Current Issues
in Translation Studies in Nigeria

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A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS ON CHALLENGES OF TEACHING TRANSLATION AT NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

ABSTRACT

The aim of translation teaching is for students to acquire comprehensive abilities in a foreign language and the mother tongue/first language (including listening, speaking, reading and writing) and even a comprehensive understanding. It equips students not only with practical bilingual ability, but also to encourage the attitudes that will allow them to do the best possible translation work after graduation. In this descriptive study, a survey of 25 translation teachers from four selected universities in South West Nigeria was carried out with 10 males and 15 females. Their ages range from 24 – 48 years with mean of 36 years and standard deviation of 2.18. Four research questions were raised and answered.

The findings revealed that the challenges facing translation teaching include linguistic and cultural untranslatability in the source language, contextualized intuition, knowledge, skills, training, cultural background, expertise, as well as the mood of teachers and students. The level of linguistic competence and relationship between previous knowledge and new knowledge of learners are often mitigating or promoting translation teaching.

It was recommended that teachers must have a sound linguistic knowledge of both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). It was concluded that neither knowing languages nor being efficiently bilingual is enough to become a translator but students should have access to appropriate tools and strategies to the teaching of translation.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Translation, the transfer of a message from one language into the other for communication, has vital importance in introducing students to

cultures, civilizations, and societies that are different from their own, as well as to modern ideas and technical/ scientific developments (Aksoy, 2001;Gerding-Salas, 2000).

Training translators and translation teachers is becoming a necessity because translation is playing a more and more important role in today's world. Translation is becoming more important in international and intercultural activity, for it facilitates mutual understanding among different and conflicting racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups, which is of special significance today when terrorism and all kinds of conflict are threatening people's coexistence. Scholars on translation teaching seem to agree on the fact that there is a difference between translation in foreign-language teaching and translation teaching for professional purposes. The focus of this paper is translation in foreign-language teaching and the problems associated with it.

The first problem for teachers when teaching translation would be the subject. Translation and interpretation are considered together as arts and skills, and teachers must decide from which angle to approach them. If they select art, students will make an infinite series of exercises. If they select skill, students will learn the syntax, accent and terminology. A more serious problem is the almost total lack of empirical studies on different methods for teaching translation and on how translation is actually learnt.

Also, there are some particular problems in the translation process: problems of ambiguity, problems that originate from structural and lexical differences between languages and multiword units like idioms and collocations. Another problem would be the grammar because there are several constructions of grammar poorly understood, in the sense that it might not be clear how they should be represented, or what rules should be used to describe them.

The words that are really hard to translate are frequently, common words, whose precise meaning depends heavily on context. Besides, some words are untranslatable when one wishes to remain in the same grammatical category. The question of whether particular words are untranslatable is frequently debated.

There are problems related to students and supporting staff. Many students and some supporting staff may be technologically incompetent. Technological competence is obviously an essential skill for professional

translators today. Students are expected to be familiar with the basics of word processing before entering the programme. In addition, they should pick up advanced techniques during their studies. But most students are not computer literate. Reference librarians who are supposed to provide formal training in Internet and Database Search Techniques, as well as introduce students to technical aids for the translator, such as voice recognition and translation memory software, are in short supply. Technology is an area that should assume increasing importance in the translation institutions.

The challenge faced by translation teachers is to encourage re-creativity in re-expression in order to avoid literality (Newmark 1990). Translation teachers need to constantly improve their operative (*know how*) and declarative (*know what*) knowledge. Consequently, one of the main aims of the teacher's job is to help the students acquire and improve both kinds of knowledge.

Learning how to cope with translation-related problems is not exactly the same as learning the language itself, although they go hand-in-hand. There are many difficulties such as translation of figurative language, culture-specific terms, translation of sacred texts, and other text types with regards to their functions, (Newmark, 1988) which fall in the categories to be taught as translation-related issues. Second, it is vital to decide which language teaching method is better used along with the method adopted for teaching translation as a craft.

The techniques adopted for teaching translation should be chosen with attention to both sides of the nature of translation: first its objective and theoretical principles and second the subjective part which is mainly related to the student's intuition and creativity.

During the language learning process, translation sensitizes language learners to contrasts and induces them to make comparisons between the grammars of the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). In particular, it introduces them to words and expressions that resist translation such as terms related to food and drink, institutions, slangs, and the like; (Gill, 1998). This naturally brings the necessity of developing sound translation skills of language learners at language teaching departments as they learn the language to communicate and to teach communication skills to their future students.

Anyone who has tried to translate between two different languages

will understand the problems associated with language translation. It is not easy to capture the same meaning when translating between two completely different languages. The best way to learn or teach a language is by experiencing that language within its own unique setting. It is much more difficult to create a curriculum and learning material for such a programme, than to use translation. For one thing, sentence patterns must be carefully thought out and built, without the deviation that a native speaker would use. The meaning of words must be brought across without use of another language. The patterns of sentences (children learn through patterns) must be carefully designed, etc. Teachers need to be specially trained as second language teaching experts, which is altogether a different thing from mastering a second language. It is like the difference between a multilingual person, and a trained translator.

Another problem is that of the classroom environment. Usually some kind of assessment takes the place of language proficiency. That means some form of test which a teacher must administer and correct. Therefore written work must be introduced much earlier, and translation type scenarios must perforce be used. The methodology addresses administrative needs, rather than being the most ideal manner of teaching.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Teacher's job is to help the students acquire and improve on their translation ability. Teachers should be able to verbalize and transmit knowledge so that the students' attitude and aptitude towards the subject can improve. Words encoding cultural information are difficult to translate since they require cultural knowledge and a background of the culture. Literal translation may not fully render the meaning of culture-bound words. There are various problems mitigating against the success of teachers' endeavour. Identification of these problems from the teachers' perspective is the main focus of this study.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine the perceptions of teachers on the challenges of teaching translation in Nigerian universities. Other objectives include:

1. To examine the problems related to language in teaching translation.
2. To determine the problems related to teaching aids in teaching translation.
3. To determine the problems of learners of language translation.
4. To determine the problems related to teachers' competence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the problems related to language in teaching translation?
2. What are the problems related to teaching aids in teaching translation?
3. What are the problems of learners of language translation?
4. What are the problems related to teachers' competence?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

In this descriptive study, twenty five participants were randomly selected from four selected universities in South West Nigeria. The translation teachers selected were permanent staff in departments of languages. They were either teaching translation at undergraduate or postgraduate level. These comprised 10 males and 15 females. Their ages range from 24 - 48 years with mean of 36 years and standard deviation of 2.18.

INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

In this study, the data was collected by means of a questionnaire adapted from Türeli (1998). It contained 27 items, which consisted of fourteen multiple-choice and thirteen open-ended questions. The questionnaire attempted to explore teachers' perceptions of the problems associated with translation teaching. The teachers were asked to rate the agreement or otherwise to statements provided. They were also asked to make a list of other problems not included in the statements.

The researcher obtained two types of data from the questionnaire. The qualitative data came from the open-ended questions. The researcher analyzed them based on the content of the answers provided by the students. The answers were grouped to find the frequencies. The quantitative data came from the multiple-choice questions. The nominal data were entered into SPSS (version 15.0) to find out whether the differences between the choices were statistically significant. A non-parametric test (chi-square) was utilised for the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: List of Perceived Problems

Perceived Problems	Freq	%
Linguistic untranslatability in the source language	12	48
Cultural untranslatability in the source language	19	76
Contextualized intuition	16	64
Teachers knowledge of subject matter	18	72
Teachers skills	14	56
Students cultural background	15	60
Mood of students	19	76
Mood of teachers	22	88
Level of linguistic competence	24	96

The findings revealed that the challenges facing translation teaching include linguistic and cultural untranslatability in the source language,

contextualized intuition, knowledge, skills, training, cultural back-
ground, expertise, as well as the mood of teachers and students. The
level of linguistic competence and relationship between previous know-
ledge and new knowledge of learners are often mitigating or promoting
translation teaching.

Item 10 in the questionnaire aimed at eliciting how the participants
perceived problems related to teaching translation. The content analysis
of the participants' answers allowed us to classify their definitions into
two groups. These are as follows:

Problems with the source text:
- Text difficult to read or illegible
- Spelled incorrectly or printed incorrectly
- Unfinished text
- Badly written text

Language problems:
- Idiomatic terms and neologisms
- Unsolved acronyms and abbreviations
- Proper name of people, organizations, and places.
- Slangs difficult to understand
- Respect to punctuation conventions

Problems related to teaching aids:
- Lack of teaching aids
- Obsolete teaching gadgets
- Lack of teaching texts

Problems related to learners
- Contextualized situation
- Previous knowledge
- Skills
- Cultural background
- Mood
- linguistic competence

Problems related to teachers
- Skills
- Cultural background
- Mood

RECOMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Sound translation practices/teaching should involve more than finding the equivalent of unknown words and transferring them to the TL. It should involve developing awareness in understanding the overall meaning, as well as the cultural motives of TL. Teachers must have a sound linguistic knowledge of both the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL). In conclusion, neither knowing languages nor being efficiently bilingual is enough to become a translator but students should have access to appropriate tools and strategies to the teaching of translation.

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