains the learner to search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity)"(1989,1996:p.7). Although for many teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) context the mere mention of translation may be still controversial (Alan Duff, (1989/1996), Deller and Rinvolucris (2002), Prodomou (2000), Bowen (2000) and Atkinson (1987)). We have been reflecting upon its use by our student teachers in this rural school teaching project in their language classroom based on the idea that translation activities may contribute to the practice and skills students need to interact in an accurate, meaningful and appropriate way. We are not only agreeing with such authors but also would like to add that for translation activities to have better results, it is important that we explore them from a rural teaching perspective and make use of translation in the EFL classroom as a learning strategy. It is of utmost importance that we tackle the translation practices in EFL classroom from a point of view which has nothing to do with the principles of the traditional approach i.e. the

grammar-translation method. Moreover, in order to make it clear for those who may see translation as a harmful procedure when dealing with students who are at the beginning of their learning process, or even for those who may think there is no room for translation in the approach and method they have been following.

For some time, several authors have been reflecting upon the use of translation in the English as Second/Foreign Language (ES/FL) classroom from a different perspective. They defend the practice of translation in the ES/FL context not as a means in itself, but as a strategy to help students become more independent and better equipped when using a foreign language. If we go back to the many methods that permeated the teaching-learning of foreign languages, it can be verified that translation was part of it in one way or another. Although, there are many views against using translation in the classroom, it merely boiled down to the issue of treating translation according to the language principles underlying the translation-grammar method which does not bring any benefits to students. As such, it was always seen as a mere exercise of translating word by word, without any context, and in many instances even as an easy way out to ensure lesson flow when teaching low English proficient students as well as making students quiet and busy. They often cited that it is time consuming and it is difficult to find appropriate material for the learner's level and for the time available. However, if we follow the post-modern tendencies in Translation Studies, especially the concepts that translation is transformation, creation and production of language (Arrojo, 1986/2002), there are many reasons for using it in the foreign language classroom. Among them, we could point out the tendency of referring to the mother tongue (MT/L1), which is very strong among students who are learning a second language. In addition, we cannot discard the naturalness of such behavior, as students translate to themselves all the time (Duff, 1989). As a result, such behaviors which could be explored were totally lost, making translation into a "skeleton in the cupboard" (Prodomou, 2002). Thus, a successful practice of translation is dependent on all the different aspects underlying any language use, such as: the polysemous character of words; the diversity of registers, styles, and idioms and the variety of language forms and uses. When translation is used in a foreign language classroom some principles should be followed, as we want our students to be aware of the many different points of view which are involved in any translation work. Whenever translating, we should pay attention to the following principles: a) the rightness or wrongness of the source language influence; b) the style of the original text may be changed, depending on the purpose of the translation text; and, c) idioms have to work in L2, even though they are notoriously untranslatable.

In anticipating the benefits of L1 and L2 in using translation as a transformation from one language to another, it is pertinent to ensure that students become conscious of the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and the fronted foreign language, since with this knowledge they will be able to acquire the FL in an easier way. It is from this practice of translating within a context, verifying these similarities and differences and ascertaining that the same text can be translated and interpreted in more than one way by the same learner, that we can, then, obtain better results in the teaching-learning of a foreign language.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English plays a very important role in Malaysia. However, there seems to be problems when it comes to teaching and learning English. Students tend to lack interest in learning the language. In order to resolve this issue, many English scholars have tried to come out with different ideas on how to promote interest in learning the language. One of the alternatives that are suggested is translating the language in accordance to Duff's three qualities (1989/1996, p.7). Translation was a significant part of ELT for a long time, and then a significant missing part for a long time also. With the arrival and then total dominance of communicative methodologies, translation was quickly consigned to the past, along with other 'traditional' tools such as dictation, reading aloud and drills. However, these activities are now a feature of many communicative classrooms and successful aids to learning, although the approach to using them has changed. According to Duff (1989), teachers and students now use translation to learn, rather than learning translation. Modern translation activities usually move from L1 to L2 with clearer communicative aims and real cognitive depth, which show high motivation levels and can produce impressive communicative results.

Thus, the value of translation in the foreign language classroom depends on the way we tackle it. Every time we resort to translation, no matter if it is inter or intra language, we realize that there are

several possibilities of language production. It is an opportunity for students to discuss and negotiate the meaning and the form of a text, bearing in mind the language diversity, the cultural contrast, and the different contexts involved. Translation also involves language transformation and production, since there is not one single, perfect end-product of it, but several possibilities of output depending on the audience, context, time, i.e. on the interpretative community. It is inevitable that learners use L1 as a resource and make certain right or wrong suppositions, based on their experience with the mother tongue. So, we have to think of how to use best this inevitable tendency of our students in assuming that the same aspects of L1 can be also used in L2.

Research Questions:

This case study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What does translation in ESL teaching mean to TESL undergraduate student teachers?
2. Why use translation in ESL classroom?
3. How and what are the translation activities for the ESL classroom?

COCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The basis of this study is to build a bridge between two fields: translation pedagogy (the knowledge about correct decoding of the original text and idiomatic encoding into the target text, that is knowledge about language use and linguistics i.e. text analysis and comprehension of cultural features) and pedagogical translation i.e. use of translation in language classroom (Zabalbeascoa, 1997) which are seen as the facilitating pillars in the discussion of the use of L1 in L2. Translation is a productive activity that focuses on de-contextualizing and re-contextualization as a communicative learning activity. Although many English as a Second/Foreign Language (ES/FL) authors had dismissed translation as being negative technique or component of EFL teaching. However, critical and creative authors such as Alan Duff (1989/1996), Deller and Rinvoluceri (2002), Luke Prodromou (2000), Tim Bowen (n.d.) and David Atkinson (1987) among others, have come forward reflecting upon its use in the language classroom based on the idea that translation activities may contribute to the students' language learning in an accurate, clear and flexible way. Auerbach (1993:19) put it coherently as: "Starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English." There appears to be an increasing conviction that the first language (L1) has a necessary and facilitating role in the second and foreign language (L2) classroom. In our case, this conviction comes from personal experience with ESL/EFL students in higher education, recent literature read, and presentations attended. This position may seem heretical in light of what most of us were taught when trained as ESL/EFL professionals, but we believe it is worthy of serious consideration. Historically, grammar-translation method had used translation in teaching Latin's grammar, text and rhetoric (Howatt, 1984). It was this translation pedagogy adopted by modern languages teachers in teaching second/foreign language learners. In actuality, it is the misconception of translation pedagogy rather than pedagogical translation use in communicative learning that had rendered translation being ineffective. In this paper, we will discuss the application of translation pedagogy by ESL student teachers into productive pedagogical translation in teaching ESL/EFL. We hope that the actualization of pedagogical translation by these student teachers will be able to shed some light into the issue of how to tackle reluctant learners and how low language input/intake in ESL/EFL classroom can be increased.

METHODOLOGY

Bhattacharya (2007) and Creswell (2007) said phenomenology is about the essence or experience of the individual or group of individuals, which is described by how they make meaning of the phenomenon they experience. Since the primary research question is focused on how successful TESL undergraduate student teachers persist despite of language barriers, a phenomenological approach was employed. This approach allowed the researchers to focus on how the student teachers' made meaning of the use of translation in teaching ESL to remote school students. Data were collected via online interviews, followed by focus group interview. The interviews were transcribed

and member checked (Bhattacharya, 2007) to ensure accurate representation of the participants' stories. Following completion of the interview transcripts, the participants' responses were analyzed for themes related to language barriers to use of translation in ESL classroom

Procedure

Participants

The participants were 18 TESL student teachers, 17 females and 1 male. They were in their final year of their education course and undergoing teaching methodology course. Part of their course requirement was to conduct ESL teaching in a remote school under Rural Outreach Program, School of Education and Social Development. Prior to the project, they did not have any teaching experience especially in remote schools. A week teaching program in rural school was carried out with four classes at a rural school in Malubang village, Pitas, Sabah. A total of 18 student teachers from School of Education and Social Development took part in the lessons and received firsthand experience with teaching ESL using games. All the students were in their final year of TESL program. The subjects were considered representative (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). It was expected that the student teachers' exposure to the TESL Methodology course might inspire them to provide cogent feedback and suggestions concerning teaching ESL. The settings were intentionally selected in order to familiarize student teachers with a challenging environment.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to beginning the interviews and data collection, the study was explained to the participants. The purpose of the study was explained in detail during a lecture. After each participant confirmed they understood the purpose of the study, they were requested to read and sign the informed consent form. To explore the use of translation in ESL teaching, data were collected via online interview. The interview protocol contained two parts with a total of 7 questions. The first part, Questions 1 through 4, focused on student teachers' perceptions of translation in ESL in improving their basic general English competence, and the second part, Questions 5 through 7, on how well it could improve their TESL competence (appendix 1). To further explore the participants' perceptions on using translation in ESL teaching, a focus group interview was conducted after the teaching program/outreach program. Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection by the primary researcher. Significant statements and clusters of meaning were identified from the interview data. From this, textual (how) and structural (what) descriptions of the participants' experiences were developed. This led to the essence of the participants' experiences (Bhattacharya, 2007). The data was then compared and themes were identified. Each participant was given a copy of their online interview transcript for review and to allow them to reflect and clarify any of their responses. This is a method of triangulation referred to as member checking (Bhattacharya, 2007). Using another researcher's experience and expertise for data verification is another form of triangulation that was used to verify data (Huberman & Miles, 2002) was utilized to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. The last form of triangulation that was employed was the use of thick descriptions. Creswell (2007) says that thick descriptions "creates verisimilitude and produces for the readers the feeling that they experience (the readers), or perhaps could experience, the events described" (p. 194). Consistencies in the findings were evident between the participants, and data saturation for these participants had been reached.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. TESL undergraduate student teachers' view of translation in the ESL teaching

Translation is a productive activity that focuses on de-contextualizing and re-contextualization as a communicative learning activity. According to Zabalbeascoa (1997), translation can be seen in two perspectives i.e. Translation pedagogy (the knowledge about correct decoding of the original text and idiomatic encoding into the target text, that is knowledge about language use and linguistics (text analysis, for instance), and comprehension of cultural features) and pedagogical translation (Use of translation in language classroom). The use of translation in ESL classroom, as perceived by TESL undergraduate seen, in the verbatim below is, predominantly of the two forms of translation mentioned earlier:

a. pedagogical translation: translation provides learners with the practice and skills necessary to communicate accurately, meaningfully and appropriately;

- *To me, translation in ESL means that a teacher uses another method to convey information to the students. It might due to the low proficiency of the students which causes them unable to fully comprehend the target language, thus, translation helps the students to understand the information better.*

- *Translation in ESL means the use of another language (first language or mother tongue or language that is more familiar to the students) in explaining words or structure of the second language.*

- *As for me, translation in ESL teaching is the use of the students' first language in the teaching and learning process.*

b. translation pedagogy: through translation activities, teachers can promote interaction among learners since they involve the negotiation of multiple possibilities of form and meaning;

- *Translation in ESL teaching involves translating L1 to L2. It could moves from L1 to L2 or the opposite direction. Translation in ESL emphasize the L1 in order to teach a new learning item or as a medium of instruction.*

- *For me, translation means expressing of something written or spoken language in different language.*

- *To me, translation in ESL teaching means the use of L1 in explaining certain words in L2 to students.*

Basically, the student teachers' view of translation in the ESL teaching revolved around; pedagogical translation: translation provides learners with the practice and skills necessary to communicate accurately, meaningfully and appropriately, and translation pedagogy: through translation activities, teachers can promote interaction among learners since they involve the negotiation of multiple possibilities of form and meaning.

2. Development of ESL Linguistic Abilities in Rural classroom using the Translation strategy - How and what?

Translation can also play a role in the development of linguistic abilities since teachers and learners are engaged in the work of sharing and negotiating meaning depending on the context. Besides, translation fosters speculation and discussion, and it helps the development of abilities considered fundamental for communication, such as interpretation, negotiation, and expression of meaning.

Appropriacy of translation

This study showed that student teachers search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity). They found the need to use translation:

- *A method to understand some statements, phrase...(R1)*
- *Way to comprehend words...(R2)*
- *...one of the ways the language seem easier to learn for the students. (R5)*
- *...replacing a L2 word with a L1 word to show meaning...(R9)*
- *...to make our learners have better understanding on the particular language content or part...(R11)*

Translation usage sources available

Translation usage sources reported used by these student teachers were three types: Translation/Dictionaries texts, Peers, and Self. They largely made use of dictionaries as their reference in assisting them in translation, followed by internet source, Thesaurus, books and article and visual illustration. These three ways are used in conjunction to seeking reference in conducting or using translation in teaching practice come from the advice of senior teachers of English and themselves to recognise the best words and meaning. Therefore, the three sources help these student teachers to integrate the translation pedagogy into pedagogical translation in meaning-making reality in rural ESL classroom.

3. Translation Teaching and Learning activities for the rural ESL classroom

Language content and language skills are the two main elements that are fundamental in producing proficient learner of ESL. Some of the aspects for designing and running translation as identified by the TESL undergraduate can be categorized into four types as follows:

Type 1-The typical process of meaning-making:

- i. explain a word, phrases or forms by paraphrasing using simpler English words and then ask for any of the learners who understands and*
- ii. if the learners still cannot grasp the meaning, I will then translate the item into the equivalent of the L1 of the learners. (R7)*

Type 2 – Learner's role in meaning making:

- 1. During a reading activity, teacher asks the learners to highlight the vocabulary or sentences that they do not understand (in terms of meaning).*
- 2. Learners work in group and translate a short text. Compare the translations and discuss why there are differences.(R6)*

Type 3 – direct translation into L1:

- It is the version in another language where a word, phrase or text in another language such as Malay language that has a meaning equivalent to that of the original English language.*
- Translating words/instructions in L2 into L1 in the case of students having really low L2 proficiency (after equivalent L2 explanation has been given but does not help). (R8-9)*

Type 4 – Translation as ESL's classroom survival kit:

- Using translation in ESL isn't a much recommended way of teaching. Learning is not holistic and students still depend a lot on their mother tongue or first language. They might neglect the importance of English at the end of the lesson.*
- It will only be used when it is really in need.*
- So far, it is necessary for the use of translation in the classroom*
- Students can understand more and well about the topic when there's translation.*
- It should depend on situations. The usage of the target of the language is still essential but translation is sometimes needed. Even so, translation should not occur so many times in teaching and learning of the process.*
- The use of translation is sort of like a medium used to understand a language better.*
- Translation is a method of teaching which should be used minimally for the extent of communication purpose.*
- In my opinion, translation can only be used when we are teaching them complex vocabulary or words with low frequency that we seldomly use in our daily life. The basic noun, pronoun, preposition and verb do not have to be translated. (R1-6)*

Translation is a difficult activity to set up and can go badly wrong. In the description of teaching of ESL by these TESL undergraduate student teachers featured the focus on receptive, productive and integration of skills. In this study, the student teachers had chosen language activities that focused on using translation pedagogy, pedagogical translation/method, problem-based activities, and context based teaching.

The activities mentioned by student teachers in this study can be translated into a common pattern for teaching ESL using translation. The basic procedure of using translation in ESL classroom can be summed up as below:

*Firstly, it is necessary to plan carefully and fully, and to identify the right kinds of aims.
Next, try to integrate translation with other skills/systems practice where possible. Avoid activities which require your learners to use their L1 a lot.
Then, use translation L1 - L2 or L2 - L1 work in the context of aims and also of the class profile.
Finally, encourage them to explore translation further by themselves - it is a fascinating, complex and worthy process.*

DISCUSSION: WHAT DOES TRANSLATION MEAN?

In this study, the practice of translation encourages the reflection on language usage, exchange of different points of view, and raising language awareness among the student teachers. The results of the study have indicated that using translation in the teaching of ESL in the rural areas by these student teachers basically met the needs of the target learners, who were struggling mostly with basic level of English proficiency. This study has revealed some evidences to support the idea that effective instruction for English as A Second/Foreign Language using translation in rural school context should take into considerations the following: (1) developing proficiency in natural language or conversation through understanding the meaning of word, and sentence via translation to relate to the learners' everyday experiences, (2) providing ample opportunity for learning, even over-learning, through translation via recitation, repetition, and practice toward automaticity of knowledge and skills, and (3) scaffolding for understanding and development of thinking skills through the methods of translation. Specifically, the findings from this study too revealed several areas to be focused on when using translation in ESL classroom: learner proficiency level, scaffolding, content of the materials, relevancy to the context, and spiral learning.

Learner Proficiency Level

Due to the target students' basic level of English proficiency, it is recommended that translation be practiced in order to ease learning anxiety and make learning manageable.

Scaffolding

Support should be rendered wherever possible. For example, hints should be provided to help facilitate discussions; example sentences should be added in order for learners to fully understand the usage of new words. Additionally, a glossary, flash cards, and pronunciation prompts would be helpful.

Content of the Materials

No matter how good the contents are, they have to appeal to the learners to boost learning motivation. A section incorporating useful expressions can be added; articles can deal with more current topics that students find important, and conversation sections could be brought to light with interesting titles.

Relevancy to context

Stronger relevancy brings higher motivation. Therefore, in the beginning of the lesson there could be a brief section discussing how the pertaining chapter relates to the readers' experience. Low frequency words and phrases related to learners' major difficulties are identified.

Spiral Learning

New vocabulary items should be introduced in context and then translated repeatedly cycled in the subsequent sections or units to facilitate learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the translation strategies used by the student teachers in remote school could be employed with students of all ages in schools and at homes. Its importance lies in the multiple benefits offered to children. Translation as part of the communicative ELT classroom approach is still a controversial area and one that provokes strong opinions. In this study, we can say that the roles of translation in the second/foreign language classroom are many: First, it helps students to see the link

between language usage and use. Second, it encourages students to see the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Third, through a comparison of the target language and the students' native language, most language learning difficulties are revealed. Finally, the development of translation of ESL learning strategies in the rural school context gives learners autonomy in language awareness. Inevitably, the eclectic and freer methodologies of the 21st Century brought a freedom both for teachers and learners, and translation coming back into the teaching-learning of ESL/FL, will contribute to the development of linguistic competent that individuals apt to interact in a world of many, different languages.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview questions

My Questions to you:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does translation in ESL teaching mean to you? 2. Why do you use translation in your ESL classroom (if not, Why?) 3. Whendoes it necessitate you to use translation in the classroom? 4. How do you describe the use of translation in your ESL classroom? 5. Who/What do you refer to help in translation? 6. Which language skills (listening, Speaking, Reading, or writing) need the use of translation in teaching? Why? 7. Which language contents (grammar, sound system, or vocabulary) need the use of translation in teaching? Why?