

***The Colour and the Shape of Translation in the Foreign Language Classroom:
The Dis/Integration of an Interdisciplinary Field?***

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the integration of translation in the foreign language classroom. Underneath the increasing acceptance of translation in foreign language teaching and learning there is a lack of unison in the field as well as an uncertain and rather vague approach to it. For this reason, it seems that translation may be condemned to remain a fragmented area. In order to analyse the status of this practice, I will first consider its background, its progress both in theoretical and applied research contexts and the effect of both.

The definite expansion but cautious establishment of translation in the foreign language classroom is largely due to a substantial amount of research from and within various disciplines. As an interdisciplinary field it has been rebuilt upon linguistics, translation studies, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, cultural studies, etc.

However, significant efforts in revisiting and rebuilding this area have not led to a unified discipline. Is it therefore possible to promote a common territory between all these fields? Does translation in the foreign language classroom represent a kaleidoscope that illustrates the complexity of the areas involved within? Or does translation in the foreign language classroom represent a fragmented area as a result of the number of disciplines involved? It is necessary to explore how translation in the language classroom can successfully integrate various streams of thoughts in the academic discourse that discard disintegration.

Keywords: integration, fragmentation, interdisciplinary, pedagogical translation, translation in the language classroom.

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Introduction

Teaching and learning methodologies work differently on each of us depending on many factors: the resources or strategies that the teacher uses, the age and the interlingual stage of the learner, etc. In my case, for instance, while the highly criticised audiolingual method allowed me to first access English as a modern foreign language (FL) as a six year old child, years later as a teenager the equally criticised grammar translation method (GTM) blocked any hint of interest in a classical language such as Latin. We all know that personal experience of learning a FL varies greatly from one individual to another. However, a global analysis of the pedagogical basis of the different approaches, principles and guidelines will lead to reflecting on the validity of teaching methodologies more accurately. In the case of FL teaching and learning, it is essential to understand the impact that the communicative approach had in language teaching and learning in the 1970s and afterwards. This approach allowed for the reassessment of a number of methods and issues in FL teaching, choosing eclecticism as a stand point and reintroducing the discussion of translation in the classroom. This needs to be acknowledged to date, as a fundamental turning point that allowed translation to be part of language teaching more formally.

This article discusses the status of translation in the FL classroom. It examines whether the study of this area, known as pedagogical translation (PT), presents concepts and interests of the disciplines involved in an integrated manner, or if instead the study of this area explores the fields involved separately, reflecting a disintegrated field and the deconstruction of PT. In other words, are we talking about PT as a fragmented discipline, or is PT an inter-, multi- or cross-disciplinary field?

It is not easy to explain the position of translation in terms of a cross-disciplinary work. While linguistics seem to be responsible for contributing towards the integration of translation in the FL classroom as a discipline, translation studies would have led to its deconstruction to an extent by largely ignoring this area, except in cases such as that of Hurtado Albir (1999). These facts, which will be discussed later in this paper, would make PT emerge as the architect ultimately responsible for reconstructing the area of translation in the FL classroom.

Revisiting Translation in the Foreign Language Classroom

Classifying knowledge in any given discipline is a natural way of allowing scholars to reflect, analyse and clarify concepts, notions and thoughts that are at the core of a particular discipline and to adjacent fields. However, these classifications are sometimes seen as divisions that act as prisons and limit reality or research possibilities. This well may be the case of translation. As a concept, *translation* can be associated with various fields of knowledge. But beyond this, historically, it has worked as a cultural tool and perceptions around it may vary according to the civilisation translation is ascribed to as well as the social, economic or cultural tradition between specific pairs of languages and countries involved and their relationship throughout history. In this regard it is normal to question whether different categorizations around the concept of translation are reliable and representative. This is also true in the case of translation in the foreign language classroom: the use, understanding and development of this element will differ

depending on the cultural and educational traditions of certain institutions or countries.

The use of translation in the FL classroom, once a valued method, was later ostracised from the classroom as it dealt with grammar in a rather ineffective and poisonous way. This methodology, commonly known as the grammar-translation method (GTM), is used to refer to the introduction of translation in the FL learning in its broadest sense. But let us consider the GTM as a tag alone: does it convey a single approach? It is often discussed as if the very same (toxic) practice is repeated in all cases: grammar is at the centre of this practice and pragmatics are absent in a classroom where the teacher presents the students with a translation model that students need to attain. But in reality it does not represent a single practice. Using translation in the foreign language classroom may not correspond to the GTM I just described. The GTM may involve a set of practices that do not match exactly with the same concept, approach or principles. Following this idea, Japanese distinguishes around twenty different meanings of the word *translation*, according to Bellos (2013, pp.21-25) where *zen'yaku* is a complete translation, *shoyaku* is a first translation, *kaiyaku* is a retranslation, etc. Just as translation may be regarded under a different light in different languages and cultures, not every approach that considers using translation in the language classroom actually corresponds to the implementation of the universally criticised GTM.

An interesting exception is that of Saito (2012, p.27), who claims that the Western GTM, which focuses mainly on the use of translation to consolidate rules or grammatical aspects, differs from *yakudoku*, a teaching method in Japan that is based on working on a text through a number of processes: understanding, parsing, interpreting and finally translating.

In any case, translation in the FL classroom is still very much in the eye of the storm: whether educational policies exclude the use of translation or the student's L1 in the classroom (as happened recently in Japan, as indicated by Saiko) or whether there is a commitment to the integration of translation or the student's L1 in the FL classroom (as happens in parts of Europe and Canada), teachers need to assess how the integration of the L1 or translation activities can be done. Macro-level policies are not always transferred adequately to the classroom, due to a lack of resources or because appropriate guidelines are not available or followed by educational institutions.

These policies, in any case, do not seem to account for what learning a language entails and the nature of working with translation skills. Language is the basic tool for translation in the FL classroom, and explicit grammar and the student's L1 will not disappear from the classroom as they are instrumental components. The communicative approach, so useful in advancing in the study of teaching and learning a foreign language seems to have turned against its own principles as it has not developed principles that guide a successful integration of translation in the classroom. In the case of PT one may wonder whether sacrificing accuracy in favour of fluency and communication prevented a more coherent development of this practice, or whether on the contrary, it had the reverse effect.

Translation, globally understood, involves working with several layers that convey meaning and that entail dealing with translating skills, pragmatics, and translation as a

socio-cultural object. In this sense, translation should be understood as a holistic activity in the FL classroom that must necessarily be conceived as an element of social interaction that contributes, enables and channels learning through to the socio-constructivism approach promulgated by Kiraly (1995).

Integration and Disintegration of Translation in the Language Classroom

The analysis of translation from various angles can help to revise and clarify the nature of translation, but at the same time, it can also be frustrating and impede cohesion in this area. Having said this, we cannot forget that translation is at the heart of multidisciplinary and that it serves the interests of linguistics and translation studies, but also those of language, culture, society, and translation as a skill and as a strategy.

There are many myths that contribute to the perception of translation in the FL classroom as a contaminating element: it is used to work only with grammar and vocabulary, translation generates useless lists of vocabulary which is out of context, language students do not have the skills needed to work with translation, students can only translate into their L1, etc. But this record of negative aspects does not reveal the pedagogical side of translation in the FL classroom. For this reason alone, teachers and scholars should examine whether it is reasonable to assume dogmas and adopt a direct opposition to PT on the basis that the *blind acceptance* of translation as a poisonous practice may be the result of the interests of certain sectors and the lack of understanding of this area. Weschler points this out by asking: "Where did we get this notion that "only English" should be spoken in the English classroom? Is it based on any cohesive theory or substantiated research? Or more likely, is it the result of blind acceptance of certain dogma which conveniently serves the best interests of native speaker teachers?" (1997, p.2). As in other fields, the lack of experience seems to make us believe in almost every claim in areas that are unknown to us, like that of translation as an invalid exercise or that of forbidding the student's native language in the FL classroom.

Translation in the FL classroom emerges as an underrated element, whether it is understood as an activity, as a skill, as a resource or as a teaching and learning strategy. The pedagogical possibilities that the implementation of this element in the language classroom offers both to the teacher and the student are not reflected in its *status quo* at present. That is, the value of translation in the language classroom does not reach its potential and it is hence not integrated or developed adequately in the curriculum.

Imposing the use of the FL as a more modern trend of the communicative approach (Weschler 1997, p.1) and the defence of "false communication" rather than a negotiation of meaning are two misdiagnoses that can lead to wrong assumptions such as the need to exclude translation from the FL classroom: it imitates L1 acquisition, it forces students to work at word level, it steals space and prominence of the FL, it is a method for controlling, it values the native teachers over non-native teachers and it is a tool for contrastive analysis (Weschler 1997, pp.5-6). These false assumptions that prevail in time prevent translation from becoming a real channel of communication, a tool for multilingual class and a transaction between ideas of a pragmatic nature where both the native and a non-native teacher have a relevant role.

Therefore, it is time to move away from compartmentalised positions that perceive the language as a modular element based on the traditional four skills (listening and reading comprehension, oral and written production) or that works on different lexical and grammar levels (words, clause(s), sentence(s) and text). Weschler, in the meantime, offers a new solution that supersedes the much criticized GTM and that focuses on the negotiation of meaning and function of language in order to work on the process that entails the construction and scaffolding, trial, error and negotiation of meaning. The functional-translation method that the author suggests, combines the positive attributes of the GTM with the best aspects of the communicative methodology. This sort of hybrid concentrates in negotiating the meaning of the message rather than concentrating in much more sterile formulas (1997, pp.1-3).

Weschler's contribution is very interesting: the author questions whether the negative assumptions of the GTM are fair and advocates reconsidering the value of this method in FL teaching. This proposal does not seem to have developed much further, but it is a positive (re)starting point for PT in that it does not demonise translation. Perhaps it is time to leave denominations such as GTM behind since this concept seems to terrify FL scholars and teachers: translation has the potential of being successfully integrated in the FL classroom in a variety of ways.

A Real (istic) Integration of Translation in the Language Classroom

Previous sections of this article have explored the fact that the integration of translation in the FL classroom is neither realistic nor real. It is necessary to walk towards a coherent (and feasible) approach that integrates translation in the language classroom as a positive element. However, there is a disparity in the power and interests of those disciplines involved. Furthermore, the teaching traditions of translation in the language classroom and its counterproductive implementation impede that this field progresses.

A revision of the basis of PT will reveal that the nature of translation in the FL classroom can be depicted as a type of funnel in which new contributions from different disciplines form a solid basis to work with. Applied linguistics, at the bottom of the funnel, played a fundamental role by distinguishing between second language acquisition and the acquisition of the mother tongue. The description of how L1 and FL learning are learned, allowed for the development of methodologies focusing on FL teaching that took into account *interlanguage*, a transitional dialect that every FL learner undergoes and which entails constant change through the acquisition of new structures (Selinker 1972). Part of this framework also undertook theories from contrastive analysis and error analysis, which contributed towards the description of the L1 and the FL systems and the prediction of potential problems.

Linguistics has also worked towards the development of another fundamental element of the funnel: *communication*. Communication has brought in a discussion of the use of language and different skills that distinguishes communication as a general notion from *real communication* and optimal exposure (as a way of maximizing the use of language). The meaning of communication in the classroom as a dynamic attribute has ensured that communicative procedures are nowadays permeable in the FL classroom in an efficient manner. Looking into this guarantees that the student works as a mediator that interacts with language through his/her intersubjectivity. However,

Allwright's question formulated almost four decades ago, "Are we teaching language (for communication)? Or are we teaching communication (via language)?" (1977, p. 2) in fact remains relevant to date.

The pedagogy of a FL, closely related to applied linguistics and to communication, understands the teacher, the student and the classroom as part of a continuum. The teacher is a guide who moderates the learning process (acting as mentor who assesses whether the translation options offered by the students are valid or not). The classroom is a space open for discussion, creativity, criticism and intuition in which learning is built by all the players involved: typically the teacher(s) and the students. The student is an actor that mediates between messages and who has the ability to work with meaning while developing translating skills through individual and collaborative learning.

The last component of the funnel after applied linguistics, communication and pedagogy is translation studies. This discipline should have a central role in the development of translation in language teaching, but its relevance is still shy. Translation studies have focused mostly on looking at the nature of translation and more recently to the development of translation across different disciplines. Despite the fact that translation studies are currently seen as an interdiscipline, they have not really taken on translation in the FL classroom. On the other hand, FL teaching did not integrate the developments that were taking place in TS, at least from an academic perspective. Further collaborations between these two disciplines need to take place as both will help to redefine translation in FL teaching.

Reassessing Translation in the Language Classroom

It is clear that there is a need to reassess translation within FL teaching. But it would not be effective to seek the value of pedagogical translation only by continuously discussing the negative impact of the GTM. Translation in language teaching needs to be reconsidered as part of an interdisciplinary umbrella that provides space for reconciliation of neighbouring areas according to specific objectives.

Myths surrounding the image of translation in FL as a toxic element have been questioned over the past few decades as a result of new approaches in this area and adjacent disciplines. However, a dialogue between PT and closely related disciplines remains a challenge. This is the case of translation studies. Probably influenced by the scepticism of authors such as Nida, who failed to believe that translation would become a science in the 1960s, translation studies has in many ways remained hermetic and excluded applied areas such as foreign language teaching (as they were beyond the real interests of translation).

However, the progressive perception of translation as a necessary hub that brings in the interests of various disciplines has added much more flexibility to this field. In the case of PT, communication has been revealed as a necessary paradigm by which language teaching and translation share a common network of interests (Colina 2002). So, what has changed? Why should PT develop now? The shift of paradigms in language teaching and the evolution of pedagogy both in translation studies and FL teaching leads towards reconciliation, although somewhat limited.

The magnitude and scope of translation studies in areas such as history, sociology, anthropology and literature hinder its foray into other less purist areas. Moreover, metatheoretical studies such as those of Holmes (1972) show that translation can be represented as a rather rigid area. Holmes' map, an essential turning point in translation studies, distinguished different branches in this field. His was the first classification of pure and applied areas in translation studies and it represents an important step towards the consolidation of this discipline. But it is Hurtado Albir who depicts pedagogical translation as part of a *continuum* in a map of translation studies. In Hurtado Albir's map, the three main divisions (theoretical, descriptive and applied studies) are necessarily in dialogue with each other. The difference between the two maps is obvious as a result of the nature of both works and the time lapse between both publications. I would like to point out both the inclusion of pedagogical translation in Hurtado Albir's work within the area of applied studies and that of language teaching for translators. This shows that there is indeed potential for a close dialogue between FL teaching and learning and translation studies, which reflect the developments attained in this research field.

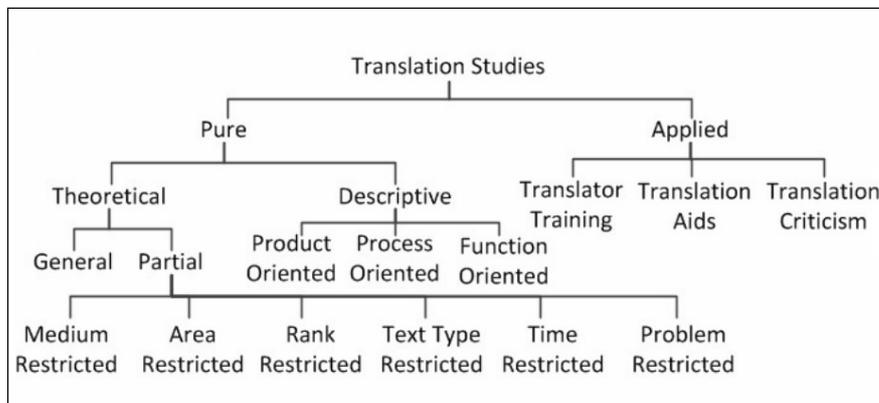


Figure 1: Map of Translation Studies (Holmes, 1972)

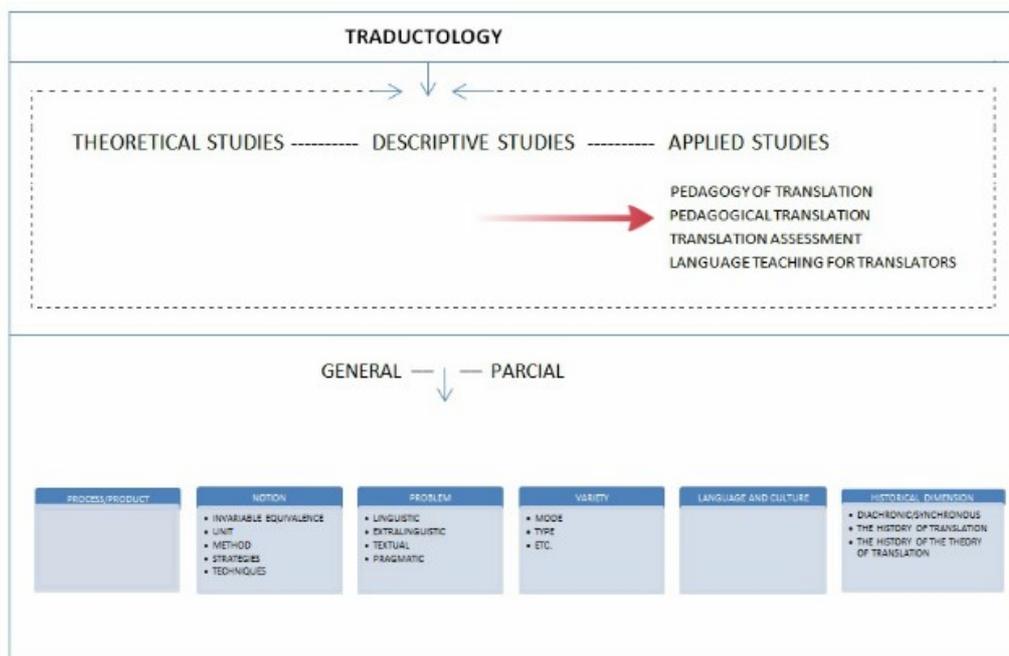


Figure 2: Map of Traductology (Hurtado Albir, 1999)

The partial picture of Albir's map illustrates pedagogical translation as a landmark where research, pedagogy in translation studies and the acquisition of foreign languages converge. Translation in the FL classroom is also connected to the bottom of Hurtado Albir's map, that is, with aspects related to translation as a process or a product, the translation unit, etc. This promotes the integration of the language and culture in the classroom. It also fosters an analysis, anticipates problems, contributes to the decision making, etc. The student becomes a receiver-transmitter-interlinguistic and intercultural mediator. This calls into question the existence of a perfect translation model and destroys the myths surrounding the notion of a *communicative ideal* (Hernández Sacristán, 1999). It also emphasises the importance of looking at the intention of the writer in a source text in a given context, particular register(s), language variations, etc. This is in turn interconnected with the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) where the skills discussed involve output, input, interaction and mediation.

Development of Translation in the Language Classroom and Academic Thought

It would be unfair to say that PT has been completely dismissed from scholarly discussions. In the last decade relevant contributions on this field have flourished.

Guy Cook's work on translation in the foreign language classroom is one of the contributions that has given new visibility to this type of translation. Although the reassessment of this field is not new and the contribution of authors like Hurtado Albir (1999), Lavault (1985), Malmkjaer (1998) and other scholars is key, Cook's influence represents a rebirth of translation within applied linguistics and language teaching which has reached into various fields and which the author has identified as TILT (translation in language teaching).

In any case, there is still work to be done. This area, its principles and its objectives need to be redefined in order to talk about an integrated discipline that is not

compartmentalised in different modules, areas of knowledge or skills but which is an approach that constructs meaning. Grammar and pragmatics necessarily build communication, and we need to acknowledge and introduce these items in the classroom. Students convene meaning through language; language empowers the student by providing them with different ways of thinking and expressing ideas. The student's interaction in a social, political and cultural context through translation can provide translation in the FL classroom with a new perspective, a new scope that goes beyond language formulae.

The introduction of translation in the language classroom is still limited and this seems to be part of a long standing tradition. However, pedagogical translation has found new ways to overcome this resistance and be more flexible: PT interacts with new areas of knowledge which are typically compartmentalised into different (and traditionally peripheral) areas. PT is necessarily interdisciplinary due to innovative approaches, new needs and to a shift in the academic thought that forces us to rethink how knowledge has been organised and institutionalised (McCarty 1999). As Munday states: "An interdiscipline challenges the current conventional way of thinking by promoting and responding to new links between different types of knowledge and translation." (2012, p.24). Chesterman (2009, p.13) also indicates, in reference to Holmes' discussion on "*The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*" in 1972, that "when science discovers a new area of ignorance, one of two things tend to happen. The new set of research questions may be incorporated into an existing domain (...). Or the new questions may lead to the establishment of a new research field, a new interdiscipline". In the case of PT, we can say that it is an interdiscipline. And while it is not entirely new, it does need to go back to its basics and reassess its foundations in order to expand.

The association between translation and modern languages is a primary relationship (Munday 2012, p.24) and this needs to be developed further. Of course there are external forces that have a powerful effect on how these areas interact and how they progress. We cannot ignore the fact that the relationship between these areas is complicated: translation has colonized many departments of modern languages, and that modern languages have conquered, on the other hand, departments of translation. Simply by looking at this enables us to have an idea of the complex rapport between these areas at many levels, from those purely theoretical to those related to practice.

Final Remarks and Conclusion

In order to integrate PT in the FL classroom we need to identify, analyse and build different linguistic and cultural needs and realities depending on the scope of each course. Being able to transmit meaning has a strong effect on language students and empowers and motivates them. Translation entails a mediating process by which the students discover in language a powerful tool that can represent blame, responsibility, etc. For that reason, the scholarly discourse and the perception of translation in the language classroom will determine the evolution and the assessment of this practice.

Translation in the foreign language classroom, in this sense, has a strong linguistic, cultural and social relevance. It goes beyond grammar rules or writing skills. It acts as a catalyst to convey messages and intentions. It is therefore necessary to develop academic thinking and conduct an analysis of what happens in the PT classroom in

order to take steps forward. A proper reassessment of PT as an interdisciplinary field needs to be put in place. This will determine its particular role in curriculum development, its methodological approach and its adequate progression in the future as an interdisciplinary field.

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