

Attitudes to the Use of L1 and Translation in Second Language Teaching and Learning (Part 2)

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Abstract

This paper reports on the qualitative research carried out on own-language use and particularly translation, previously summarised in an earlier article together with discussion of the quantitative findings and conclusions. A number of ‘mini’ case histories are presented based on face-to-face interviews with teachers together with *verbatim* respondent comments and opinions. The data illustrate the wide variation in individual views which are often not apparent from quantitative data.

Keywords: Second Language Teaching and Learning; Translation; L1 Use

Introduction

This paper forms Part 2 of the research study previously described and reported in this Journal (Druce, 2013), and should be read in conjunction with that article. Presented here are ‘mini’ case histories of fourteen face-to-face personal interviews with teachers together with a selection of *verbatim* comments and opinions from amongst the 126 respondents. In Part 1, various recommendations were made for further research focussing on language teachers in various contexts and on samples of learners at different levels and in different countries. This article, therefore, is intended (i) to provide additional insights for practising teachers and (ii) to aid potential researchers in the field by identifying key issues and themes which may not always be apparent from perusal of quantitative data. The relevant background, respondent demographics, research questions, theoretical framework, study details, methodology and limitations are as described previously.

Overall summaries of the qualitative findings were previously reported and discussed in relation to the quantitative data and theoretical concepts. It was reported that 86% of respondents do agree that carefully planned translation activity can play a useful role in the L2 communicative classroom with 82% agreeing to the use of an eclectic approach. Nevertheless, it was also noted that the qualitative information “illustrates the wide and varying views of many language educators (*op. cit.* 2013: 76), and it was considered appropriate, therefore, to report more fully on individual respondent attitudes and opinions to stimulate further discussion on the issues raised. Subsequent to submission of the author’s (2013) earlier article, Hall and Cook (2012) published a comprehensive ‘state-of-the-art’ article

concerning own-language use in language teaching and learning encompassing theoretical frameworks, previous research, and practical aspects.

Personal interviews/'mini' case histories

Fourteen face-to-face interviews were carried out comprising twelve in the UK and two in Israel, with the principal aim of exploring views of language teachers/trainers from differing backgrounds and in different settings. Due to the constraints, only short summaries of the main points are given, highlighting key issues wherever possible.

Case Study 1

A teacher trainer and manager for many years, this person herself trained using the Direct Method, with the term 'translation' triggering negative school experiences (Latin, French, etc.). She subsequently rejected the Direct Method, though, due to practical reasons, suggesting various uses for L1 particularly overseas in monolingual environments, not readily applicable in the UK where multilingual classes predominate. She has encountered management 'banning' of L1 for various reasons in the L2 classroom. The issue of bilingual teachers is a polarising one. Some, even though sharing the L1, use only L2 except for breaks, others use strategies for measured use, while others defer to student demands. She also observes widespread use of electronic dictionaries. The Institute of Education (London) undertakes 'learner case studies' to analyse/track oral and literary skills and practices on L2s, and to devise learning programmes involving use of L1, to help teacher trainers. The aim is for teachers to see learners as users of a range of languages. Translation as a fifth skill may be useful depending on level and sophistication of the learner, language diversity and organisational constraints. However, scope for innovation in ELT is limited due to time constraints, limited L2 exposure, time assessment demands etc. Methodology and organisational factors continually interact. Translation could be useful for raising intercultural competence (in a primarily bicultural environment, as opposed e.g. to London).

Case Study 2

A head teacher of Hebrew in London (and speaking on behalf of the team of 12 teachers) is in principle, against the use of translation, even for advanced students, e.g. for homework, since learners find it difficult. Students, particularly at lower levels, mentally translate and they are not encouraged to become reliant or dependent on L1. Translation is used in class for words and phrases encountered in texts which are being studied, particularly for texts with beginners, and where learners who won't admit to not knowing, can write a word in the text. The need is to ensure new vocabulary is known, which can be internalised during homework.

Tasks etc. are explained in L1 at lower levels, where use of L2 for this would be very time consuming within limited class time (e.g. 1-2 hours per week). She compared this to an absorption 'Ulpan'* class in Israel where there are 5 hours' learning 5 days weekly in an 'immersion' setting. Learners do like some translation and feel more confident about homework once they are sure about vocabulary/grammar structures etc. 'Scaffolded' help occurs between weaker learners. Translation is only one of a range of tools including role-play, games, use of TV, all in the L2, and is useful as a comprehension check, but in advanced classes, discussion and some translation of newspapers predominates especially for new subject areas. She agrees with translation being a fifth skill to complement the 'four skills', and agrees absolutely with its role in intercultural communication.

Case Study 3

An EFL teacher trainer blames the dominance of the native speaker model, publishing house/monolingual textbooks, and "absurd national policies (e.g. Korea, Japan) torturing teachers and students" for the translation ban. She maintains that use of L1 is essential for understanding certain concepts (e.g. time), and useful for grammatical points and metalanguage, and the idea of L2 using only can be scary for learners and teachers. Code switching and working between languages show how languages work, and learners, certainly at lower levels, mentally translate. Bilinguality implies a totally different person, and not just a user of two languages. The native speaker attainment model is "unrealistic and dispiriting", and she derides the predominance of student requirements for native speaker teachers both in UK and abroad in language schools (e.g. Japan). Birkbeck College always employs "good teachers" irrespective of L1 ability. She discourages translation into L2 which is suitable mainly for professional translator training, requiring sophisticated skills. In UK classes, foreign students write translated words in the texts (e.g. Persian), but discussions and debates occur only in English; i.e. the 'product' is in English, but the process is varied and cannot always be monitored. She agrees strongly regarding translation as a cultural bridge (e.g. in film).

Case Study 4

This TESOL course leader in London agrees that translation requires sophisticated and demanding linguistic skill beyond bilinguality, and though he uses it sometimes abroad in monolingual classes, he is basically a proponent of the Direct Method. Translation can be used minimally for contrastive analysis or quizzes, tests and for specific pedagogic reasons. Lower intermediate students e.g. in Chile where he often teaches, manage well with the Direct

* Hebrew classes for new immigrants

Method except for individual words as do students in Israel who code switch as necessary. Many employers seek native speaker teachers who are perceived to be 'better' but there are many variations around the world. He cites the failure of "massive translation" in Japan (into *Jakudoku*) in language teaching, based on word for wordism, producing "translation slaves" who are "text bound". He is a firm believer, from experience, for a monolingual class, to have a highly proficient non-native speaker who knows the L1 but is prepared not to use it. This means being firm, setting parameters and rules in order to achieve maximum L2 exposure, and insisting on L2 only in English classes. In this way, students in Israel learned automatically and naturally; it was difficult, but ultimately appreciated. Difficult cultural terms in the L2 do not need translating into L1 if they are understood, and the task is to raise awareness of cultural norms/behaviours. Translation is not necessarily a 'fifth skill' since it forces working with two language systems simultaneously when many prefer only one.

Case Study 5

This TESOL teacher trainer accepts that L1 is an important tool and can be useful in contrastive analysis or 'false friends', and sometimes in multilingual settings (UK) via scaffolded help between groups of students with differing L1s. Though this sometimes works, the teacher does lose some control. She agrees that some students expect translation, and certainly either mentally translate, or annotate texts. However, though it is useful and helps with understanding it "does not help with automaticity or fluency", and to achieve this, the L1 must be discarded; a learner "needs to be immersed (in the L2), to hear then imitate". This respondent previously learned Russian via grammar translation leading to good reading and writing, but "hopeless speaking". Nevertheless, she agrees some translation raises language awareness for advanced learners, and is a good way of checking comprehension. After the debate over the years, L1 is now regarded as a valuable resource since the L2 is learned on the basis of and resulting from L1, though this can be problematic if the two languages are similar. Translation as a fifth skill is a reasonable idea to complement the four skills, and enables "looking at the infrastructure of the L2 at higher levels in a subtle way".

Case Study 6

A University lecturer in modern Hebrew had previously undergone traditional TEFL training in a language school using only L2, avoidance of translation, eliciting etc. It was a surprise to encounter (assessed) translation examinations into the L2 even at beginner and lower intermediate levels (in UCL), though students seemed to enjoy it, without complaint. It helps with learning tenses. Nevertheless she rarely uses translation other than for instructions, comprehension checking, and minimises use of L1, with classroom pressure to maximise L2

usage. Colleagues in SLES* (UCL) apparently employ translation widely, and students seem to appreciate it. This respondent admits to “being conditioned” about translation but accepts its usefulness at advanced levels for heightening awareness, though her students don’t request it, and at lower levels for specific topics/themes, e.g. in film.

Case Study 7

At Cambridge University, interestingly, translation is included in all L2 teaching not as a conscious policy, but as historical tradition, although newer teachers, including this respondent, seriously questioned its role and purpose. As a senior trainer in Spanish, she was initially questioning, but saw that students wanted more translation and she finds it useful for raising language awareness, contrastive analysis, etc. and has revised her views noting that it is not a question of whether to translate but how, i.e. to make it more relevant, exciting, creative, innovative and communicative. Cambridge students, who tend to be more literary/academic compared to other Universities do like it, and see its value, and provide a very positive feedback and very high ratings for translation compared to role play or group work, from annual student evaluations. She agrees, though, that it does depend on student type and personality, and issues of ‘confidence’. This teacher is convinced that much time can be wasted by overuse of L2, though admits there is not enough hard research evidence to know the usefulness of translation, and sees it as a continuum on the L1 usage spectrum. Translation to L1 is taught by classical/literary/ medieval specialists, while into L2 by native speaker teachers. General language classes employ eclectic methods including communicative, some grammar and some translation (for assessment exams), and other specialised language classes (depending on level) predominantly use translation discussion topics or genres (especially in year 4 after a year abroad). Examinations require translation in both directions without dictionaries. She sees “the translator as a lifelong language learner and the language learner as a natural translator”.

Case Study 8

This professor of translation has never taught languages *per se*, but is the author of somewhat controversial views on the role of translation in language teaching. She does not, however, see any conflict between the disciplines; translation was always part of her own language learning, but never looked down on. Translation can be used in language teaching but is not necessary, but she claims the lack of translation topics in SLA texts is a “peculiarly English issue”, because ELT professionals in UK lack knowledge of other languages and teach

* Slavonic and East European studies

English abroad without anyway being able to translate. Hence the native/non-native speaker issue has been crucial. Use of translation tasks depends critically on the choice of an interesting authentic text and student engagement, and even grammar translation can be used as long as it is, crucially, done well. Many students do have a “feeling” for translation and should not be prevented from enjoying such activity. She admits to using the mid-point score often in the questionnaire in this research because she does not know the answers. She definitely agrees that translation is a fifth skill including all ‘four skills’ in a naturalistic way, and has to be done sensitively regarding cultural mediation, requiring prior understanding and feel of cultural differences. She maintains that whilst translation into L2 is difficult regarding grammar and vocabulary, translation into L1 is also prone to error if the ST is not understood properly, and both modes should be adopted.

Case Study 9

This teacher of Yiddish in UCL, London University, is a firm proponent of the Communicative Approach including role-plays, and believes it “really works from ages 3-93”. The language and related literature, culture and history are all taught from the beginning in the L2, using the four skills, except for occasional words. At advanced levels, she uses some translation of short texts into the L1 (English) as a comprehension check, and for rapid acquisition. She never sets a translation examination involving translation into the L2, due to the time to master grammar and syntax, and because of L1 interference. For students of a new language and culture, translation into the L2 is not efficient, and is only appropriate for professional translators. Success of role-play does very much depend on the teacher and perception of student personalities, and a good teacher will make the required adjustments. She agrees that translation is a fifth skill encompassing all ‘four skills’, and that “language is a window to the culture of a people”, and steeped in traditions, emotional links, and idioms/phrases. Since Yiddish is a dying language, maximum classroom exposure is anyway necessary.

Case Study 10

Another TESOL course leader suggests that Communication methodologies are more prevalent in the UK and USA than elsewhere, but that many teachers (particularly in Universities) are linguists by training, and tend to teach languages the way they were taught. School language teachers are qualified appropriately. Westminster University offers a Translation Studies option for MA TESOL students. This module was originally a stand-alone in the MA Applied Linguistics (and previously MA Applied Language Studies) degree to offer as wide a range of career options to students coming from very diverse range of countries and backgrounds. For the same reason, it was decided to retain the module as an option after the

MA TESOL course began, and it is also available to students in various modern language departments, (including translation and interpretation degrees). In 2011/12 there was an increased demand for the translation module from students, necessitating formation of a second cohort (10/11 TESOL students compared to 2/3 previously), and this can be compared with the similar Aston University experience (cf. Case 13), i.e. the appeal of “dual track career possibilities”. The interviewee is also learning Spanish, taught in a mainly communicative mode but with limited translation of words/phrases into L1 to avoid the time-wasting aspect of gesturing etc. She agrees that translation skills are useful for looking closely at language in deconstructing text and for grammar, but is unsure about the concept of a ‘fifth skill’. This title would certainly raise the status of translation, and she suggests that in any case teachers “should not close off options for learning” if these can be used communicatively, and that there needs to be an ongoing debate about training of language teachers, and methodologies adopted by them.

Case Study 11

A senior Hebrew teacher at the Hebrew University in Israel teaches and speaks only in Hebrew (L2) to a multilingual class, on ideological as well as practical principles, in order to avoid slipping into unnecessary use of L1. At very high levels, however, translation into L2 (Hebrew) is used for whole texts. She regards translation of texts into L2 as the “ultimate test”. However, this training is very specific and is geared to enabling overseas students from many countries to become proficient enough in Hebrew (in 1 year) to take regular degrees of the Hebrew University, i.e. to take lecture notes, read articles, write seminar papers, and take written and oral examinations. There are two main projects: (i) to summarise a 10 page article in Hebrew into 2.5 pages, and (ii) to translate 5 pages from L1 into about 3.5 pages of the L2 (Hebrew). This is, therefore, a much more rigorous and testing requirement than simply learning to “get by” in the L2 for daily life. The ultimate aim is to write a seminar paper in Hebrew and to read the ‘Haaretz’ newspaper. Translation is also used from Hebrew articles to L1, and then to back translate to see how much is remembered. In intermediate classes, a strictly Hebrew only regime is enforced, which is also the case in regular ‘Ulpanim’ classes for immigrants. Courses for training University language teachers include strategies to teach text meaning. She observed that in general, translation is a “tempting” easy route for regular teachers.

Case Study 12

Another senior teacher in the TEFL department of the Hebrew University also agreed that translation in Israeli ‘Ulpanim’ classes has largely been “taboo”, and that the main aim of English teaching is comprehension of ideas and a global approach to reading and writing, and

understanding of text genres. However, attendance at certain conferences stimulated this interviewee into thinking about new language and links to personality/self-esteem/self-confidence. She, therefore, experimented by encouraging groups of students to translate short texts from English into their own L1's and then to discuss which version is better and to share their views. The teacher acted as a guide on the sidelines, while students themselves assessed the translations. Students found this very motivating, with considerable peer group learning, and an enhanced atmosphere. The teacher then asked some comprehension questions to check both accuracy and understanding of the translation. This approach is suggested as a way of overcoming the dilemmas of understanding versus ability to answer comprehension questions, and to empower students. Learners were able to identify what issues caused disagreement. A further experiment was carried out encouraging students to give a presentation by integrating source material from different languages, exemplifying the power of language as a communication medium. Also, brief translation of opening text paragraphs can improve learners' ability to think in English and develop comprehension i.e. limited translation as a 'preview' technique for understanding texts. Students in Israel tend to be "thrown in at the deep end".

Case Study 13

Aston University is one of only two that appears to offer a TESOL and Translation combined MA course (in addition to the individual subject MA courses). Both the professor of translation and the TESOL course coordinator noted that in 2004, student generated demand for a combined course was definitely the driving force, as opposed to a faculty idea, with the main aim of keeping wide career options open and possibly utilising both disciplines. In addition, it was noted that many of their EFL teachers were also involved in some outside translation work and research, which made it a logical step. The course, however, is not integrated *per se*, but comprises discrete modules, and all students must study elements of both disciplines involving four core modules, with extra modules according to choice. The combined course is regarded as very successful and has the most students. The topic of translation in language teaching/learning was not yet considered as a stand-alone module, and issues were only touched upon in existing modules, but not explored in more depth.

The translation professor was not sure about the concept of translation as a 'fifth skill', but agreed that it does encompass the 'four skills', and is a specific competence. She is more certain about the concept of intercultural communication and the role of translation in reflecting on cultural differences and raising awareness of language. She suggested that translation be used more globally to reflect on genre conventions in the target culture, and for contrastive

analysis to make students aware of syntactic, lexical and stylistic elements by comparing complete and authentic texts in two languages. Reflection on the purpose of text opens the mind culturally, and encourages thinking in communicative ways and away from a narrow linguistic focus. She is also in favour of translation exercises in both directions.

The TESOL coordinator noted that in Turkey 25 years ago there were strict instructions to completely avoid L1, which in a monolingual class was difficult especially when students wanted it. Noting that many statements in the questionnaire led her to think about “the power of translation” and how it can be a useful tool in various ways, her views have now changed. She sees no problem, for example in translation-based learning, if students use L1 in group work but report back in English as required, and she is now considerably more flexible about the use of translation amongst small groups of students with different L1 nationalities, and plans to experiment i.e. using a ‘scaffolding’ approach for intra-group discussion about problems/solutions for the translation, and ensuring each group member has a role and contributes opinions in some way to the outcome. She does not agree with an enforced L2 environment, and thinks that L1 should be used to save time in explanation of odd words or phrases if students will benefit. In a monolingual class she would sometimes adopt a deductive approach, though she believes language learning is basically inductive, but this depends very much on the student. This interviewee believes translation is a ‘fifth skill’ but definitely linked to the ‘four skills’, and that it is a very powerful way to facilitate cultural mediation. The TESOL students are obligated to undertake regular teaching practice and ‘micro teaching’ within the cohort.

Case Study 14

This EFL methodology teacher in Macedonia teaches to a monolingual class, and all the teachers share the same mother tongue as the students, (no native English speakers). The question of whether and to what extent to use the L1 in the classroom is a very acute one, and the source of considerable discussion and debate. This teacher is also considering conducting a questionnaire survey amongst both teachers and learners to elicit views. Another (native English speaker) teacher in Spain states that it is a sizeable dilemma deciding on how much translation to use in the classroom since some, especially weaker students, come to depend on translation to the extent that their progress in the L2 becomes seriously stilted and they never build self-confidence in the L2.

‘Verbatim’ comments from respondents (regarding two of the questions on the questionnaire)

Q. *What do you think your students feel/felt about the role of translation of authentic material of different types in the L2 classroom? (cf. Druce, 2013: 76-77)*

- Comfortable in that it is part of the process of learning language and culture.
- Translation activities are generally well received. Some students ask for translation tasks if not already present in language course.
- I think translation can be very useful in the right context and used in the right way. Most students seem quite keen on it, but enthusiasm might wane quickly if it was done too often.
- We stay in English using L1 when necessary to keep the class going or to quickly explain something.
- Depends on the student, the level and the task.
- My students feel that translating from L1 to L2 is very hard and boring, but it is easy from L2 to L1.
- A welcome change.
- Poor students like it. Good ones reject the whole idea and sometimes complain to the supervisor about too much use of L1.
- Sometimes they take a little time in understanding the underlying or the hidden meaning of the passage.
- Rarely use translation as my classes are multilingual and translation usually involves L3 – I do not know all the languages represented in class.
- They may think it’s a good idea but I disagree.
- Naturally they’d be glad to have someone translating text/class discussion to them.
- Needs to be handled carefully and selectively but at times may aid a deeper understanding of the text.
- They probably translate texts anyway whether teachers like it or not.
- Depends on their age and proficiency. The most proficient older learners may prefer a more translation-free approach.
- Generally quite happy about this, though there is of course the question of what is an authentic text.
- They thought it was boring and absolutely useless for them, as well as ineffective in terms of language learning.
- Very mixed: it depends on quite a lot of factors (student, teacher, level, aims, etc). Many teachers would NOT use translation activities beneficially, in my experience.

- It depends how it is done, and how their teachers have used translation in the past. Very often their experience has been that it is a sterile activity.
- They feel challenged but pleased.
- Useful in small doses, and for certain kinds of texts, for certain purposes.
- I think translation works well for individual sentences, showing students differences between languages (especially grammatical structures) and making vocabulary learning more efficient and natural.
- I would think that they find it useful but enjoy irrespective of authenticity.
- They like to translate.
- My students use translation for focused vocabulary building and are enthusiastic in general.
- Helpful.
- Have never tried it with students. I think they would have found it strange.
- They think that translation plays facilitative role in learning another language. For instance, they usually try to translate the content of their lesson into their mother tongue.
- They consider it nonsense.
- Can't answer since my students are only allowed to translate a) the news and b) reflective discursive texts.
- They don't like it, but do it anyway.
- They were a bit sceptical as to its usefulness in class in the beginning but I made them search for film titles at home and think about how they are translated, so that we could discuss it in class.
- I do not think they want to translate everything into L1, however, as part of their homework to improve their language ability, they are happy to do it.
- I integrate translation in the communicative method and have positive results.
- I never apply translation of long texts in my classes so they tend to be extremely grateful for it since they do not get that in their state schools and/or universities even though their language proficiency stagnates or goes down with Grammar-Translation methods. They appreciate a teacher who can communicate with them with near native command of English.
- They felt relieved, as they understood the exact meaning in a short time.
- They often rely on this to comprehend a text, although I try to keep them working in the L2 and emphasize reading strategies.
- Ambivalent.

- They probably would like it – but since we have students from all over the world, we generally don't use it.
- They found it useful.
- They use it constantly. It gives them some self-confidence.
- They never translate texts as a material in class.
- They seem to find it satisfying, as they want to understand every word. Higher-level students also enjoy the intellectual challenge of discussing different versions.
- Most of my students enjoy translation work where it is possible to use in class.
- I don't really use translation as a standard exercise or method for teaching. However, most students prefer not to translate, or translate only specific things in order to fully understand them.
- I use translation to illustrate code mixing and 'false friends' of translation.
- We don't translate whole texts.
- They would probably appreciate it.
- They love translation and often ask for it. We only translate into L2, never into L1 and I always write the – very short – texts myself to ensure the language is manageable and realistic.
- The majority of my students would struggle to cope with such tasks. I fear that the loss of motivation as well as (because of) the poor outcomes may outweigh the benefits.
- They try to avoid translation because they feel that they are not sufficiently fluent in either Urdu or English and are totally discouraged from using a mother tongue such as Punjabi or Pashto.
- When it is explained and suits the purpose they like and appreciate it. We don't use it much but it is useful in the right situation.
- I think that it is quite often tough to sell it to them as valid if you are working with students in-company or at a Private Language School, as they often associate it with more traditional organisations.
- It varies from student to student. Some want to translate texts and new vocabulary – it gives them the feeling that they really understand what is going on. I feel they need coaching to move away from only relying on translation, and seeing the value of trying to do as much as possible in the classroom, and if students want to use it to help comprehension, then I encourage this. For dealing with certain topics, e.g. false cognates, it is invaluable.
- The full range of feelings from loving it to loathing it – so much depends on the type of texts they translate, the spirit in which it is done, what exactly is meant by *authentic* –

authentic to them or authentic in terms of not being specifically designed for ELT, and a host of other subjective factors.

- They do it so automatically that it is better to harness it than fight it.
- Too demanding overall. Translation requires knowledge/awareness of both L2 and L1. Good L1 knowledge is too often an unwarranted assumption.
- Depends on their predilections, how it's presented, what the purpose is, how it's managed ...
- It depends on the purpose of language learning in the particular institution. At university level it would seem essential to use translation.
- Useful way of understanding the language and culture of L2. Makes FLL more rigorous and 'academic'. Makes 'A level' students take FLL more seriously.
- Students usually feel comfortable with translation, and often see it as a nice diversion from other classroom activities. They generally enjoy it.
- I teach multilingual groups. Translation is not an option.
- Boring – they've very often done it all before and it tends to avoid a more 'real world' approach to authentic language use.
- I have a low-level, monolingual class, whose L1 do not speak. However I sometimes encourage translation of words, phrases or longer sections of language between students, which appears to aid confidence and provide an opportunity for concept checking.
- Students generally appreciate it when done in a useful and timely manner.
- They find it very difficult.
- Depending on level, at beginner, at false beginner and higher levels a hindrance. Since they spent more time translating than learning the language.
- With the proviso that the material is relevant and of appropriate level, they are open to it.
- They find it a useful task as long as they are not dealing with a literary/poetic text.
- The need for translation is obvious in the case of specialist texts.
- My view is that it was enlightening in the sense they could compare their own language with the language they were learning. They were also helped to see that all languages are equally valid, and that learning English did not necessarily mean that their own mother tongue became a 'second-class citizen'.
- Some of them feel comfortable.
- Being a monolingual class (all German speakers), I'm sure they'd like vocabulary translation activities – but not translation of whole texts.

- Too much work and they prefer using L2.
- Translation activities per se, e.g. full translations of texts/articles/stories in the classroom were not in the students' best interest, but translating some L2 vocabulary into the students' L1 was appreciated and certainly improved general comprehension.
- They like it.
- I think they don't consider it very useful to learn to develop speaking skills.
- They found it challenging and outdated.
- It is both a vital and hard task.
- They enjoy the varied types of translation activities I do with them and feel that they benefit from them.
- Translation into L1 is relatively easy but translation into English often leads to errors and resulting frustration. Sometimes we have international students and in these cases I keep the local/national L1 (German) to a minimum.
- Not very interested. Translation is valuable in small doses, particularly at higher levels and where word meanings are close but not the same. It is the discussion about the translation, and not the translation itself, that is valuable.
- We do not do it, but I think it can lead to confusion and limit the amount of flexibility that can be developed in the L2.
- It depends on the context. In certain situations it is very useful, in others it is not.
- Selectively used it can be a useful tool.
- Some students like it and find it useful. I offer them the chance to see that there is no one-to-one translation (L1 to L2) and this can aid future vocabulary learning whereby L2 definitions play an important role, as well as example sentences.
- Some were pleased, others were against. It is a problem when the class is not monolithic in languages.
- I have multilingual classes in Britain. It would not be appropriate at all. When I was teaching in Japan, the classroom was the only place where students were exposed to English, so again translation would have been inappropriate.
- I think they feel stressed because they have to be more precise than when they develop their own ideas.
- For the last 21 years I have taught multi-lingual classes in the UK, so have not had the opportunity to experiment with translation. I suggest my students use translation for independent study.

- Most students welcome authentic material and come to understand what they can gain linguistically and in terms of cultural understanding from looking closely at texts and translating them.
- Some rely on it – others never use it.
- Useful. It promoted group work and interactive discussions. I do not use it all the time.
- They don't usually need to translate whole texts; they sometimes ask for a translation of a word or phrase they are not sure about.
- Some liked it, others didn't. In hindsight, I think those who liked it would have favoured accuracy over fluency, and the ones who didn't would have favoured fluency and were probably better spontaneous communicators.
- They normally appreciate it, depends on module.
- I don't usually incorporate translation. I think that translation in the modern language classroom is probably best avoided at the lower levels.
- I think some find translation of individual words helpful/give them confidence.
- My students (all Chinese) enjoy translation tasks.
- Sadly, I don't think they are familiar enough with it these days to judge, but when I use it they enjoy it.

Q. *Any other comments? (cf. Druce, 2013: 79-83)*

- All my 'neither agree nor disagree' answers are really 'it depends' answers.
- Grammar translation is still used to teach languages in France. English teachers have NO teaching qualifications and do not develop professionally. They think teaching is something you learn on the job. They teach as they were taught.
- The main problem with translation and ELT is the current dominance of the English native speaker in much of the profession and the woeful inadequacies of most of what Holiday calls the 'BANA' world in languages. This is particularly problematical in the private sector, but is present too in the public sector in these contexts.
- My understanding of what you meant by 'translation' in the FL classroom changed as I went through your questions. Certainly there are many useful ways of using translation that do not involve turning complete texts from L1 to L2 or vice versa. You can be a good translator but a poor L2 language user and my own priority would be to develop good L2 users rather than good translators, but that does not mean that there is no role for the judicious use of various translation activities in the classroom. I am rather against any suggestion that 'translation' is necessarily a good kind of activity, or

a good 'approach' to second language learning, but that still leaves a great deal of scope for teachers and learners.

- Like any other practice, translation in teaching is most successful when it is equivalent to the student's ability. If a student is good enough, translation may fascinate to self-indulgence in it. Further, it is essentially translation that empowers an advanced student in perfecting his skills in L2.
- L1 and L2 should be used judiciously, depending on the purpose of the lesson and the preferences of the learners.
- I think it is horrendous that translation is being reintroduced in the general ELT curriculum. There are some minor benefits for students at advanced levels of proficiency. I think that good teachers know how to give directions so that translation is not necessary. Translating directions for the most part is sloppy teaching.
- I think the translation of short items such as words and phrases can be useful for individual students but I don't normally have whole class exercises in translating.
- I don't think of translation as a method for the whole text but rather as a means to clarify pieces of text.
- I use L1 in the classroom for low level students. I never ban L1, but try to encourage better users to use it.
- Success of translation activity depends on the kind of text chosen and the way the translation activity is administered in the class.
- Translation should not be forced on students; it should be used only when the learner can benefit and is open to translation as well as other methods.
- It strongly depends on the level of the course you teach; in the advanced course I don't use L1 at all, however with the lower level it is sometimes unavoidable.
- I would consider using translation more now than I used to if I have the opportunity to teach groups from nationalities where they can work together in groups (scaffolding).
- I think translation can be used only after the students reach a certain level but not at the beginning.
- Interesting subject, and it gives one a chance to reflect on certain matters. I have to say that, for me, translation is a tool, as opposed to one of the skills when learning a language. Translation can also hinder some students' progress as it becomes a crutch without which they feel they cannot continue learning, i.e. the weaker students can come to rely on having everything translated and this is bad for self-confidence. More motivated students find everything useful and encouraging. I have also taught, in the past, with a 'Direct Method' style method, and have seen the pros and cons of it.

- I think translation can be used occasionally as a tool for quick assessment of reading comprehension. However, teaching it explicitly is distracting in my case and prevents students from focusing on the text itself.
- Our students speak different languages, thus translation to L1 is usually not an option.
- I use translation into L2 with A1-B1 at the moment, only focusing on language the students are likely to need themselves. The texts are short, a maximum of 10-20 sentences, depending on the level, but they can be quite complicated with conjunctions etc. Students always work individually then compare their answers in pairs or small groups. The answers are folded under at the bottom of the sheets with as many alternatives as I could find that could still be 'correct'. This way the students explore what sounds right, feels right and is right and can choose the answer they like best for future use.
- I think that the benefits of the use of translation, as with the use of almost any technique, depends on the situation. In some situations, used together with a variety of other techniques, it may be useful. I certainly wouldn't make it a large part of any language program.
- I believe that translation tasks are of value. No classroom exists in a bubble. The value of such an approach depends on all sorts of factors – level, students' previous experience of language learning as well as their own attitudes and beliefs as well as those of the teacher, etc.
- I would like to say that where I have ticked neither agree or disagree I mean it depends on the situation. I think mediation, at least orally is an important skill for L2 learners to acquire.
- As a publisher I thought the point of translation topics in course books was interesting. For economic reasons (global course books) and practical (a demand for answer keys) I can't see this happening, although there has been an increase in bi-lingual wordlists being made available thanks to better technology.
- A lot of the questions are fascinating but a bit "black and white"; I liked the ones with modal verbs involved better than the more overtly declarative ones because I think there are a lot of grey areas where translation and use of the L1 in other ways CAN be either positive or negative, depending on a host of subjective factors.
- The thing is not whether to use L1 or not, what matters is when and how to use it. New competent teachers are usually against using L1, experienced ones do use L1 to help students learn L2. Untrained teachers use much of L1 at times when they shouldn't and in a way that actually hinders L2 learning.

- I always try to avoid translation issues unless the language skill is very low or the subject-specific vocab is alien.
- Using translation is not an either/or issue.
- Graduates of a British university language degree, where a great deal of the teaching and speech and essay writing may well be (and quite properly) in the foreign language, are expected to have excellent control of English, in the same way that graduates of foreign universities are expected to have full control, both grammatical and stylistic, of their own languages. Awareness of L1 can be augmented by sensitivity to the differences between the native language and the foreign language. The problem, however, is that many students lack English language skills, whether because they are not native speakers of English or because English schools lay too little stress on the English language itself. It used to be said that all teachers were teachers of English. This should be remembered in the context of teaching languages at degree level. At sub-degree or more practical language teaching level, or where the L1 varies or where the teaching is being carried out in the country of L2 (the Israeli Ulpan is an example), the issue is quite different.
- Direct translation takes place more in years 12-13; translation for comprehension purposes used in lower years (with specific focus).
- Two points. Firstly, translation usually implies a proficient near-bilingual teacher – and usually, of course, a monolingual group. So the teacher/translator has probably been resident in a non-English-speaking country for a considerable time. Such a teacher could probably use translation techniques as very important tool in teaching. The disadvantage might be a reduction in the constant and all-surrounding context of the L2 in the classroom. Secondly, translating is often and necessarily based on reading and writing skills, rather than listening and speaking – this can skew a course too much towards particular skills.
- I discourage translation – it becomes a habit, and so whenever anything is read or spoken, particularly the latter, it becomes problematic.
- I have noticed that adult students are more dependent on translation and explicit grammar than younger ones.
- I strongly reject the word ‘eclectic’ in education, since from my point of view what it stands for is resorting to different strategies/activities without clear principles. One of my most serious bees in my bonnet is that most of the ELT teaching that goes on around the world is not based on clear principles i.e. most teachers do what they were taught to do in teacher training courses, most of which never go beyond giving them *recipes* to follow for a successful lesson (whatever that is) and are never given the

information that would help them define their own beliefs and therefore be aware of WHY they do what they do in the classroom.

- Translation is useful in a monolingual class (if the teacher speaks the students' mother tongue well) for quickly checking understanding of new language. Can also be useful for testing understanding of language.
- In my school we sometimes had up to 12 nationalities in one class. Students were often asked to give their own definition of a word or their L1 equivalent, which brought awareness of etymology; e.g. the word 'coach (trainer)' which has a similar word to trainer in many languages. This might be a simplistic example, but the exercise worked very well in that it involved all students. Further, I think it is beneficial for the students to have a bi- or multilingual teacher because he/she is aware of the stumbling blocks and the difficulty (or ease) of language acquisition.
- Much depends upon the level you teach. Beginners need some explanations, whereas upper levels enjoy discovering subtle differences and shades of meaning. Bilingual teachers are very useful at upper levels, but beginners need non-natives not to be discouraged.
- Language transfer is unavoidable as the linguistic systems are always interacting in the mind, but I believe translation tasks should be kept to a minimum in the EFL learning environment.
- My answers may appear to contradict each other as I have based my answers on my students (secondary school age) who do not need to learn how to translate as a skill. Some have an over-reliance on using their translators which stops them thinking and using existing knowledge and slows them down. Other answers are given from my personal view of learning a foreign language.
- Some of the questions ask about the potential of translation in class to do certain things. Much depends on the tasks chosen and the students concerned. Translation can be boring and/or non-communicative, but so can other task types if poorly chosen or executed.
- The valuable part is the process, not the product of translation, and the discussion of alternatives.
- I think the decision to a certain extent has to be left to the students as to how they prefer to learn and how they learn better. Our role as teachers is to show them the different way rather than impose.
- One issue is using translations as another teaching tool, and another different topic is becoming a translator.

- A number of my weaker Chinese students use electronic translators for any words they do not understand. They remain weak students as they do not hone their guessing and inferencing skills by working out meanings from context. If they really do need a dictionary, a monolingual one would be more effective.
- I think translation is useful but it's not something the students like and, filling in this questionnaire, I realised that I don't like it myself very much as it really needs a lot of precision.
- I don't feel my use of any of the foreign languages I know is good enough to use it confidently as a tool in the classroom (except at very low levels). However, I think it is a useful skill and underused in ELT classes.
- I do not encourage translation of texts. However, I include it in classroom discussions and instructions.
- I think that judicious use of the mother tongue can be beneficial for learners not only for the acquisition of the language but for helping them to lower their anxiety and create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere for learning. I personally do not like the word *forbidden* because it produces negative effects. Learners should feel that they can get all the help they need to learn the language, including the use of the L1 either by them or the teacher when it is necessary.
- I myself benefited a lot by translation from Greek to English (when I was studying Modern Greek. I think it could become really tedious however, if it was used too often or in an unimaginative way. There should be something to discover in each translation task.
- With very young learners translation is often needed. Most teens and adults like to try and understand from context. I agree that translation is nearer to a 5th skill.
- I use the L1 for purposes relevant to language learning, and *not* for instructions, discipline, classroom management.
- Of course it undermines the principle of monolingualism, but that principle is outdated in a globalised world where school systems should enable students to acquire multilingual competences. Interlingual tasks such as intercomprehension and multilingual language awareness-building activities should feature in every modern language classroom.
- Teachers need to have a clear understanding of what translation is and what it does and doesn't do / deliver in order to be able to use it in a way that benefits language learning. They also need to understand what different roles it can play in mono- and multilingual classrooms and how to set up activities which benefit not only the majority

language speakers in a multicultural classroom but also those for whom the majority language (say German) is already an L2 so they are learning English as an “L3”.

- In the grammar-translation classroom of old, translation was often used as an instrument of discipline and of putting students in their place rather than empowering them and boosting their confidence. It’s a question of attitude and methodology (and translation is not in itself a methodology). Incidentally, what about task-based learning as a way of introducing real-life (rather than simulated) communication into the FL classroom?
- The nature of translation is that you try your best to express *somebody else’s* ideas. Of course, there’s scope for creativity and individuality in that, but not for self-expression. So doing nothing but translation would indeed limit students’ choice of expressing themselves quite severely.
- Definitely translation is a fifth skill and a complex one at that (and I’m saying that as a qualified translator as well as a qualified language teacher); yes, it is linked to the other skills, but indirectly rather than directly; yes you can use it to help improve the other skills, but not as a replacement for other kinds of activities linked to those skills.

Concluding comments

The interview sample of experienced teachers illustrates the diverse nature of teacher experiences with and attitudes towards the use of the L1 and translation, and in particular, its possible role as ‘fifth skill’. Due to the widely differing contexts, it is difficult to make generalisations, but the interviews can be regarded as ‘mini’ case studies providing a basis for wider investigations.

More recently, a global survey exploring teacher practices and attitudes towards own language use in ELT has been carried out. The findings indicated “clear evidence of widespread own-language use within ELT, and suggest that teachers’ attitudes towards own-language use, and their classroom practices, are more complex than usually acknowledged” (Hall and Cook, 2013: 6). The conclusions of the present work reported here and previously (Druce, 2013) are in broad agreement with this and tend to confirm the apparent paradox between teachers’ statements regarding minimising use of the L1 in the classroom (61%), and 86% agreeing to the use of carefully planned translation in the L2 communicative classroom (Author, 2013: 66). As mentioned previously, it would be enlightening to focus further research on language teachers in a variety of different contexts, and on large samples of learners at different levels and in different countries. Research methodology developed in the course of this study and elsewhere could form the basis for such further investigations.



Bio-data

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