TRANSLATION: AN AID OR A HINDRANCE

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to highlight the importance of translation in teaching a foreign language regarding not only vocabulary acquisition and improvement, but also the development of grammatical structures and even the acquirement of cultural competences. Taking into consideration my students' different translation assignments, I will demonstrate the fact that translation is sometimes an aid, but it can also be a hindrance since finding the proper form and meaning of a certain text as a whole is not always an easy task.

Keywords: translation, vocabulary, development, language, technique.

Translation activities can represent a positive method to introduce certain features into a foreign language class and the students also have the chance not only to acquire the new vocabulary belonging to the foreign language, but also to improve the development of grammatical structures and to compare their own culture and way of life to the foreign ones.

In a translation class, students have their own ways of translating, each of them tries to develop and improve that particular method which he/she feels is suitable for him/her. Some students find it very easy to solve one particular exercise of translation, others need more time to think about it and others are simply not sure, so the teacher must always plan the class in such a way as to be able to take care of all these aspects and to motivate the students for further translation practice. Otherwise students will feel discouraged and they will consider the translation class a boring one. How can they become active participants in these classes if they find no satisfaction in dealing with such types of exercises?

Gifted teachers will surely find the most suitable types of exercises for students belonging to different levels of mastering the foreign language. Students do not always have to work individually, they can work either in groups or in pairs because in this way they feel at ease, talking to their peers and finding solutions together. Such activities are very good not just for the translation tasks, but also for developing their relationships with each other: they have the chance to know each other better, to spend more time together and to improve their foreign language because they have more courage to use it when they talk to a classmate than to a teacher. They have the confidence that they are not evaluated and they are allowed to make mistakes because nobody is going to judge them.

I will exemplify some of the activities that I have practised with my students making use of translation, which have been successful in my attempt to develop my students' vocabulary and grammatical structures and even the acquirement of cultural competences. The students enjoyed these activities very much because they made them take part actively in all translation classes.

Even if the textbooks do not offer the students the possibility to solve different translation tasks, there are nowadays a lot of books that can be used in teaching translation and I will mention the source of each particular exercise.

A book that I use in order to help my students improve their language skill is *Essential English, Dificultăţi şi Capcane ale limbii engleze*, written by Olivia Farrington, translated and

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adapted in Romanian by Alina Hăhăianu and published by Teora Publishing House in 1998. The following example is selected from this book; my students found it very interesting and considered it helped them improve their comprehension of the new words and phrases. The following exercises are selected from the worksheets that I make use of in my translation classes.

Class: 8A, 2 English classes/week (8th year of study)

- **Translate into English paying particular attention to the translation of the word which occurs in all sentences: „sfat".**

1. Măcar dacă aş fi urmat sfaturile profesorului meu.
2. Urmaţi aceste două sfaturi şi nu puteţi greşi.
3. Un mic sfat înainte de a începe: citiţi instrucţiunile (de utilizare).
4. Nu ne-au dat multe sfaturi în această privinţă.
5. Sfaturile sale nu au fost apreciate. (1998: 10)

- **Transate the following letter into English:**

Dragă Charles,

N-am mai primit de mult veşti de la tine. Ce mai faci? Vreau să îţi povestesc ce mi s-a întâmplat acum o lună, dar mi-ar fi greu să-ţi explic într-o scrisoare. Ne putem întâlni undeva? De exemplu la Wild Boar (=La Mistreţul)? N-am mai fost pe acolo de luni de zile. Sper că încă mai există!

Pe curând, Ben.

P.S. Acum o săptămână am primit o scrisoare de la Francis. E în Portugalia de şase luni. (1998: 15)

The first exercise can cause some difficulty in translating the sentences because the noun *advice* in English does not have a plural form and if the students do not know that already or if they have forgotten that, then the sentences might be translated in a wrong way, we might find the noun *advices* in certain sentences or *an advice*, which is definitely wrong, instead of *pieces of advice* or of *a piece of advice*.

The second exercise simply helps the students improve or develop their vocabulary by translating an uncomplicated and short letter from Romanian into English. They have the chance to enrich their vocabulary by learning new words or revising the ones they already know.

Class: 9E, Philology, Bilingual English, 5 English classes/week

- **Translate the following text using the words *miss* or *lack*:**

Le lipseşte o strategie adevărată asupra transportului feroviar. Vor să suprime linia care duce pe coastă, dar ea le-ar lipsi într-adevăr insularilor (locuitorilor din insule). Fostul ministru al transporturilor era mai bun. Tuturor ne lipseşte. (1998: 76)

- **Translate the following text using the words *many*, *much*, *a lot of* or *too (much/many):***

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Nu am mult timp şi am prea mult de lucru. Am multe scrisori de scris. Sunt multe mesaje pentru mine pe robotul telefonic (= answer machine)? Sunt într-adevăr prea ocupat! (1998: 86)

When my students solved these exercises, first they said everything was very easy, but when they started to translate the sentences, they realized that they involved certain vocabulary and grammar topics that were not as easy as they looked like at first sight. But what really counted was the final result because they had developed both their lexical and their grammar knowledge.

The next exercises are taken from *Essential English; Exerciţii cu verbe complexe*, written by Stela Şlapac, published by Teora Publishing House in 1994 one of the books that is suitable for the students in the, 8th, 9th and 10th grades. They develop certain translation exercises containing verbs and offer the students the opportunity to see how many alternatives there are in which the same verb can have a different meaning, depending on the context or on the preposition it is used with.

Read and translate the following short text paying particular attention to the phrasal verb *to break up:*

9C, Biology-Chemistry, Bilingual English, 5 English classes/week

The audience in the college auditorium was impatiently awaiting the appearance of the out-of-town entertainer, who was already an hour late. The chairman of the evening, fearing the people would *break up*, scribbled a frantic appeal for help and had it passed down the aisle to Professor B., who was a ready and witty speaker. Thinking to *break up* the stony atmosphere, Professor B. began:

- I've just received a message asking me to come up here and say something funny.

A young student at the back of the room called loudly:

- You'll tell us when you say it, won't you?

To which the grave professor made an instant reply:

- I'll tell you; and the rest will know! (1994: 14)

In order to solve this exercise in a proper way, the students need to know the meanings of the phrasal verb *to break up*. Thus, they will illustrate in the best way possible the original meaning of this phrasal verb, but if they are not so sure of all its meanings, then it might involve a certain degree of difficulty in translating it properly.

The next exercises are selected from *English with tears; English Grammar made difficult*, *Engleza cu lacrimi*, written by Ileana Galea and Virgil Stanciu in 2001 and published by Dacia Publishing House, a book that I use for the students in the 11th and 12th grades as it is suitable for advanced learners. The exercises aim at developing proficiency in different aspects of the language and to make students acquainted with recent types of examination tests.

Translate the following text into English:

CLASS: 12E, Philology Bilingual English, 5 English classes/week

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Monet a dat impresionismului demnitatea artei clasice, deşi la sfârşitul secolului nu mai era un impresionist, în sensul de a lucra în aer liber, inspirându-se direct din natură. El declara că dacă pânzele lui sunt sau nu pictate după natură nu-i treaba nimănui şi nu are absolut nicio importanţă. De fapt, erau pictate din memorie, dar cuprinderea memoriei sale era la fel de limitată ca şi drumul de la eleşteu la atelier. Prin geniul său de a reda efemerul printr-o structură monumentală, Monet a devenit un maestru al timpului regăsit – cel mai proustian dintre pictori. De fapt, echivalentul său literar mai potrivit era poetul simbolist Stéphane Mallarmé. Pentru Mallarmé, pagina albă tremura de posibilităţi, aşa cum făceau şi apa calmă sau pânza pentru Monet. (2001: 203)

In order to offer a proper translation, the students need to master not only the appropriate lexical knowledge, but also the sequence of tenses. Thus, from the lexical point of view, this short text helps students revise or acquire new vocabulary, and from the grammatical point of view it helps students revise the sequence of tenses or understand the relationship between past and present tenses.

The next translation exercises are selected from *Developing Competence in English, Intensive English Practice*, written by Cornelia Coşer and Rodica Vulcănescu, published in 2004 by Polirom Publishing House and from *Engleză. Exerciţii*, written by Cecilia Croitoru and published in 2008 by Booklet Publishing House.

These two books include exercises which have been chosen in order to involve knowledge acquired or revised in textbooks at school regarding the sequence of tenses, nouns, articles, adjectives, adverbs, possessive adjectives and pronouns, numerals and determiners, passive voice, if clauses and hypothetical meaning, modal verbs and reported speech.

CLASS: 11E, Philology Bilingual English, 5 English classes/week

I. Translate the following text into English focussing on the passive voice:

"Pădurea a fost tăiată. Copacii bătrâni au fost culcaţi la pământ, curăţaţi de crengi, făcuţi stive, încărcaţi în care şi duşi la oraş. Din rădăcinile vechi a răsărit crâng tânăr. Pădurea o să fie iarăşi pădure în putere mai târziu.

O dată cu pieirea pădurii, au pierit şi hoţii. În porumburi, în grâne, mai greu să se ascundă hoţii, să-şi piardă urmele...

S-a apropiat toamna. A inceput toamna. A fost cules porumbul. Viile, câte au sădit românii după molimă, au fost îngropate, să nu degere mlădiţele sub zăpadă.

S-a deschis şcoala. Arborii îşi leapădă frunzele galbene. Vânt. Ploaie. Vânt schimbător. Ploaie măruntă, deasă. Ploaie de toamnă..." (Zaharia Stancu, *Desculţ*) (2004: 157)

After having solved enough exercises on the passive voice, the students can translate this short text with the purpose of better understanding the use and the proper meaning of the passive voice in English and its relationship to the Romanian language.

We should take into account the fact that comprehending a language involves not only understanding its grammar and vocabulary, but also the definite aspects and features of its culture, which is a system of significances and approaches, principles and norms that speakers of that language assume.

Language and culture are fundamentally interconnected and they should always be studied together since there is such a close relationship between them. Additionally, it can be

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established without doubt that we cannot consider foreign language teaching without including culture.

In *Introducing Translation Studies*, Jeremy Munday refers to Lefevere's definition regarding the relationship between translation and culture: "Translation is the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and … it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin." (2008: 126)

Nowadays, teachers focus more on teaching the students about other countries' cultures and civilizations, thus contributing more to the development of their students' vocabulary and ability to use the foreign language in different contexts. Then they can use the information regarding the students' background, interests and experiences to facilitate the progress of the culturally relevant classes. (Terry&Irving, 2010)

There are many methods by means of which students can learn about the foreign culture: newspaper articles, magazines, music, dances, movies, books, TV shows and documentaries. My students prefer music and newspaper articles, but also getting into contact with native speakers. When I develop translation activities based on cultural topics, I usually bring my students different texts that I previously select from magazines, newspapers or the Internet and they have to translate them adapting the text to our country. If there are specific terms that cannot be translated, then they are only explained and the source word is kept in its original form.

In my translation classes I often use Kussmaul's example of developing such activities and it always helps: "… I give my students an oriented translation task, in other words, I tell them the purpose of their translation, who their prospective readership is, and sometimes, in order to get them on the right path, I also tell them if they should adapt the text to the target culture or leave it within the source culture" (1995: 134). This type of translation activities is appropriate for 11th or 12th graders who already posses certain knowledge of both the source and the target culture.

In this article I have tried to demonstrate how we, as teachers, can improve our students' knowledge of English by using translation exercises, more precisely how we can develop their vocabulary, grammar structures and also the cultural competence. I hope the exercises I have selected from the ones I use with my students in my translation classes can be a good proof of the way that translation can help teachers in the teaching process.

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