

Translation as a teaching aid in the ESP classroom

S. Danilina

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Corresponding author. E-mail: sv.danilina@gmail.com

Paper received 31.01.20; Accepted for publication 15.02.20.

<https://doi.org/10.31174/SEND-PP2020-220VIII88-02>

Abstract. In previous years, translation has been viewed as an inefficient teaching aid in communicative EFL teaching. It has rarely featured in either EFL or ESP textbooks. However, recent views on translation as a source of supplementary EFL practice expressed primarily by the teachers of theory and practice of translation, as well as the author's own practical experience, evidence to the fact that translation has managed to stand to the test of time, and has retained its teaching tool value, particularly for advanced students of English. This paper presents some examples of practical use of translation exercises in the ESP classroom of history students.

Keywords: *ESP, translation, history students, text-based learning (TBL).*

Introduction. The extensive use of communicatively oriented methodologies in the recent decades has pushed translation exercises to the outskirts of both teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom, translation being central to the ill reputed grammar-translation method. Although in the 20th century it served as a heavily explored teaching aid, it has been under-researched, viewed as an undesirable deviation from teaching English *through* English, as an obsolete methodology that discourages learners from communication, "artificial and restrictive exercise, counterproductive, forcing dependence on L1, purposeless and with no application in the real world, frustrating and de-motivating" [2, p. 68]. Today foreign language learners realize that they need as much L2 practice as possible during precious classroom time and often see the use of L1 associated with translation as a hindrance to efficient language acquisition. Therefore, in recent decades the usage of the L1 or translation in class has been frowned upon and in most cases teachers have tried to avoid it as much as possible.

A brief overview of relevant publications. Since the beginning of the 21st century, translation as a supplementary teaching tool has been surviving a rebirth of interest, with a lot of scholars commenting on the benefits of its use in the EFL and, particularly, ESP classroom [2; 3; 4; 5; 9, et al.]. And when it comes to the ESP classroom in particular, various kinds of translation exercises seem to have always remained relevant [4, p. 67]. Translation has started to be seen as a useful tool in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and ESP [2; 5]; the use of L1 in ESP instruction has also started receiving considerable attention of researchers [8]. V. Leonardi, for example, maintains that translation is a very useful tool to learn grammar, syntax, lexis and culture-related issues in both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), and points out that "while translating, students are encouraged to notice differences in structures and vocabulary and they have to develop methods and strategies to deal with them" [5]. Discussion of differences and similarities during the translation process helps learners understand the interaction of the two languages and the problems caused by their L1. It also helps learners appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the L1 and L2, for example in the comparison of idiomatic language such as metaphors.

S. Marinov explores what he refers to as a post-communicative cognitive paradigm and promising pro-

spects for translation in the ESP context [6, p. 229]. He observes that "translation is an activity or a strategy naturally employed by both language teachers and learners. Accordingly, despite some possible limitations, its potential should be studied and exploited since it could help language learners gain deeper understanding of what they do when they move between the two languages and thus indicate the areas that might need improvement" [6, p. 227].

The idea of post-communicative competence is supported by J. Kic-Drgas who remarks that "the objective of language learning is no longer defined in terms of acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language. The teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence" [4, p. 257]. The researcher also emphasizes that the use of mother tongue and translation may facilitate comprehension of specialized texts (Kic-Drgas [4, p. 259], which is particularly relevant in ESP learning. Furthermore, translation of stimulating materials involving multi-modal texts (for instance photographs and other visual representations of reality), as it is further noted by Kic-Drgas [4, p. 260], inspires learners' creativity. Thus, ESP and translation as a teaching method is a multi-faceted issue that continues to be raised by researchers who see it as deserving a closer analytic look and needing rethinking.

Importantly, teaching ESP and employing translation as a method of teaching and learning does not require from ESP learners in-depth knowledge of translation theory as it is required of translation students. As noted by Witte [4, p. 258], "It is not essential to be an expert in translation and translation theory to use translation in class". But translation activities used for learning ESP and the use of L1 can contribute to facilitate comprehension of specialised materials in the ESP classroom and improve learners' skills [1, p. 45].

Thus, the main **objective of this paper** is to analyse some instances of using translation as a teaching aid in the ESP classes of history students and to reflect on the benefits that translation practice can bring to ESP learning.

Description of the main material. The situation with using translation in the ESP classroom of Ukrainian students has its own specificity. Unlike learning contexts of other countries, where translation has been negatively viewed as an EFL teaching tool, in Ukraine it is still widely used in school lessons. Therefore, when they come to the university, Ukrainian students in most cases view

translation as a normal practice that they have long been used to. Throughout the first two years at Taras Shevchenko University during which they study general English, students, on the contrary, feel surprised by the usual lack of translation exercises in communicatively oriented classes. When translation practice returns to the classroom in the third and fourth year of studies in their ESP course, they do not seem to have any negative attitude towards it.

ESP course for history students that this article focuses on has been designed to match the learners' future needs. In case the students continue to work internationally in the academic field of history, they are likely to encounter English in all aspects of their professional life, as most research is published in English. They will primarily need English to read and write in their field of professional interest, and also to be able to clearly convey their message orally at conferences or while interacting with their colleagues personally.

The question of purpose and learners' needs, as pointed out by Kic-Drgas [4, p. 256] is even more relevant in ESP than in EFL. Although translation may not be the most effective exercise for all learners (but rather for those more inclined to the analytical learning of languages), it is indispensable in ESP where it trains learners in remembering accurate equivalents of their professional terminology, as well as promotes comprehension of authentic texts required for their professional competence. When students start working in their field of choice, "such activities may prove very useful as they will have a set of common phrases specific to that domain and to which they can always refer, as well as skills for further learning. They will be provided with a basic foundation, the tools needed to face new linguistic challenges in their future professional life" [2, p. 71].

The translation exercises that the article comments on come from the textbook written by our department for history students whose level of English has reached B1+/B2 level according to CEFR. Each chapter centers round a certain historical topic and contains several texts followed by a set of exercises with some that offer translation practice. Translation exercises are meant to be done by learners after some other kinds of exercises on the text have been completed, and so the learners are properly prepared for translation. However, as a rule, teachers will further supplement this practice with necessary comments on equivalence, differences and similarities between languages.

In one of such exercises, the learners may be given L1 equivalents of words and collocations and invited to find their correspondences in the text. For example, a text on Ancient Greece offers the vocabulary units like: *золотий вік грецької культури*; прагнути гармонії та рівноваги; забезпечувати модель; погляд на життя; говорити красномовно; присвятити своє життя чомусь; повага до закону. Such practice promotes 'noticing' and memorising of the accurate equivalents of professional terminology essential to efficient professional interaction of students, as well as offers them strategies of processing an authentic text using it as a source of relevant vocabulary. Furthermore, the firm knowledge of such equivalents

will enhance the learners' speaking fluency and their quality of writing.

In terms of grammar exercises, translation can be particularly helpful in getting students to 'notice' the grammar construction unavailable in their L1, which can promote the accurate use of those in the learners' oral and written output. Initially, the learners are likely to refer to such constructions in the process of mental translating from their L1 into L2 but later they might start using them in their production automatically. For example a text might highlight an *appear + to infinitive* construction available neither in Ukrainian nor in Russian, as well as impersonal passive constructions like "were said to live":

Most important to historians, Greeks *appear to have temporarily lost* the art of writing during the Dorian Age.

His questioning, like that of the Sophists, *appeared to challenge* the authority of the gods, of parents, and of the city's laws.

The Greeks believed in many gods, who *were said to live* on Mount Olympus in northern Greece.

Greek society in the 400's and 300's B.C. *is considered to be* the first example of a classical civilization.

Another notoriously problematic issue is the use of modals, particularly modals of deduction in their past tense form. Historical texts can serve as a valuable source of these constructions and promote the learners' understanding and accurate usage thereof:

However, excavations conducted in north-western Turkey suggested that the stories of the Trojan War *might have been based on* real cities, people, and events.

Or attending to reduced adverbial clauses like:

When given a death sentence, Socrates calmly drank hemlock, a slow-acting poison and talked with his friends until it took effect.

Which may come in handy to make the learners' writing more concise.

Conclusions. It is important to recognise the problems associated with traditional approaches to translation, as it is easy to reduce translation practice to a solitary, time-consuming and unrewarding activity based on demotivating texts. To make it more dynamic and stimulating, translation tasks should be based on the texts relevant for the learners' subject matter, they should be quite short and translated by students in groups, where possible the element of a communication gap should be offered.

Each translation task should be followed by the analysis of the learners' texts, which includes the discussion of translation transformations used by the learners, their strategies of adapting target texts to the standards and expectations of the target audience. This part of learning is very valuable because it enables students to analyze various solutions of translating the same sentence, and although the range of possibilities in specialized translation is not as wide as in the case of general translation, the value of the exercise cannot be underestimated. In spite of the fact that translation does not exactly enhance students' communication competency, it can be helpful in making learners aware of the shortcomings typical of their foreign language productive activities and in bringing ESP learners' oral and written output closer to the natural L2 speaker production.

REFERENCES

1. Avand A. Q. Using Translation and Reading Comprehension of ESP Learners // *The Asian ESP Journal*, 2009. – No.1 (5). – pp. 44-60.
2. Chirobocea-Tudor O. A Case for the Use of Translation in ESP Classes // *Journal of Languages for Specific Purposes*, 2018. – No.5. – pp. 67-76.
3. Fuertes-Olivera P. A. and Piqué-Noguera C. The Literal Translation Hypothesis in ESP Teaching/Learning Environments // *Scripta Manent*, 2013. – No. 8(1). – pp. 15-30.
4. Kic-Drgas J. Translation in the ESP Teaching // *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 2014. – No.2 (2). – pp. 253-261.
5. Leonardi V. Teaching Business English Through Translation // *Journal of Language & Translation*, March 2009. – pp. 139-153.
6. Marinov S. Translation Exercise Aided by Data-driven Learning in ESP Context // *ESP Today*, 2016. – Vol. 4 (2). – pp. 225-250.
7. Maziėkiene V. Translation as a Method in Teaching ESP // *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 2018. – No.3 (6). – pp. 513-523.
8. Poljaković I. Using the First Language in the ESP Classroom at University Level // *Metodologija i primjena lingvističkih istraživanja*. S. L. Udler, K. Cergol Kovačević (ur.). Zagreb: Hrvatsko društvo za primijenju lingvistiku, 2016. – pp. 337-347.
9. Witte A., Harden T., Ramos de Oliveira, Harden A. *Translation in Second Language Learning and Teaching*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009.