

Foreign Language Teaching and Translation

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Abstract

As the world steadily becomes the global village, many learning institutions have embraced foreign language teaching as part of their syllabus. The major policy shifts and changes in foreign policies of many highly-developed countries have also broadened the scope of foreign language teaching and acquisition across different cultures. The research paper explores the aspect of culture on teaching English language as a foreign language. Specifically, the treatise reviews the missing factors, strategies for teaching foreign language, technological impacts, effective ways of teaching foreign language, and development of foreign language and translation. In the conclusion segment, the paper presents the general overview of foreign language and translation and how they directly and positively impact on an individual's writing skills besides improving on vocabulary.

Keywords: Foreign language, Translation, Technology, Culture, and Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

Since the pace of globalisation has been on the verge in the recent period, many universities and higher education institutions have included foreign language teaching as a compulsory subject in their academic curriculum and syllabus. Almost all the world's leading universities and colleges offer various educational programmes in foreign language acquisition and learning.

Other than the globalization aspect, major policy shifts and changes in the foreign policies of many highly-developed countries have also broadened the scope of foreign language acquisition, and an increasing number of translators and interpreters of different languages are hired by various public and private organizations.

By using many secondary resources, the purpose of this article is to examine the most common issues related with the foreign language teaching and translation. This paper briefly highlights the common factors and considerations for foreign language teachers.

1.1 Foreign Language Teaching and Translation: The Missing Factors

Translation is the gateway for understanding others and their civilizations. Therefore, universities are interested in the courses of translation in their endeavours to train and graduate competent and efficient translators since mistakes in this field may be disastrous (Amer & Walid, 2009).

English departments of Arab universities have been in an uncertain state of direction from the very beginning for lack of a specific educational policy on whether emphasis should be given to language and linguistics or literature, or simultaneously both. Learnings toward English literature have always been evident, but course offerings and faculty recruitment show a general lack (if not absence) of direction (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2009).

1.1.1 Translation Programmes Development

The number of university-level programs in the training of translators and interpreters has increased spectacularly since the beginning of the 1990s. At present, there are more than 300 of such programs worldwide, in addition to the courses in translation given in virtually all Modern Language programs. This growth responds directly to the increase in cross-cultural exchanges at all levels, and thus to the general economic process known as globalization. However, it is also a result of the progressive breaking down of the distinction between academic and vocational tertiary institutions (Amer & Walid, 2009). Being a foreign language teacher is in many ways unique within the profession of teaching. Becoming a foreign language teacher, too, is a different process from that which other future teachers' experience. This reality is rooted in the subject matter of foreign language itself. In foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, in foreign language teaching, the medium is the message (Hammadou and Bernhardt, 2001).

Learning a secondary language has always been referred as one the most challenging tasks for the students and higher education learners. The first object one should take into account when teaching how to translate a text is to examine the qualities of the translator. No doubt, the main quality should be that the translator has a perfect knowledge of the target language, which must always be his mother tongue (Claramonte and Carmen, 2004). The didactics of translation are perhaps the area of Translation Studies which has received less attention: "the teaching of translation has been seriously impeded by what can only be described as a great gulf between translation theory and practice" (Claramonte and Carmen, 2004). Research on word translation has focused on the processing routes used by different types of bilinguals and factors that affect the speed of translation, and model development has focused on how to account for these factors (Francis et al, 2011).

Although the English language is used broadly throughout the Arab World, English departments have, in a way, failed to produce linguistically competent graduates. On the assumption that Arab universities should turn out

graduates who can work effectively toward the social and economic needs of their countries, it is presupposed that English departments should teach the English language and provide an understanding of the culture it belongs to, rather than try to acculturate Arab students into the English language native-speaker system as they have traditionally done (Al-Kharabsheh et. al., 2009).

1.1.2 Proactive Approaches towards Effective Translation Programmes

The first and the most important thing to do in language teaching is to evoke interest, desire and positive attitude in the students towards the target language. The viewpoint that is to be given to the students on the importance of the foreign language learning will directly affect the efficiency of the teachers in the language teaching activities (Gocer, 2010). First, teachers of English as a foreign language are assumed to be individuals involved in supporting the learning of the English language by learners whose contact with this language in their own countries is limited largely to the classroom. Second, it may be helpful to point out from the outset that although the focus of this study is on the characteristics of language teachers, the findings suggest that these cannot be considered in isolation of the characteristics of language teaching (Hammadou and Bernhardt, 2001).

Translation errors on the job may very well lead to disasters. In chemical context, they can cause fatal poisoning or terrible explosion. In legal translation, they can unlawfully make a defendant lose an expensive lawsuit. In aeronautics context, they may bring a plane down from the sky on people's heads. Thus, poor performance of an interpreter can spoil the proceedings of a whole international conference. The universities in Gaza have never dealt with such nasty realities, but they are very real (Bordonaro, 2006).

It goes without saying that teachers of translation, when elaborating their programmes, must also decide what kind of knowledge and what kind of competence he is to teach the student. The situation in the Faculties of Translation is different from that in the Departments of English Studies. The programme of Translation Studies must take into account the needs of contemporary society: the increasing demand for translators in some fields—for instance, technology, law, economy, medicine, and dubbing among other (Short, 2004). Thus, the curriculum should include such subjects as cultural studies on the organization of political, cultural or social institutions of the country of the target language, and some others connected with the functioning of international organizations such as the UN or the EEC. Other subjects in the curriculum should include the teaching of technical terminology and specialized jargon, and text analysis among others (Claramonte and Carmen, 2004).

According to Wang (2005), “The entry of vocational concerns into the university environment has led to the demand for Translation Studies as an academic discipline, largely as a means of creating institutional legitimacy. The same process has forced traditional pedagogical concepts to adjust to the rapidly changing technologies of professional translation and localization, occasionally in conflict with the concerns of established Translation Studies” (p. 34).

1.2 Foreign Language Teaching and Translation: The Role of Technology

Wang (2005) opine that Language is a living thing, so the best way to learn a language is interactive, authentic environments, and for this computer technology and the Internet are powerful tools for assisting these approaches to language teaching (Wang 2005). Many teachers have been required to move into the field of translation, even though their background is in language teaching at various levels. These teachers create a demand for specific training of trainers in this field (Ingrid et al., 2001).

Knowing the fact that foreign language teaching and translation is a specialized subject, foreign languages experts and researchers are devising various plans, strategies and teaching methods to make the learning process easier and hassle-free for the learners. Reflectively, with the advent of networked computers and Internet technology, computer-based instruction has been widely used in language classrooms throughout the United States (Wang, 2005). As with any subject, the field of foreign language instruction has seen many changes and continues to develop—all with the intent of producing students who can use and apply the language in meaningful and interactive ways (Jochum, 2012). Many institutions have recruited professional translators to give classes, often for contents requiring technical competencies that the language teachers do not have. This creates a demand for training in the teaching techniques appropriate to such contents (Pym, 2010).

The existence of translation and, therefore, its practice, dates back to the birth of languages. Since humans became nomadic, they encountered other people and cultures, and the need of translation emerged in order to facilitate communication. However, the translation was not conceived as a discipline of its own until 1976, when André Lefevere christened this discipline Translation Studies, and in the academic field, the translation used to be associated with the teaching of foreign languages (Pariante-Beltran, 2006).

Professional translation is a specialized skill that requires specialized training. And, actually, it is not the goal we would like to achieve. The goal of translation is more like to provide learning opportunities in the process of creating translations and examination of them as final products in order to develop language awareness. Translation activities should be used in the English classroom, and they should be supported by communicative, natural learning methods (Bordonaro, 2006). Instructors are often left to find their own material about the author or the culture of the source text. Lacking the appropriate pedagogical tools, they struggle to provide information

about either the original work or about translation itself, and they might feel uneasy about teaching material for which they lack adequate preparation (Maier et al., 2010). The most important factors that guide the learning and teaching process and enable the students to gain acquisitions in accordance with the determined goals are the class and non-class applications. The application pattern emerges with the approaches, methods, techniques and tactics which are followed in the process. The approach (strategy) is actualized with the methods, and the methods are actualized with the techniques and tactics. The strategy is existent between the methods and techniques (Gocer, 2010).

Usages of modern technological applications has, also, been increased many folds, and foreign language teachers and educators spend most of their time in mastering the use of these technologies applications and assistive technology access methods. In today's language classes, "the teacher's role should shift from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," while students should actively search for and explore answers instead of receiving standard interpretations. Technology integration helps this shifting process for teachers and students" (Wang, 2005).

Even within the best communicative-based foreign language classroom, one will still find activities related to the direct instruction of vocabulary and grammar which include supplying-written or orally--the English word in response to its Spanish equivalent or vice versa, making flashcards with the English word on one side and the Spanish word on the other, or playing vocabulary games such as memory or hangman (Jochum, 2012).

The necessary elementary English language skills include spoken and written communicative fluency, reading and translation skills, and research capability. In addition, English departments should contribute to a better international and intercultural understanding, collaborate with other departments to provide a broad-based, high quality education, serve the English language needs of other departments, and direct graduate programs in applied linguistics and English as a foreign language (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2009).

Without good instructional materials, the common standards could be hamstrung, experts say. And the quality of the materials produced for the common core remains to be seen. Publishers large and small have jumped into the fray, offering an array of programs they say are "aligned" to the common core. States and districts are working individually and together to draft their own. Those who led the writing of the standards are crafting explanatory documents to guide teachers and publishers. Subject-matter groups are offering resources, and the two groups of states working on tests are creating, or planning, an array of supports including online banks of teaching tools (Gewertz, 2012).

Access to information on the World Wide Web and the use of new information technologies, especially networked computers, has contributed to increased communication among foreign language teachers and students in many countries, and through e-mail, mailing lists, discussion groups, and chat rooms, the Internet has increased access to and communication in the foreign language with both native and non-native speakers (Přifer, 1992a).

As all of this happens, the more established translation schools are facing challenges from the many younger institutions, resulting in numerous efforts to establish or confirm the prestige in this field. This might explain, for example, why there are so many international conferences in Translation Studies, organized by both the older and the younger institutions (Slepchenko, 2011).

1.3 Foreign Language Teaching and Translation via 'Self-Directed Learning'

Many researchers are of the opinion that foreign language teaching and acquisition can be effectively simplified by applying self-directed learning methods. Although "the foreign language teaching literature is replete with studies of learning strategies, self-directed learning has received scant attention in the current knowledge base" (DU 2012). Self-directed language learning generally describes an approach to language learning: that of a learner trying to progress independently of a language classroom in which the teacher directs the learning (Bordonaro, 2006).

Deborah and Echevarria point out that students from diverse educational, lingual and ethnic backgrounds have different needs, and they all should be taken with a single fitting instructional approach. Deborah and Echvarria state that:

"We do English language learners a disservice if we think of them as one-dimensional on the basis of their limited English proficiency. ELLs have diverse backgrounds, languages, and education profiles. Some read and write above grade level in their own language; others have had limited schooling. Some enter school highly motivated to learn because of family support or an innate drive to succeed others have had negative school experiences that squelched their motivation. Many come from middle class families with high levels of literacy; others live in poverty without books in their homes. Those whose native language is Latin-based can recognize English words with the same Latin derivations; those who have different language backgrounds, such as Mandarin or Arabic, lack that advantage. Some students' native language does not even have a written form" (Short, 2004).

Although learner training had demonstrated its desirable effect on the development of self-direction in second

language learning in various contexts, what we know about learner training is relatively piecemeal and unsubstantiated by empirical studies (Lai, 1999). Other notable methods include the sole use of the foreign language in the classroom; a modular approach to teaching in which students are grouped according to proficiency level rather than age or grade level; and project-oriented learning that emphasizes the use of authentic materials through technology and integrates learning about English-speaking countries with language and content learning (Pfister, 1992b).

1.4 Teaching Translations in Foreign Languages: The Cultural Factors

In order to teach a foreign language to students, language teachers must be ready to confront various cultural issues, as learners of second languages, sometimes, feel a kind of 'cultural invasion', during the learning process. In fact, Pfister (1992a) argues that "it is our goal to make our students knowledgeable and sensitive to the realities of a foreign culture, so that they can function expertly in it. In this process, each student has to reach inside his or her own cultural reality and make personal adjustments in order to incorporate a new culture within his or her personality" (Pfister, 1992a).

Most of the available literature reveals that contributors to this intriguing debate could be rightly divided into three camps: the linguistic, the literary, and the moderate. Those who subscribe to the linguistic camp are in favour of the view that language and linguistics courses are of much more pragmatic and practical value for students in their future careers, while those who adhere to the literary camp maintain the view that literature courses are far more useful than those in language and linguistics. The third camp expresses moderation through levelling out the debate, as they call for incorporating the two components. Accordingly, the first two camps have continuously been striving to persuade English departments across the Arab World to amend their study plans and curricula by introducing more courses in the respective specialization (or component) being advocated by them (Al-Kharabsheh, et. al. 2009).

Translation is 'Cinderella' in the family of language teaching techniques, though basic language teaching methods throughout history have centred on translation and almost all language learning developed out of translation. As Alan Marley said, translation has been put into the methodological lumber room along with such activities as dictation, reading aloud, etc. It is considered to be something boring, pointless, difficult, 'irrelevant' and at last, uncommunicative. Pfister (1992b) describes 8 steps to bring the student in line with those of the target culture. According to Pfister (1992b), in confronting a target language text, we instruct our students to follow eight steps: (1) read the text, (2) underline words you do not understand, (3) look them up in a dictionary, (4) make personal statements with each word, (5) turn these statements into questions, (6) pose these questions to your neighbour, (7) write down his or her responses, and (8) read the text again for understanding. In this way, the student is trained to create a meaningful context for unfamiliar vocabulary (Pfister 1992b). We have to prepare the next generation of experts to be not only first rate in their various fields (engineering, business, politics) but also completely at ease in a second language and culture. It is no longer good enough to be able to speak German, for example--that is, to be able merely to manipulate the linguistic structures of a foreign culture (Pfister 1992a).

Pfister(1992) concludes that: "On the foreign-language side of the program, efforts are divided into two parts: (1) the preparation phase and (2) the internship experience. The preparation phase consists of language acquisition courses--one per semester--each of which is structured with the goal of communicative mastery for an actual setting in Germany in mind. At all times, the content of any given language structure is at the forefront of instruction: culture. The cultural assumptions inherent in German modes of thought, speech, and behaviour structure the presentation of grammar from the very beginning of language instruction. All four language skills--listening, speaking, reading, and writing--are coordinated within this cultural approach" (p. 32)

2. Conclusion

Above discussion briefly touched various aspects and concerns regarding foreign language teaching and translation, but it requires more in-depth researches and studies to find out different learning needs, both for the learners and teachers of the foreign languages. Foreign language teachers must realise the fact that they belong to a specialised field which, always, needs up-gradations and advancements on a regular basis.

According to Al-Kharabsheh et al. (2009), "Studying translation helps become freelance translators, interpreters, tourist guides, teachers, to mention but a few; It enables us to have good knowledge of and skills in many academic fields including different topics" (p. 32). Reflectively, translation is critical in exposing religious and cultural affiliation of learners. In the process, the stereotyping views about the foreign language will be minimised as learners develop the urge to appreciate diversity. In comparison to literature and linguistics, "translation is very interesting and this helps us be affluent in different translation activities; Studying translation reinforces one's linguistic capabilities and it also exposes the individual to many literary genres" (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2009).

Therefore, translation is directly and positively impact on an individual's writing skills besides improving on

vocabulary. Moreover, translation fosters the attitude of practicality in linguistics and literature analysis within a flexible scope of understanding. Specifically, the concepts of semantic, sociolinguistics provide the much needed skills for translation with the context of a subject (Al-Kharabsheh et al., 2009). The most challenging aspect of foreign language teaching is to understand the needs of the learners that may vary from country and country. Though, 'lost in translation' has become a universal phenomenon for the foreign language learners, language teachers and educators must utilise newly-introduced teaching methods to get the desired results.

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