

Translation in the Teaching of a Foreign Language As a Means and As an End

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Abstract: In the history of foreign language teaching translation has alternately been praised and condemned. Unfortunately, the praise and condemnation were based on a rather simplistic, biased, and extreme view of the role of translation. In this view no clear, explicit distinction was made between translation as a means and as an end although in practice people already showed a tendency to be more concerned with one aspect than the other. Moreover, in their treatment of translation people tended to take an "either ... or ..." position. Either take it or leave it. This paper proposes a more explicit, balanced, and moderate attitude towards translation and its two aspects. It is suggested that a clear distinction be made between translation as a means and as an end and that each be treated accordingly in a better programmed way. The treatment should consider the level of instruction. At the beginning level translation should be treated more as a means than as an end. Gradually, as the level of instruction progresses the role of translation as a means is reduced, while its role as an end is increased so that at the more advanced levels translation will be treated more as an end than as a means. Accordingly, translation should not be totally abandoned or too liberally used. However, the use and disuse should be based on a careful and well-prepared program. In line with the idea that translation be treated as an end at the more advanced level, and considering its importance for a developing nation, it is also proposed here that translating be adopted as a "fifth skill" to be pursued.

Key words: translation, means, end, fifth skill

The history of the use of translation as a means of teaching meaning may be as old as the history of foreign language teaching itself. The beginning of as a means of teaching meaning can be traced through the first appearance of a bilingual dictionary. Western people may believe that a bilingual dictionary was a Roman invention, but according to Kelly (1976:24) it first appeared among the Akkadians (people of Accad, a city in ancient Assyria/Babylonia) as early as 2500 B.C. So it seems that the use of translation as a means of teaching meaning has a very long history.

As a means of teaching meaning, translation has received both praise and condemnation. During the Grammar-Translation period naturally translation was accepted as a respectable procedure. However, when Natural Method came into vogue later on, it was totally rejected. When Direct Method replaced Natural Method it was still rejected although some Direct Methodists considered it to be of considerable value. Translation reappeared as a respectable classroom procedure when for practical reasons people adopted the Reading Approach. Later on, when the Audiolingual Approach appeared, once again translation was rejected. Nowadays, when a reaction to the behaviorist features of Audiolingual Approach results in the appearance of more cognitive approaches with more emphasis on communication (communicative competence), the use of the mother tongue and translation are permitted again.

It seems that people have always had differing opinions and attitude towards translation and up to this time this controversy has not been totally resolved because both sides have equally plausible arguments. Those who oppose translation among others argue that (1) it is a long way round of connecting concept to foreign word, (2) switches the learner's mind out of the target language, (3) it deprives the learner of exposure to it and (4) it may be counter-productive to genuine teacher-student communication in the classroom. On the other hand, those who support it say that (1) it makes the non-native teacher's job easier, (2) it makes him more self-confident, (3) it is preferred by the learner, and (4) it saves time.

THE PROBLEM

This paper is not an attempt to endorse or promote any one of the two opposing sides. Rather, it is meant to show that in this case people tend to take an "either or" position. They forget that translation,

just like other things, has both good sides and bad sides and that in one situation it may be useful but in another it may be harmful. So the problem is how to find when it is helpful to use it and when it is not and how to use it. Therefore, an extreme position, i.e. totally abandoning it or too liberally using it, is not advocated here. It would be wiser to take a more moderate stance, considering prevailing condition of the teachers and the environmental setting in general as well as the fact that translation is just one of the many ways of teaching meaning. One example of an appropriate attitude towards translation is that showed by Harbord (1992: 355). He says, "... it should be used to provoke discussion and speculation, to develop clarity and flexibility of thinking, and to help us increase our own and our students' awareness of the inevitable interaction between the mother tongue and the target language that occurs during any type of language acquisition."

More importantly, this paper is also meant to bring to attention the fact that when talking about translation in the teaching of a foreign language people tend to be more concerned with its use as a means of teaching meaning. Very little discussion is directed towards the possibility of adopting it as an end. When talking about the goals of language teaching people usually refer to the four conventional language skills, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It hardly ever occurs to their mind that it is possible to adopt a "fifth skill", that is **translating**.

There must be reasons for people not to address translation as a possible end (goal) of foreign language teaching. One possible reason is that people are too occupied or hypnotized by the well-rooted idea that the goal of language teaching (both foreign and native) is the attainment of the four traditional language skills. They forget that in a foreign language setting it is possible, even desirable, to take an additional skill, i.e. **translating**. In the teaching of one's own language, or when the students of a foreign language teaching are going to live in the community of the target language, mastery of the four language skills may be sufficient. However, when the students are going to live in their own country with their fellow-countrymen an additional skill (translating) is desirable. With the additional skill the students will be able to share the benefits that they get from their mastery of the foreign language with the other people around them. In that way they will be of better service to their

compatriots. All this time people seem to assume that the students learning a foreign language are going to live among the native speakers of the language or among people of other countries. In reality the majority of them are not.

Another possible reason is that people may think that translation is too difficult or complex to be adopted as an end in a foreign language teaching. Yes, it is true that translation is a complicated process. It consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context (Larson, 1984:3). Therefore, in addition to being bilingual, a translator must also have some knowledge of the culture of the writer and the subject matter.

Another indicator showing that translation is a hard undertaking is Newmark's statement that literary or non-literary translations without mistakes are rare (1984:5). He further adds that translation always involves a loss of meaning which provokes a continuous tension, a dialectic, an argument based on the claims of each language. The loss is caused by a number of factors. He identifies four of them. First, if the text describes a situation which has elements peculiar to the natural environment, institutions and culture of its language area, transference to the translator's language can only be approximate. Second, the two languages, in context, may have different lexical, grammatical and sound systems, and segment many physical objects and virtually all intellectual concepts differently. Third, the individual uses of language of the text-writer and the translator do not coincide. Finally, the translator and the text-writer have different theories of meaning and different values (pp. 7 – 8).

Meanwhile, Alwasilah (1998:1) states that for most people it is easier to express themselves directly in Indonesian or English than to translate other people's work for three main reasons. First, a translator is a speaker who is confined by a set of both linguistic and non-linguistic assumption. Second, translating involves quite a few a number of things. Third, translating is an art trying to replace a written message with a similar message in another language.

Because of the difficulty and complexity of translation people may ask, "Why bother adding a new goal when the achievement of existing goals is still far from the desired success?"

Albeit very difficult and involves a very complicated process, translation is very important, especially for developing countries. Japan is a classical example of the success story of translation for the development of a country. In Japan the massive effort of translation has resulted in the rapid development of science and technology. Translation has become a catalyst for the development of the nation. Thanks to their effort in translation the Japanese now enjoy an equal position with other developed nations. In addition, according to Alwasilah (1997) Louis Kelly in *The True Interpreter* (1979) says that in developing its civilization Western Europe is indebted to the translators who have acted as mediators between writers and readers from different language background.

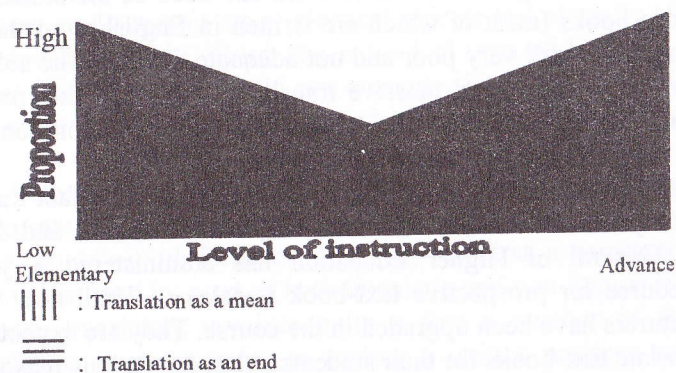
With regard to the urgency of translation, for Indonesia in particular, Anton M. Moeliono (1999:17-18) has the following arguments. First, translation is a lot cheaper (in terms of cost) and more economical (in terms of time) than teaching a foreign language to read a book. Second, considering the fact that English seems to be enjoying a special privilege and given more attention than Indonesian in the school curriculum, Moeliono is worried that a silent rivalry is taking place between English and Indonesian and one day it may happen that some of our scholars will be more fluent in English than in Indonesian. Still according to Moeliono, right now we are facing a dilemma between the need of the students to read reference books (most of which are written in English) and the fact that their English is still very poor and not adequate for that. The solution to all these is a well-planned massive translation effort. In this respect, Moh. Tadjuddin goes further by saying that the sooner a nation conducts translation, the faster it progresses in culture creation (1998:3).

Another evidence of the importance of translation is the fact that for a number of years in collaboration with Canada, Australia, and Japan Directorate General of Higher Education has administered a yearly upgrading course for prospective text-book translators. Until now more than 500 lecturers have been upgraded in the course. They are expected to actively translate text-books for their students. Alas, for various reasons as yet the project has not been very successful.

A PROPOSAL

Considering the importance of translation as depicted above, it is proposed here that in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language translation be treated not just as a means but also as an end and that more attention be given to the skill of translation. At present, the teaching of translation is still a long way from satisfactory condition. Translation is treated as a separate and compulsory subject only for university students majoring in English or other foreign languages. The fact that it is difficult and the current goals of language teaching have not been achieved satisfactorily should not deter us from adopting it as an end or should not be used as a reason to delay it until later stages. It is precisely for that reason that it should be given proper attention right from the start so that at later stages or when translation is treated as an independent subject for language majors every-thing will be going more smoothly.

The adoption of translation as an end does not mean abandoning it as a means. Rather, the two should go hand in hand in the teaching process. The treatment of translation, as a means or as an end, should put the level of instruction into consideration. It is proposed here that at the beginning levels translation be treated more as a means than as an end. Gradually, as the level progresses the role of translation as a means is reduced, while its role as an end is increased so that at the more advanced levels translation is treated more as an end than as a means. Graphically, the proposed treatment of translation is as seen in the following display.



It is hardly necessary to say that translation as an end should begin with very easy words, phrases, or sentences which have fairly straightforward equivalent in the native language. Then the level of difficulty or complexity is increased in accordance with the level of instruction. In that way, it is hoped the adoption of translation as an end will not have any serious negative effect on the teaching and the achievement of the traditional language skills.

WHAT AND HOW TO TEACH

If the above proposal is accepted, the next question is what kind of translation should be taught and how? Translation is by definition a change of form. However, the change should not affect the message or meaning contained in the form because the message or meaning is what the translator wishes to transfer to his readers. Because a text has both form and meaning, Larson (1984:15) makes a distinction between form-based translation, which she calls **literal translation**, and a meaning-based translation, which she calls **idiomatic translation**.

Each of the two kinds of translation has its own uses. Literal translation is especially useful for linguists who want to study the source language or to make a comparison between the source language and the target language. However, for most readers literal translation often makes no sense and is not very communicative. On the other hand, idiomatic translation will be very useful for common readers who want to get the message contained in the source-language text. Therefore, the latter kind of translation has much greater value for the majority of people and constitutes the one that should be taught to the students.

Accordingly, in the teaching of translation students should always be reminded to give more emphasis on the constancy of meaning than on the equivalence of form. In addition, the teaching should be orientated more on the practice than on the theory of translation. Students should practice translating a lot more than just listening to explanation about theories of translation. The only "theory" that should be given to students is guidelines on how to produce a good translation.

With regard to this, Djajasudarma (1998:3) quotes 7 steps of translation recommended by UNESCO (1957:74) (1) Reading the whole original text to comprehend the subject matter; (2) Re-read the whole

original text trying to comprehend technical terms, etc; (3) Drafting the first translation; (4) Checking the first translation draft; (5) Typing final translation concept; (6) Inserting formulas; and (7) Final checking and error correction. Another step not found here but strongly recommended by Sadtono (1985:2, 141) is testing the translation result. He further suggests the use of *Cloze Technique* for the test. The purpose of the test is to find out and to eliminate two things: (1) Possibly misunderstood transfer, and (2) Too "heavy" transfer (i.e. too "heavy" terms or grammar).

CONCLUSION

What has been proposed is a just preliminary, rough idea. If accepted it still needs a lot of thinking, specification, details and ramification for its follow-up and execution. The purpose of the article is just to bring to attention something very important that so far has not been given proper consideration.

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