

## Forgiven, not Forgotten: Communicative Translation Activities in Second Language Teaching

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### ABSTRACT

Although frequently discarded and despised in the 20th century, translation now seems to find wider acceptance within the Second Language Teaching (SLT) field. However, it still has a long way to go before recovering its due place in the L2 classroom. The aim of this paper is to suggest a number of translation (and interpreting)-based activities covering the different competence levels, thus showing that communicative content and translation can perfectly go hand in hand so that old, unjustified prejudices can be superseded once and for all.

### 1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that translation, although continuously used in the teaching of foreign languages for over 2,000 years, almost instantaneously fell into oblivion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Weller 1989: 39; Pegenaute 1996: 113). The rise of the “strong” versions of the communicative approach only served to reinforce this tendency (Snell-Hornby 1985: 21; Cervi 1990: 39; Sánchez 1997: 39), thus eliminating traditional (especially written) exercises and activities from the L2 classroom.

However, communicative competence is not exclusively based on oral and aural skills: communication can also take place in written form (Coste 1977; Hardin 1987; Álvarez *et al.* 1992; Brown 1994: 226-230; So 1995: 539-545; Cenoz 1996). This, together with the new status of the learner’s L1 (Chuquet & Paillard 1987: 53; Dabene 1987: 93; Bourguignon & Candelier 1988: 23), is a forceful argument for the reintroduction of long

forgotten activities. As a consequence, the communicative approach seems to have been redefined from a holistic, integrated point of view (Sánchez 1993; 1997: 196-217), and its now truly non-restrictive are amply exemplified by all those out-and-out communicativists advocating the presence of translation in communicative curricula (see, *inter alia*, Mateo 1993; Valdeón 1995; Pegenaute 1996; Palacios & Seoane 2000).

In this light, it is our purpose here to present a series of translation-based activities that could somehow widen the traditional methodological offer, normally consisting of the typical *thème* and *version* exercises. But before going any further we shall first clarify some preliminary questions.

-The traductological theoretical framework described in the following pages is mainly a functionalist one, as put forward by Nord (1990, 1996 & 1997), for two main reasons. **One**, its versatility: the source text (ST) is now simply an offer of information to be dealt with as the translator sees fit. Consequently, strategies are not evaluated *a priori* but together with the target text's (TT) function in the reception context. This in turn means that the old dichotomy of "literal vs. free" translation is superseded in a simple, natural way, which will allow us to demand different kinds of translation depending on the aims of each activity described. And **Two**, its extraordinarily flexible concept of translation, which does not require two codes (in the sense of two different languages) and does not restrict itself to dealing with written texts. This will of course allow us to include a number of additional activities which, in our view, will considerably enrich the methodological choice currently available.

-Throughout the following pages, translation is always to be thought of as a means, not as an end in itself. Thus, under no circumstances should it be interpreted that L2 curricula are to be centred around the activities here enclosed (Lavault 1985: 9-10; Thiel 1985: 118; Tittford 1985: 76; Sopena-Balordi 1987: 42; Nadstoga 1989: 109; Ballard 1995: 36).

-Since no professional results are being sought, no damage can be expected in practising service translation. In any case, good professionals can also reach quasi-native standards in service translation (MacAlester 1992: 294). After all, this is an activity the translator will frequently come across, since -whether we like it or not- only native English-speaking translators -like Newmark (1991 & 1995)- can avoid translating into their L2 (Pym 1992: 292; Sibboard 1994: 9; Beeby 1996: 58).

-It has been our purpose to devise a series of activities with as much communicative content as possible. Thus, following Sánchez (1993: 52) and Fotos (1997: 52: 54), we have sought student interaction (in L2), meaning negotiation and all possible interest-raising features. However, it should be stated here that activities will be more easily labelled "communicative" the higher the competence of the students they are designed for.

## 2. Activities suggested

This said, we will directly move on to the list of activities suggested. These will be listed in what we consider order of increasing difficulty.

## 2.1. Explanatory translation: lexis (Level: absolute beginners)

Given that L2s are not learnt in the same way as one's L1 (Strauss 1987: 29), at least when a certain age has been reached, and that students enter the classroom with pre-established linguistic (and cultural) baggage (i.e. their L1), we suggest gradually increasing the amount of L2 input the students will be exposed to and occasionally resorting to translation when, for instance, introducing new vocabulary (Strauss 1987: 117; Newmark 1991: 62; Stibboard 1994: 15; Pegenaute 1996: 11). This would be especially useful in all those cases in which the possible alternatives would imply using unknown (and therefore incomprehensible) vocabulary or structures, not to mention easily misleading gestures.

The translation can be provided by the teacher or, alternatively, elicited from the student, thus fostering a certain degree of interaction and discussion in L2. In any event, it is advisable that the student be conscious of the complex intricacies languages present and they should therefore be told that what they are learning is the meaning of a word as seen in a given context, since polysemy is all but exceptional. Thus, students could gradually grow aware of the dangers implied in mentally constructing the -otherwise hardly avoidable- simplistic L1-L2 binary equivalents.

Thus conceived, the activity is mainly focused on the students' grammatical competence (in its lexical and phonological dimensions, given that it should be done orally). Secondly, the student's strategic competence is also fostered: by being asked "How do you say this in...?" the student gets accustomed to directly resorting to the native speaker, who will make up for his/her faulty competence.

As could be expected, given the students' low competence level, the communicative content present in this activity is rather limited. However, there is meaning negotiation, logical conclusion reaching and possible interaction in L2 plus a number of interest-raising factors: usefulness (it is a vocabulary learning technique), use of more than one sense (both auditory and visual stimuli can be used), possible group work, perception of highly achievable goals, etc.

## 2.2. Literal translation (Level: absolute beginners)

Given the extraordinary tendency that (especially) beginners show to memorise certain expressions as if they were fossilised formulae (Butzkamm 1985: 87-90), this kind of translation could be used to put an end to it. This activity would basically consist in eliciting from the students the literal (or word-for-word) translation of an L2 expression. Again, properly speaking, this should be regarded more as a teacher tool rather than a classroom activity. In any case, its validity can be seen in the different purposes it may serve. Thus, it might well be far more helpful than the ordinary metalinguistic explanation for the student to understand the composition and structure of a given expression so that s/he will be able to use it productively with the adequate inflectional changes that the situation might require. A very simple example may serve to illustrate this point. Our experience suggests that there is a tendency in some students to use simple expressions like "What's your name?" not only

with a direct interlocutor but also to refer to third persons. Literal translation in such cases may well help the student avoid the automatic repetition of structures as mere formulae. Thus, in the specific case of "What's your name?", an expression frequently found in the first unit of most English-learning materials and equally frequently memorised by the student as if it were a fossilised expression, literal translation could make the student understand the nature of "your" and its application to the second person.

Additionally, it can also be a good help for him/her to understand the meaning of single words contained in wider expressions frequently contained in the first units of textbooks for beginners, such as "Nice to meet you", "You're welcome" or "See you tomorrow", which pass largely unexplained. Furthermore, it can also be used to cause knowledge transfer: when studying an expression such as "Where are you from?", for example, the teacher can also succinctly introduce the -more often than not- problematic phenomenon known as *preposition stranding*.

As follows from above, this activity mainly focuses on the student's grammatical (syntactic) competence and its communicative content is once again limited: it should never occupy a whole lesson but be used on very specific occasions. On the other hand, there is meaning negotiation, some possible interaction in L2 and optional group work. The students' interest will also be guaranteed thanks to their easily perceiving the usefulness of the exercise and especially to the little time it will take up, which will almost certainly preclude the possibility of boredom affecting the students' performance.

### 2.3. Translating the student's error-containing L2 output into L1 (Level: any from absolute beginners)

To some extent, this is the reverse of activity No 2. The student's output frequently contains errors s/he is not even aware of and which s/he will not understand if the only explanation given is of a metalinguistic kind. This activity would ideally concern syntactic mistakes or even the student's first steps in the field of discourse through the first linking words s/he is capable of using. By making the student translate their L2 (oral or written) output into L1, however, we could make them single out the source of error and correct it effectively. In this sense it is important that they should understand that what they are to translate is what their (written or oral) text actually says, and not what they think it says.

Thus devised, this activity focuses on the student's grammatical (mainly syntactic) and discursive competence, its communicative content being rather limited. Active participation could however be promoted by encouraging the group to help the student who is being asked. Once again, brevity will prevent the students from getting bored although, once used to this type of exercise, they will easily perceive its usefulness. In any case, the teacher should adopt this activity cautiously and avoid its overuse.

### 2.4. Decontextualised translation (Level: lower intermediate)

This activity -variants of which can be found in Lavault (1985: 62), Beeby (1996: 67) and

Palacios & Seoane (2000: 158-159)- has been devised as a bridge between activities Nos. 1 & 5. In the former we have already remarked upon the importance of raising awareness of the value of context in both vocabulary learning and translation. Now we suggest devising a list of decontextualised polysemic words for the students to translate into their L1. They could work in groups and try to find as many translations as they can think of, always providing an adequate context for them. The group who guesses the particular meaning or use the teacher has previously selected will win. This exercise could be done periodically with vocabulary items recently seen in class. Consider, by means of an example, the following list of essentially polysemic words: act, address, fall, head, house, order, top, scene.

Needless to say, what this activity aims is at providing useful lexical practice, although the importance given to context in meaning construction can also be interpreted as an important part of the learner's strategic competence.

Active participation and meaning negotiation make it easy for us to call this a "communicative activity" perfectly capable of raising the students' interest through such features as novelty -only seldom are activities like this practised in the L2 classroom-, group work, not to mention the informal, game-like situation.

## 2.5. Contrastive approach to vocabulary learning (Level: any from lower intermediate)

Once the learner reaches a certain level, his /her vocabulary limitations become more apparent. Funnily enough, this does not mean that the ultimate aim should be increasing the number of entries in the mental lexicon: as stated elsewhere, most learners inevitably resort to the highly inconvenient but certainly easy lists of L1-L2 equivalents (Krakowian 1992: 119). Consequently, a great step forward would be made if the learner left them aside and concentrated on "improving" the knowledge of the words s/he already knows. Since a large number of Indogermanic words are related to one another -a fact often unnoticed by the student-, this is something we could make use of in order to help learners remember old words, establish relationships between them or even learn new ones. Sticking to a lower-intermediate level, a contrastive approach to vocabulary learning raises the student's awareness of the complex process of lexical selection that takes place when translating (Pegenaute 1996: 116), consolidates new vocabulary learning (Newmark 1991: 62), constitutes an ideal way of tackling both *faux amis* (Perkins 1985: 60-63; Atkinson 1987: 244; Strauss 1987: 31) and polysemy (Chuquet & Paillard 1987: 54-55) and, above all, may help the student overcome the above-mentioned L1-L2 equivalents (Snell-Hornby 1985: 26).

This approach may prove especially useful when tackling new vocabulary in reading exercises, which does not mean that it is the only choice but simply one out of many techniques the teacher may resort to in order to improve the learner's lexical competence, not forgetting that some other aspects can also be focused on. Thus, the exercise may well serve to work on questions of register and discourse (pragmatic competence) and help the reader infer meaning in context (strategic competence).

Since this is not a fully independent activity, its communicative content is largely dependent on that of the other activity within which this is to be found. In any case, active participation and discussion in L2 should always be fostered. As for its interest-raising qualities, these will largely derive from the characteristics of the text chosen. An example will help us illustrate this point. With this aim in mind we have selected one of the many texts contained in the textbook used for intermediate students in the adult-oriented language courses offered by the University of Oviedo:

### GAME FOR A LAUGH

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT of going on a TV quiz show? The games are played for a laugh, but the prizes can be really fabulous: cars, stereos, TVs, videos and exotic holidays.

Of course, being a game show contestant is not for everyone. Fear of the camera is a common worry, and general shyness is another. But for those who are keen, Christine Patterson from a leading independent TV production company has some advice.

'Contestants need to be quick-witted, fast on the buzzer and not shy about appearing on TV. They can be aged from 18 to 80 to compete.' She also believes that 'you need to have a reasonable amount of general knowledge, but an important factor is how your personality shows itself on TV.'

#### **Do you have to be confident?**

'If you can talk freely and are confident,' says Christine, 'it's an advantage.'

Most contestants agree that being on quiz shows is addictive. It's frightening and nerve-racking. But once you know you've done it, you just want to go back and do it again and again. If you have read this far and still think you would like to be a contestant, you have made a very revealing statement about yourself. You are bright, bored, not afraid to look silly in front of others, and almost certainly an eternal optimist. Pessimists, who may have all the other qualities, rarely enter game shows, saying 'What's the point? I wouldn't win anything.'

#### **Which are you?**

(Gairns & Redman 1996: 22).

What we shall attempt to do here is show a possible way of introducing the most important items of vocabulary contained in this text, which need not always be contrastive. What is being stated here is that the contrastive study of vocabulary may prove useful on occasions. In any case, it is our duty to emphasise the convenience of introducing vocabulary in context so that the student can see it in use, which in turn may serve him/her to infer the meaning of some terms. In this case, very few students are likely to know the meaning of "buzzer", although it is easy for them to infer thanks both to the general context (the text discusses the topic of television contests) and the specific context surrounding this particular word: it is required of the contestant to be "fast on the buzzer". Something similar could be argued apropos of the expression "nerve-racking".

Moving on to the usefulness of a contrastive approach to the introduction of new vocabulary, we find it exceedingly useful to emphasise the close relationship existing between words in the student's L1 and L2. This is indeed the case with "fabulous", "appearing", "personality", "advantage", "addictive", "revealing", "eternal", "optimist", "pessimist", "rarely"... In some cases, this relationship is clear; in others, such as

“appearing” or even “advantage”, it can easily pass unnoticed.

Another logical step is to point out this relationship in false friends. In this regard, the text reproduced above contains no less than five words which could be so described: “contestant”, “confident”, “statement”, “point” and even “prize”. In such cases it might be convenient to elicit their translation into the student’s L1.

Lastly, it is important to draw the student’s attention to two more words which, although not problematic from the point of view of comprehension, may cause difficulties in other ways. Thus, it would be useful to resort to contrastive analysis in order to explain the difference between “game” and “play”, not forgetting to mention the ambiguous category of the latter. A similar example is “laugh”, which translates into Spanish as both “reír” and “risa”. It is thanks to such examples that the Spanish student may become accustomed to the fact that English frequently resorts to the so-called Ø derivation; in other words, it does not require any type of derivative affix to change the category of a word.

## 2.6. Explanatory translation: the phrase and beyond (Level: [upper] intermediate)

This activity has been devised to help reduce the sometimes inexplicable grammatical errors to be found in otherwise considerably advanced students. Given that translation is being increasingly recognised as an ideal instrument in the visualisation of grammatical aspects and structures, as well as the restrictions imposed by both the source and target languages (Chuquet & Paillard 1987: 54; Baker 1992: 109-110), what follows is an adaptation of the classical sentence translation exercise (Lavault 1985: 18; Perkins 1985: 54; Atkinson 1987: 243-245; Strauss 1987: 30; Newmark 1991: 62). Additionally, it can also be used to provide practice in such difficult areas as lexical collocations, idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs.

Procedures can be many and varied. We find the one contained in Palacios & Seoane (2000: 145-148) particularly convenient and practicable: students can be divided into groups, each group receiving a set of cards. Each card will contain one phrase, sentence or expression (preferably in a relevant context), the translation for which will be found on the reverse side, and the winner will be the person getting the greatest number of correct translations. One suitable example may be found below. The left-hand box shows the expression to be translated by the student whereas that on the right shows the reverse side of the same card, containing a possible translation -in this case, suggested by Breslin (1993: 229).

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| To be houseproud | Gustar(a alguien) tener la casa impecable |
|------------------|---|

The game rules may vary. By way of example, several identical sets of cards can be devised, one for each group of students so that all groups can work with the same expressions. Within each group, all students will take their turn and try to translate one card. Points will be given for each right answer and the winner will be the student with the highest score.

This was a methodological proposal suggested by Palacios in one of the sessions of the course *Técnicas de Enseñanzas del Inglés en un Contexto Comunicativo* (University of Oviedo, September 1999). However, we consider that it also has its weak points, especially since it introduces language in a decontextualised manner. Palacios himself is fully aware of this important limitation (Palacios & Seoane 2000: 145-148). Indeed, contextualisation is especially important when students are asked to translate into their L1. Such a context does not imply a great deal of effort on the part of the teacher given that dictionaries frequently contain contextualised examples. Thus, we can go back to the example above using the context provided by Kirkpatrick & Schwarz (1994: 175):

|  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| She is very <u>houseproud</u> and makes all her guests put on slippers before they walk on her carpets | Le gusta tener la casa impecable |
|--|----------------------------------|

In the case of service translation, the teacher should also prompt the student to produce the word, expression or structure in the right context to make sure that they have acquired their right usage.

Once again, the exercise focuses on the grammatical (especially lexical and morphosyntactic) aspects of the student's communicative competence. However, if -as suggested above- appropriate contextualisation is provided, it is possible to defend the idea that the exercise consists in putting across messages, which -together with group work and the game-like procedure followed, not only justifies our calling this a "communicative task" but will also raise the student's interest.

## 2.7. Dramatisation (Level: upper intermediate)

Sociocultural factors being frequently left aside in the L2 classroom whatever the level (Viña 1997: 119), this next activity aims at practising such various culture-specific aspects as the average pitch and volume usually employed by native speakers in particular contexts, the kind of relationship established between them, what conversation topics are to be expected, not forgetting non-verbal aspects such as gesture and body expression (Coperías 1997: 550-551). We are therefore entering the difficult and nonetheless necessary realm of pragmatics, whose vital importance in cross-cultural communication is more than frequently acknowledged (Viña 1997: 121).

What we propose here is that the students, starting from an ST (in principle, in L2) depicting a communicative situation, devise another text in their L1 covering a more or less parallel situation. The reverse order, however, could also be applicable to more advanced students. Texts to be used can be as varied as life itself since virtually any daily situation can be made use of.

It is worth noting that the student should aim not so much at faithfully reproducing the content of the sentences contained in the ST but at producing a parallel scene in the target language. Taking the speech act as the translation unit, as Marcondes de Souza suggests



(1990: 108), could help students understand what the exercise is about. This could show that translation is useful when it comes to practising not only accuracy but also “pragmatic equivalence” (Stibboard 1994: 13).

This type of activity is inspired by role games and could be referred to as “dramatisation”. The procedure is fairly simple and basically consists in transferring a given speech act (customer-assistant interaction in a shop, asking for directions on the street, meeting an old friend you have not seen for years, etc). This could be done with any text or dialogue contained in a textbook or with excerpts taken from an audio recording or a video. In the case of the video recording, non-verbal aspects of communication are explicitly present and it will be easy for the students to observe them. An oral text reproduced in an audio recording or a written text, on the contrary, will not signal such aspects explicitly. It is therefore advisable to devote some time to practise them before working on the final TL version, which in such cases will be the student’s L1.

The class could be divided into different work groups, each one producing a different TT, which will be later “staged” within the circle of the group or, should the occasion arise in the case of open, outgoing students, in front of the whole class. Needless to say, meaning negotiation, interaction, active participation, creativity, group work, game-like procedures... are features making such activities perfectly appealing, communicative tasks. However, it could also prove beneficial -and certainly more difficult- to carry out the same type of exercise using the student’s L2 as the TL. In such cases, it is to be assumed that the student will be more or less familiarised with the pragmatic aspects contained in the ST so that more time could be devoted to the study of the pragmatic aspects featured in the same situation in the target polysystem.

## 2.8. Cueing (Level: upper intermediate)

This exercise, inspired by Klein-Braley & Smith (1985: 163-164), is the natural bridge between activities Nos. 7 & 18. As opposed to dramatisation, students are here required to create their own communicative situation, the (L1) cues provided by the teacher helping them to succeed in their task. A good example could be the following:

Estás en la estación de ferrocarril de Bristol. Dirígete a la taquilla y pide un billete de ida a Londres. Pregunta horarios y tarifas. Escoge el tren de precio inferior que salga antes.

Such requirements could quite accurately reflect a perfectly real situation in which the student is in an English-speaking country with someone who does not speak the language and asks him/her to do that for him/her. But, once again, the situations this activity could focus on are just as many as those seen in activity No 7, or even more, since the TT could also be a written one (e.g. a note, a formal letter...).

All dimensions of the student’s communicative competence find their place in this exercise, which -if approached as we did the previous activity- may well deserve to be

referred to as a (perfectly appealing) communicative task.

## 2.9. Paraphrasing and summarising (Level: any from intermediate)

Whether into one's L1 (Atkinson 1987: 243-245; Palacios & Seoane 2000: 157-158) or in either direction (Tudor 1987: 271; Stibboard 1994: 15), these are two strategies widely appreciated among experts since they involve practising active and critical reading or listening comprehension (depending on whether we have an oral or written ST) and force the student to accurately reproduce another's ideas without relevant omissions, thus combining comprehension, quickness and spontaneity in the rephrasing process (Niedzielski & Kummer 1989: 143; Meyer 1989: 128-129; Ballard 1995: 29). Thus conceived, paraphrasing is a tool students can profit from in order to free themselves of the almost hypnotic appeal the ST seems to exert on them, which usually materialises in word-for-word translation.

Additionally, summarising is a precious strategy both translators and interpreters often have to resort to (Meyer 1989: 128-129). In order to summarise, the student needs to read and understand the text globally. As Niedzielski & Kummer put it, "[t]o produce a semantically representative summary, the translator or interpreter must recognize redundancies, select the most important words or expressions, and combine them into a shorter discourse still containing all of the primary elements of information" (143).

It goes without saying that this kind of activity should never reach independent status in the L2 classroom. On the contrary, it is to be interpreted as a complement to other activities such as reading and listening comprehension and used as a pre-discussion activity. In any case, it is of vital importance that the text chosen should be minimally appealing to the group since only then will the exercise foster creativity, participation and active discussion, thus reaching very high communicative levels.

## 2.10. Potentially polysemic texts (Level: upper intermediate)

This is the natural continuation of activity No 4, where students were encouraged to resort to context in order to disambiguate meaning at word level. In this case, we will consider the potential ambiguity not of single words but of the text as a whole, which can be of two different types: syntactic and pragmatic. It is advisable to start dealing with the former type since it is far more easily observable by the student, but exploring the latter can also prove interesting and rewarding once a certain level has been reached. By translating L2 texts whose illocutionary force differs from its literal meaning, a fact far more usual than we normally think, the learner will gradually gain an interesting insight into those language intricacies that seem to be beyond the scope of ordinary grammar books. Given the tremendous importance of pragmatic competence, especially if we bear in mind that it does not seem to develop as quickly as do other aspects of communicative competence, every single effort in this direction should always be welcome (Wolf 1999: 104-106).

The student should therefore be told to translate not what the original message literally

says but what the speaker really wants to put across with it, in which task the context will undoubtedly be an invaluable help. Consider in this regard the following telephone conversation suggested by Yule:

- Can I talk to Mary?
  - She's not here.
  - I'm asking you -Can I talk to her?
  - And I'm telling you -SHE'S NOT HERE!
- (1996: 50)

In this case, the caller simply asks whether it is possible for him to speak to Mary, whereas the person at the other end interprets it as "Is Mary available?" His answer, rather laconic, simply indicates that Mary is not physically present there, although the caller suspects there is more to it ("She's not available this moment" or "She doesn't want to speak to you").

All in all, such exercises could raise the student's awareness of the complexity and importance of pragmatics by establishing an interesting contrastive analysis of L1 and L2 facts.

The ST need not be lengthy, and so students could again be divided into groups so that the actual translation could be the result of the active participation of all group members. Lastly, we should not forget that texts of the kind we are dealing with now frequently present humorous features which could be exploited in these exercises. In this sense, ironic texts offer a myriad of possibilities.

#### 2.11. Where have these excerpts been taken from? (Level: upper intermediate)

Drawing on related material taken from Lavault (1985: 62) and Beeby (1996: 67-68), our aim here is to show the student that the different kinds of texts present their own lexical and discursive features in all languages. Thus, any English speaker will be able to recognise the sentence "Keep away from children" as taken from a medicine instructions sheet; or "If product enters eyes, rinse with water" as part of a text containing shampoo use directions, for example. Both share some characteristics (the use of imperative, avoidance of articles and personal reference, etc.) which define them as clear members of a precise set of texts: those containing instructions or directions.

By presenting the student with a selection of similar extracts (from newspapers, political speeches, commercial letters, forms, job applications...), s/he will grow familiar with, and internalise, their most relevant features, thus eventually learning to identify them through what Wolf calls the "principle of relevance" (1999: 102).

Special emphasis is therefore placed on discursive and pragmatic aspects, not forgetting the student's strategic competence. Once the excerpts have been identified correctly, their translation can be tackled into the student's L1, always taking special care to abide by the specific lexical and discursive norms imposed by the target language.

The first part of the exercise could be arranged as a game or contest in which students

are divided into groups, so that the different members discuss and agree on a possible solution. Thus, all factors meet to create a perfectly entertaining, communicative task.

## 2.12. Liaison interpreting (Level: any from upper intermediate)

Niedzielski & Kummer use this term to refer to any situation in which two or more people who do not speak each other's language manage to communicate thanks to the intervention of a third person who speaks both (1989: 139).

This activity is here presented as a bridge between the one we have termed "cueing" and the final tasks involving interpreting. The ideal situation would be that in which two exclusively monolingual speakers could be found so that the learner could act as an interpreter for them (see Prieto 2002 for a full account on this matter). Since this is not always possible, students could be divided into threes and be assigned one of the three possible roles. This class division could be preserved for further occasions, always encouraging the students to shift roles within their group. The situations to be reproduced range from a simple interview (between two politicians, two businessmen, a celebrity and a journalist), a scene in which a local takes a foreign friend shopping... all of them being perfectly common situations in which most of us will have taken part more than once.

To start with, the interlocutors can be provided with a short, rather general script (similar to the one used in the cueing activities above) so as to ensure that the conversation produced is long enough and that the different groups deal more or less with the same topics and, consequently, similar linguistic features. Only later, or when the students' level is quite high, should the script be done away with.

If practised correctly, this activity may give rise to incredibly interesting situations the students will not fail to enjoy. However, the division of the class into such small groups will be a true test of the teacher's management skills, which is why this is only recommended when working with adult students. Post-session feedback, as to the errors committed, is also advisable.

Thus understood, liaison interpreting covers all aspects included in the concept of communicative competence while creating a joyful, informal and highly entertaining environment in which learning will undoubtedly take place.

## 2.13. Underlining translation units (Level: upper intermediate)

The activities included in this paper have been gradually introduced so as to cater for the specific needs derived from the different competence levels. We can now consider students to be on the threshold of full text translation, as currently practised in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year English Philology courses at the University of Oviedo. However, most of the students attending such courses are presented with translation exercises without actually having ever done anything similar before. This might explain the generalised tendency to faithfully reproduce the structural and stylistic ST patterns, thus frequently producing what is generally referred to as word-for-word translation.

Consequently, we agree with Perkins (1985: 57) in that some kind of preparatory activity might be devised so as to provide students with some essential training before they actually face their first translation exercise.

What we suggest is presenting the group with both an ST and a TT to be compared, paying special attention to the translation units as adopted by the translator in each specific case. Thus, students will easily become aware of the fact that, when translating, individual word and translation unit do not usually go hand in hand. As stated elsewhere, words cannot be translated as if they were isolated items but always together with the surrounding context; sometimes, they are part of idiomatic expressions and they must be tackled accordingly; there are also cases in which the translator chooses not to translate them so as to avoid redundancies or artificial renderings. Finally, it must be pointed out that the same grammatical structure may sometimes be used differently in the source and target languages.

Thus presented, the exercise focuses more on familiarising the student with the translation process than on practising a specific communicative aspect. However, some obvious contrastive analysis is fostered which might be beneficial to the lexical and morphosyntactic components of the student's grammatical competence.

Finally, it goes without saying that it should be the students who -always guided by their teacher- point out whatever they consider remarkable, and not the teacher him/herself, fostering discussion and participation in an exercise whose main interest lies in the nature of the text chosen and in its very usefulness.

#### 2.14. Comparing multilingual texts (Level: advanced)

Multilingual texts, such as those easily obtainable from tourist attractions, are an invaluable training source for the language learner, as Palacios & Seoane wisely point out (2000: 119; 121-129). To start with, they are not usually very long, which greatly facilitates their study in a single lesson. Generally speaking, one of the texts will be interpreted as the ST, the rest being translations into other languages which might well serve the student as an introduction to translation criticism. On other occasions, exceptional in our country, these texts present such high-quality translations that they constitute ideal material for contrastive analysis.

The reader is normally offered not only the English and Spanish versions, which are the languages on which this paper concentrates, but also other European languages and, in the case of Spain, some of the regional languages. We consider that readers hardly ever pay any attention to these other versions, which -however- could prove invaluable tools in sensitising students to both linguistic variation and relatedness between languages, especially as far as vocabulary and syntactic structure are concerned.

Thiel also suggests using parallel texts (1985: 119), by which term she refers to two or more (original) texts written in different languages but fulfilling the same function in their respective reception contexts. This would imply, for instance, comparing the instructions of use of a Spanish product with those of a British one. In this case we cannot talk of translation, since both are original texts. However, they are clearly comparable, since they

fulfil the same function and will therefore be placed in parallel communicative situations. Consequently, the comparison of their textual structure conventions will be an extremely useful exercise which could also be complemented with other activities involving the translation of some excerpts into the student's L1 or, in the case of really advanced students, the production of their own parallel texts in L2. This last proposal is indeed interesting in that it goes well beyond traditional translation, providing the learner with considerable freedom to explore and create and with a unique chance to transfer knowledge to other applicable contexts.

Thus conceived, the activity allows the learner to work on all aspects of his/her communicative competence, although special emphasis will be placed on the discursive and sociolinguistic components. Needless to say, the phase concerning text comparison need not be a monologue on the part of the teacher. Preliminary instructions and enough time can be given so that students, divided into groups, could themselves determine how to approach the texts involved in fruitful, motivating interaction. As regards the actual production of the parallel text, individual work is a possibility, in which case it is also worth pointing out that translating itself is a communicative activity. In this case, the parallel text is nothing but a message addressing a specific receptor who could be more or less defined in a given translation commission. We would therefore have a sender, a message, a code and a receiver, thus completing the communication diagram.

#### 2.15. Cultural aspects (Level: advanced)

Our aim here will be somewhat different since we will be dealing not so much with innovative or possible variants as with the traditional translation exercise. However, special emphasis will be placed on the kind of texts chosen for it.

References to the inseparability of the language / culture binomial abound in the literature (vid., *inter al.*, Chaffey 1990; Puren 1995; Coperías 1997: 550; Davis 1997; Nord 1997: 23). Unfortunately, obvious space limitations prevent us from going into the nature of such a close relationship. Suffice it to say that culture undoubtedly determines some of the grammatical and, above all, lexical and pragmatic aspects languages present (Johnson 1995: 56; Coperías 1997; Hadley 1997: 491). Beyond that, cultural aspects - unlike their purely linguistic counterparts- are acquired unconsciously, thus making each and every one of us potentially ethnocentric (Ortuño 1991: 449), which in turn means transferring our cultural values in an L2 context (Davies 1992).

When exposed to values different from our own -something which, to a greater or lesser extent will always take place in the L2 classroom- and lacking the necessary training to face them we frequently react negatively (Ortuño 1991: 450). This could easily result in the creation of negative and -only too frequently- stereotypical images of the target language native speaker. In our view, we could talk of the teacher's moral duty to correct such distortions by sharing his/her personal experience with his/her students, thus providing them with a more accurate image of the community of speakers of the language they now study.

What we propose, therefore, is the selection of culturally-relevant texts for translation, which will inevitably foster the already powerful intercultural component the activity intrinsically possesses (Bensoussan 1987: 34; Villegas 1987: 46 & 50; Newmark 1991: 62; Ballard 1995: 35; Nord 1997: 17, 23 & 32; Cook 1999: 202-203; Palacios & Seoane 2000: 130-134). The inclusion in the text of cultural institutions and culture-loaded words or culturemes will undoubtedly make the task more difficult but also more appealing to the learner, who will easily be willing to take part in the discussion which should arise during the correction session.

## 2.16. Source or target text? (Level: advanced)

Nothing could be simpler than the activity we are about to describe. Funnily enough, very few authors mention it at all, although Villegas (1987: 51-52), Ballard (1995: 29) and Pegenenaut (1996: 112) are worth pointing out. After all, it all comes down to presenting the group of students with an ST and at least one translation offering no indication as to which is which. In a first phase, the group should be encouraged to comment on any linguistic, discursive or cultural aspect they consider worth mentioning, which will constitute the basis for a second step in which they have to judge and determine which of the two texts is an ST and why. The exercise is extremely useful since it will test the students' linguistic and cultural competence, especially when detecting instances of language transfer or cross-linguistic influence that could allow them to determine which is the ST.

Texts in this activity should always be authentic. Indeed, they are not difficult to find given the amount of multilingual texts easily obtainable from different institutions (museums, tourist offices...), airports or even on the Internet. Additionally, the exercise could be rounded off by telling the students to propose their own versions whenever they come across any feature they do not agree with. Thus, not only would we be doing some useful work on the L2 but practising contrastive analysis, not forgetting the part concerning translation analysis and evaluation.

In so doing, the student has to resort to every single component of his/her communicative competence to be able to detect any abnormal element, however insignificant it might seem, whether it be grammatical, discursive or pragmatic, that could lead him/her to identify the source and target texts. Once again, work will be done on a written text, which apparently does not leave orality too much room, although this is easily solved through group work and oral discussion. Lastly, among other various features, the frequent presence of hilarious effects involuntarily achieved through linguistic or translational blunders also adds to the activity's intrinsic interest.

## 2.17. Intralinguistic translation (Level: advanced)

As mentioned earlier in this paper, there is no need of two different languages for us to talk of translation. Thus, Klein-Bradley & Smith (1985: 167) and Beeby (1996: 70-71) use the labels "mode-change translation" and "deverbalisation", respectively to refer to the change

from oral to written language and vice versa. However, we prefer our own denomination, which could also include changing from a given register / style or (social, regional) variant into another while at the same time it specifies that source and target language are one and the same in this case.

It should also be noted that changes in mode usually bring about changes in style (oral speech tends to be less formal, whereas the opposite could apply to written language), so this kind of exercise could be especially productive. As usual, it could be approached in numerous ways. One could imply using an oral text as the basis of an oral comprehension exercise. This text will be later rendered in written form with the subsequent changes. We are fully aware of the many difficulties the learner would come across when carrying out such a task. That is why handing out a written transcript of the text is also highly advisable. As follows from above, it is clear that communicative competence is thoroughly treated in this activity. As an exceptional feature, it is also worth pointing out that no reference to the student's L1 is ever made in it. Lastly, creativity stands as one of the activity's major motivating features: there will never be a single solution. The different options can then be evaluated by the whole class, although this is not at all incompatible with previous group work.

## 2.18. Interpreting (Level: advanced)

This last activity is nothing but the natural culmination of this methodological repertoire concerning translation, especially if we bear in mind the extremely lax concept of translation defended in the opening lines of this paper. Explicit support for this position can be found in Nadstoga (1989: 109) who conceives (both written and oral) translation as a conscious intellectual process whose presence in L2 curricula is fully justified especially in the light of the cognitive learning theories.

In our particular exposition, interpreting is the logical continuation of the so-called cueing and liaison interpreting activities, in which the learner will have already had the chance to unconsciously develop the strategies necessary to face a task of this nature. Even though we are not alone in this unambiguous defence of interpreting activities designed for advanced students, there certainly is some controversy as to what kind of activities should be introduced first. In this sense, a consecutive-first approach can be inferred in both Nadstoga (1989: 114) and Decotterd (1987: 27), whereas the opposite, simultaneous-first trend can be seen in Klein-Bradley & Smith (1985: 166), who justify their position on the grounds that simultaneous interpreting requires less memory effort.

These authors might certainly be right in their assumptions but the truth is that, to the inexperienced learner, simultaneous interpreting is at least a difficult challenge, if not an unachievable one. It is therefore likely to cause affective problems in the students which we would much rather avoid by introducing consecutive interpreting first, so that the learners can gain confidence before reaching the highest levels of their difficulty scale.

Another important question is the direction in which the translation will be carried out. Once again, taking into account that we are in an SLT context and that in real life



interpreters are frequently forced to translate in both directions, we see no harm in doing the same with our students as long as we stick to realistic aims and consequently do not expect students to perform to professional standards.

Unfortunately, space limitations prevent us from offering a detailed account of the very many different possibilities both variants present. We will simply suggest using the small group technique, as seen when dealing with liaison interpreting, only gradually widening the audience, so that the transition may help the student nullify the natural affective factors that could possibly affect his / her performance. The situations that could be simulated are again very varied indeed: interviews with celebrities, full press conferences... In any event, it is important that the students work with no script in this case, so that the output can be more natural.

The next step will naturally involve using the language lab and its only too often underused equipment, which makes it ideal for practising simultaneous interpreting. Good-quality headphones will provide the acoustic isolation necessary to carry out this activity without too many problems.

As interpreting involves real-time, interactive communication, there is no denying that these activities stand at the very top position of the communicative task charts. On the other hand, their novelty -they are hardly ever practised in the L2 classroom-, the hilarious situations that may arise, plus the logical feelings of personal achievement in the students will largely contribute to the success of these two activities which deserve a privileged place in L2 curricula for advanced learners.

### **3. Conclusion**

As can be seen, even if the activities designed for the lower levels are greater in number, those addressing the higher levels are far more complex and definitely more communicative. However, we consider that this is not an exceptional feature only to be found in translation-based tasks. Much to the contrary, it affects any kind of pedagogic programme. At the lower levels, the students' competence will obviously limit the kind of activities they could be presented with, and we believe it would even be harmful for them to take part in activities with too high a communicative content.

Nevertheless, we believe it clearly positive to show the communicative potential they can all have, something which is not always duly acknowledged and which may well serve as an argument for translation to be denied its otherwise well-deserved place in L2 curricula.

On the other hand, this communicative content cannot be overlooked in those activities selected for the higher levels. They are integrative, holistic tasks and exercises containing interesting, realistic simulations in which all possible aspects of the communicative competence are at work.

In devising and selecting all these activities, the lax concept of translation, as defended by the so-called functionalist theories of translation, was a great help since it provides

sufficient scope to cover not only the translation of written texts but also and very especially oral translation or interpreting, the basic foundation underlying some of our proposals.

Overall, translation -in its many varieties- provides excellent material for interlinguistic and intercultural analysis, which should always be practised independently of the students' level. It is with this aim in mind that we have presented the reader with the account of possible activities on which the present work has focused. It is now entirely up to the practitioner to adopt and adapt them to their interests and needs.

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