

Towards a New Consideration of the Integration of Translation in ESP Classes

Author: Asma Merine
Salhi Ahmed Centre University, Naama, (Algeria),

Abstract:

Translation, a basic means of communication, has been disfavored and even suffered the reputation of being an ill suited aid in teaching and learning English. In fact, there was a lot of research about the function of translation in language teaching and learning, some of which highlight its useless effect; however, other research present translation as the fifth language skill alongside the other four basic skills. With the birth of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as a new trend in applied linguistics, an important question arises, is translation a necessary component in an ESP course? If yes, how does a teacher teach and include translation aspects in ESP classes? In fact, translation and its use in ESP classes have been subjected to numerous debates. The core issue in these considerations is whether or not translation needs to be included in ESP courses. Thus, the current theoretical study focuses on identifying the various reasons for the rejection of translation in EFL and ESP in the past. Moreover, the research seeks to reassess the role of translation in ESP classes and propose an approach or activities related to translation. All in all, the study will highlight a theoretical framework of some issues with implications for the integration of translation in ESP classes.

Keywords: Communication, EFL, English for Specific Purposes, ESP, Language teaching and learning, Translation.

ملخص:

الترجمة، هي وسيلة أساسية للتواصل، قد تم إهمالها، لأنها وسيلة مساعدة غير مناسبة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها. في الواقع، كان هناك الكثير من الأبحاث حول وظيفة الترجمة في تدريس اللغة وتعلمها، وبعضها يسلط الضوء على تأثيرها غير المجدي؛ ومع ذلك، فإن الأبحاث الأخرى تقدم الترجمة باعتبارها المهارة اللغوية الخامسة إلى جانب المهارات الأساسية الأربعة الأخرى. مع ظهور اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة كاتجاه جديد في علم اللغة التطبيقي، يبرز سؤال مهم، هل الترجمة مكون ضروري في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم، كيف يقوم الأستاذ بتدريس جوانب الترجمة وتضمينها في فصول برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؟ في الواقع، خضعت الترجمة واستخدامها في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة لمناقشات عديدة. الفكرة الأساسية في هذه الاعتبارات هي ما إذا كانت الترجمة بحاجة إلى

تضمنها في تعليم الانجليزية لأغراض خاصة أم لا. وبالتالي، فإن الدراسة النظرية الحالية تركز على تحديد الأسباب المختلفة لرفض الترجمة في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. إضافة إلى ذلك، يسعى البحث إلى إعادة تقييم دور الترجمة في تعليم الانجليزية لأغراض خاصة واقتراح نهج أو أنشطة متعلقة بالترجمة. بشكل عام ، تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الإطار النظري لبعض القضايا التي لها آثار على تكامل الترجمة في الجانب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التواصل ، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض محددة، تعليم اللغة ، الترجمة.

Introduction

The 21st century has experienced an incredible technological advancement in different fields including the educational, scientific, economic, and technical ones. Such developments led English language to become a global language and a means of communication to ensure the multiple exchanges in all areas. Undoubtedly, English is now the most popular language worldwide throughout its famous historical background. It is required for various purposes especially to be up to date with the rapid advances in the field of technology and business. Thus, learning this global language becomes a must that is highly required in different domains.

Obviously, the previous mentioned facts led to the appearance of a new movement in the world of ELT namely English for Specific Purposes or what we call ESP which was strongly apparent by the 1960s with the aim of meeting learners' needs, lacks, wants and interests in various academic or occupational settings. Actually, ESP has experienced an incredible growth and impulse in their role as a key to success in different settings.

In ESP, several language issues are seen as significant elements for communication to take place in both teaching and learning because they show how language is used and viewed. In this vein, it is believed that various language issues play an important role in the success or failure of any communication. Recently, many ESP specialists started to take translation as an essential component in designing ESP courses as its significance is not in doubt. Based on the previous discussion, this paper attempts to examine the forth coming questions: is translation a necessary component in an ESP course? If yes, how does a teacher teach and include the translation aspects in ESP classrooms?

1. ESP Interpretations

For the past several decades, there was a great need to use English for various purposes either academically or occupationally. Consequently, there was an urgent call for real efforts to provide courses in English and more precisely in English for Specific Purposes (henceforth ESP) to meet the needs of this new challenging world.

Due to the fact that General English did not meet the specific needs of learners, ESP arose as a term in the 1960s. Obviously, this new approach is specially designed for adult learners who are learning English not for pleasure or prestige but as a key to success so that they will be able to use it in specific practical situations and fields.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) deeply believe that there are three main reasons behind the emergence of ESP: *“the demands of a brave new world, a revolution in linguistics and a new focus on the learner.”*

As far as the first reason is concerned, several ESP practitioners in addition to Hutchinson and Waters state that the end of the Second World War and the oil crisis of the early 1970s were behind the appearance of one of the most prominent areas of ELT teaching today which is ESP. Moreover, the domination of America after the end of the Second World War resulted in an incredible expansion of the use of the English language worldwide because the United States was the most powerful economic nation at that time. Additionally, Oil Crisis resulted in the flowing of money and knowledge in oil- rich countries; it was a great chance to deliver their goods. Consequently, people all over the world especially Arabs were obliged to communicate with the western experts using English for the sake of facilitating the business activities they are engaged in without any difficulty. In this regard, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 7) confirm that:

The end of the second world war in 1945 brought with it an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale for various reasons; most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role of international language fell into English.

The second reason is related to didactic, i.e. new methods and approaches began to emerge in the field of teaching and learning English (the study of language). Interestingly, there was a gradual paradigm shift from Grammar Translation Method to communicative approaches which emphasize more on the use of language in real situations. Thus, things

began to change from producing correct grammatical sentences or mastering its structures and rules correctly to dealing with the use of these rules and structures as a system to convey meaning in a particular context. Language is no longer viewed as an abstract set of elements under a system but rather “as a source of communication which may vary according to the situations or the contexts.” (Flowerdew et al, 2001:11).

The third reason is much more related to psychology than to linguistics which was a ‘*focus on the learner*’. As a matter of fact, there were new developments in the field of education psychology which focused more on the learners and their motivation toward learning. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that: “*learners were seen to have different needs and interests, which would have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the effectiveness of their learning.*” Thus, ESP teachers started to design courses that take learners into account; the courses are specific to better meet learners’ needs, interests, wants and expectations as well. This major shift in the world of English language Teaching resulted in a natural extension of ‘*learner-centered*’ or ‘*learning-centered*’ perspectives on ESP.

As it is discussed earlier, a new generation emerged with a need for English as an international language; people who want to buy and sell products abroad, mechanics who have to read instruction manuals, students who are obliged to write articles related to their fields, hotel receptionists who have to communicate with foreign clients, students in different disciplines who need to be up to date with the developments in their domains (economy, medicine, computing, ...etc), all these and many other demands effected positively the expansion of one particular broad diverse field of ELT namely ‘ESP’. Thus, it is of great importance to raise the following two questions which has brought specialists to heated debates: what is ESP? And what does it refer to?

Several ESP practitioners tried to define the term ESP; for instance, Mackay and Mountford (1978: 2) define ESP as “*a form of teaching English for a utilitarian purpose and as a pragmatic response to a developing situation.*” They proposed that the needs of the learners being academic, occupational or scientific determine these rationales. In her point of view, Robinson (1980: 3) presents a clear definition to this term, “*ESP is an enterprise involving education, training and practice, and drawing upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy, and the students’/participants’ specialist areas of interests.*” Moving further, she proclaims that: “*An ESP course is purposeful and is aimed*

at the successful performance of occupational or academic roles.” Her definition suggests that ESP courses are designed based on analyzing learners’ needs so that it should be tailor-made; an ESP course is different from the other courses in many terms of topics including selection of materials and textbooks, selection of the needed skills, situations, functions and language as well.

Moreover, Robinson (1991: 2) determines certain features that she considers factors of criteria common to all ESP programs:

1-ESP is goal-directed: students are not learning English language as an end in itself, but because they need to use English.

2- ESP courses are based on the analysis of learners’ needs.

3- ESP learners tend to be adults rather than children.

In their turn, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) view ESP as an ‘**approach**’ rather than a ‘**product**’. In other words, ESP is addressed to meet learners’ needs, wants, interests and lacks and it does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching materials or methodology. More recently, Basterkmen (2010) points out that ESP is a ‘*goal directed*’; its major goal is to provide students with the linguistic features of subject-specific field. She adds that ESP aims to develop the competencies required to help a particular group of learners or employees to function effectively in their discourse communities (either at university or at work

In fact, ESP has been defined differently by different scholars; however, no one could define it in a couple of sentences because the term is extremely complicated to be described as Strevens (1980) points out, “*it is not easy to produce a definition of ESP which is simple and water weight.*” Generally speaking, ESP is a language teaching approach which fundamentally uses needs analysis as the basis for curriculum development and it generally addressed to adult learners. It is considered as an umbrella term embracing a number of subdivisions and it is often divided up into two major sub-branches namely: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). In this respect and due to the fact that a new generation emerged with a great need for English for different purposes, the demand for ESP continues to increase all over the world.

2. Translation in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Translation as a method in teaching and learning second/foreign languages has a long history because it has been one of the main controversial issues for many years. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the emergence of Grammar Translation Method as the most traditional and ancient teaching method had excluded the communicative skills and making translation the best method to teach foreign languages especially the classical languages, Latin and Greek, by understanding and learning grammatical usage and vocabulary in the target language. Actually, this method was grounded on the translation of literary passages, deductive application of rules, reading comprehension, searching for synonyms and antonyms, fill-in the blanks activities and memorization as well. However, the method was strongly criticized and impacted by new approaches in the world of teaching and learning foreign languages for being only descriptive and not communicative. Its main focus was on accuracy of forms; therefore, students would not be able to speak fluently after having studied the language for many years. Further, it was sentence-based and form-focused. On the pedagogical side, it did not encourage students to see the foreign language as a vehicle for communication. In this vein, Willis (1981) states that learning/ teaching languages should be based on a communicative method, i.e. teaching English through English and not another language. This point of view has led to the appearance of new methodologies as a response to the old method which was ‘the grammar translation method’. Celce-Murcia (2014: 5) points out that in the grammar translation approach,

There is little use of target language for communication. Focus is on grammatical parsing, that is, the forms and inflections of words. There is early reading of difficult texts. A typical exercise is to translate sentences from the target language into the mother tongue (or vice versa). The result of this approach is usually an inability on the part of students to use the language for communication. The teacher does not have to be able to speak the target language fluently.

Thus, the arrival of new methods and approaches which were based on communication disfavoured the use of L1 to enhance and facilitate learning in FL classes such as the direct, natural and communicative language teaching methodologies which are grounded on increasing FL use through teacher-student interactions. Actually, several arguments and assumptions were provided against the use of translation including:

- (a) Translation is an artificial activity that is grounded on reading and writing so that students do not practice oral skills (Zabalbeascoa, 1990).
- (b) Translation prevents students from gleaning insight into the multiple uses and meanings of the word. It also creates and hierarchy (Harbord, 1992).
- (c) Translation is uncommunicative, boring, pointless, difficult and irrelevant (Duff, 1994).
- (d) Translation was not used to learn English language, but to demonstrate knowledge of structure since students focus on the translation of the English text, rather than the English text itself (Gorusch, 1998).
- (e) Translation activities are useless and do not resemble real world practice because translators operate into and not out of their mother tongue (Carreres, 2006).
- (f) Translation does not include spoken communication or listening comprehension. As a consequence, it stresses the rote memorization of vocabulary words and study of the explicit rules of grammar (Kim, 2008)
- (g) Translation cannot fit all learners since it can only be useful for the ones who are interested in literature or with those which have already acquired a good level of proficiency in the FL (Mogahed, 2011).
- (h) Translation is based on the use of two languages. In this respect, it deprives students from opportunities to receive sufficient FL input (Pan, 2012).

3. Translation as a Fifth Skill

Translation was abandoned for a long time by many scholars. Later on other researchers have called for reassessing the role of translation (Witte, Harden & Ramos de Oliveira Harden, 2009; Cook, 2010; Leonardi, 2010; Malmkjaer, 2010). Consequently and as a communicative activity, translation is welcomed again as a '*fifth language skill*' alongside the other four basic skills namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking skills because it helps students to raise their level of proficiency and it leads to improving the four skills. Again, various arguments have been put forth and given to justify the significance of translation in teaching and learning foreign languages particularly the English Language. In this vein, Ross (2000) declares that,

Translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: in the advanced or final stage of language teaching, translation from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1 is recognized

as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers.

In his part, Schaffner (1998) declares that translation could be beneficial to both foreign language learning and teaching in terms of improving verbal agility, expanding the learners' vocabulary, developing their style, improving their understanding of how languages work and the main differences between them so that their comprehension will be enhanced. Additionally, accuracy, clarity and flexibility can be developed through translation. Most importantly, raising discussion about similarities and differences between languages is a key element that helps students to understand and compare grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language points in English with their mother tongue. To avoid a continuous dependency on L1 and L2, translation should be used as learning and teaching aid for improving language skills in ESP especially reading and vocabulary acquisition and therefore it should be implemented as a product-oriented activity. All in all, the mother tongue of the students should by all means be acknowledged.

4. Translation in ESP

As it is known, translation offers much to the English language learner and teacher beginning with grammar translation method. Actually, translation was out of language pedagogy for many years but it has rather stubbornly refused to die in the teaching of languages other than English as it is stated by (Cook, 2007). In ESP, translation is believed to be of great importance as a very useful tool and comprehensive approach to learn many aspects in a language such as grammar, syntax, lexis and culture-related issues in both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). In this light, Leonardi (2009:150) states that “*business and financial texts are characterised by a large number of culture bound terms and references which should be known by students in order to boost their comprehension of texts.*” Thus, translation should be implemented as cultural mediation. In fact, translation activities are recommended mainly for students with an advanced knowledge of English (Widdowson, 2003). In his part, Bolitho (1984: 48) confirms that the use of authentic texts in classes is one among the benefits of translation.

There is a strong case for using authentic materials appropriate to the conceptual level of the learner. However, as much

support as possible should then be provided for the linguistic content by offering explanations in the learner's first language, by using diagrams and by devising carefully graded exercises.

When the students or employees are unable to retrieve their lexical corpus to perform a task, translation will be the best solution. Cook (2001) argues that the L1 *"can be used positively for conveying meaning, for example explaining grammar, for organising the class, and for students use"*. Such use can be organised *"in activities based on translation for the development of fluency in L2, for presenting the meaning of a new lexical item or expression in order to facilitate the learning process"* (Dedrinis, 2006: 15).

However, it is worth mentioning that translation should not be used in a way of using word for word equivalents or sentence for sentence interpretation because previous knowledge should be taken into consideration as Mackay and Mountford (1978) state: *"Where translation can be employed as a pedagogic procedure, it provides an opportunity to relate their own knowledge to the acquisition of English as a foreign language."* In this respect, one can say that translation becomes a negative tool when there are significant differences between languages so that the ESP teacher should raise learners' consciousness of the non-parallel nature of languages.

As the majority of ESP students often rely on their mother tongue in their English classes to be engaged in specialised communication, an appropriate translation-based methodology should be implemented by ESP practitioners to guide their learners to acquire terminology through the use of translation and at the same time being aware of their different usage (Merine, 2019). Moreover, bilingual dictionaries can be used for checking the exact meanings of the technical terms in their native language. Other techniques and methods can be used to promote the fifth skill, i.e. Translation.

For instance, after acquiring the necessary terminological knowledge emphasised in the studied texts, translation can be proposed in the end. Also, it can be integrated through the different language activities suggested in the didactic unit as tasks to be achieved in the structural, language use and language production activities. In the first stages and with the help of images, the students will be asked to translate, individually, some terms related to their specialty using both Arabic and French languages (it depends on the students' languages in their country). Gradually, translation activity will be more complex, since they will have to deal with sentences, paragraphs and texts found in authentic situations.

Moreover, knowing that students have different language aptitudes, the ESP teachers need to motivate them by suggesting pairs or group work. In this way, the students will assist themselves by comparing their actual knowledge of English with their proper specialised information of the subject. In line with these activities, Mahmoud (2006) states that *“translation may be useful, because it can be interactive; learner centered, and promotes learners’ autonomy in using materials”*

Another way to promote translation is to ask learners to translate from English to Arabic or French, then they exchange their productions. After that, their classmates output will be retranslated back to English and finally the translations are compared to the original text. This procedure may possibly raise learners’ lexical, structural, stylistic and language transfer awareness and they will be conscious of the lexico-grammatical difference between the English and the Arabic languages when producing discourse in the target situation. Consequently, they will realise the difficulties of translation and the differences among languages.

For more and better linguistic development, ESP teachers can provide the students with professional passage related to their field as a homework assignment to read it at home; the passage should not be too long or too linguistically complex. This activity provides students with the opportunity to understand, review, summarize, and react to a reading material and then translating the passage. In the next day, the teacher can ask students to work pairs or in small or large groups. After, pairs exchange their translations and translate the passages back into L1. In the end, translations will be examined and compared with the original texts. Again, the analysis will give students a chance and raise their awareness of grammar, vocabulary, grammar, style, and language transfer among languages.

To maintain students’ interest, it is necessary to introduce new types of tasks and activities especially when the educational environment is related to teaching English for Specific Purposes. Actually, one of the most successful methods and pedagogical tools for stimulating students’ motivation is the use of translation as the fifth skill. Translation has become an integral part of ESP courses. It does not only motivate them to learn the language but also to enrich their communicative and analytical skills and professional vocabulary in the age of globalization.

Conclusion

It is widely believed that teaching languages is based on the communicative methods which focus on teaching English through English; however, it is also significant to acknowledge that translation is necessary to some extent for many students who want to acquire a foreign language with low level of proficiency. In fact, a great number of publications have acknowledged both the usefulness and uselessness of translation in ELT. However, little has been presented about its use in ESP. To be used in an effective way, ESP teachers should implement an appropriate translation-based methodology. Moreover, a contrastive approach to language is necessary for many reasons: to help students to acquire new vocabulary, to know more about problem solving strategies, to strengthen their grammatical and lexical competence and performance, to improve their analytical skills and to provide a sense of security. Since ESP students are supposed to deal with structures and new terms belonging to different domains, translation as a strategy and as a fifth skill should be mended rather than ended.

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