

USING TRANSLATION AS AN ACTIVITY IN CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

As one of the techniques in foreign language teaching, translation is almost forgotten since this technique cannot be able to make the learner use language actively in terms of speaking and listening. Actually, if translation is used properly, it can be applied in teaching foreign language in the classroom. This study is aimed at giving an idea of using translation as the technique through content-based instruction in university or college. Content-based instruction is the teaching which combines the teaching of foreign language skills and teaching a specific content in the specific field. In this study, the use of translation technique is as one of the activities through content-based instruction. It is assumed that learning a foreign language while studying a specific content related to the learner's field of study will be more useful and interesting. There are two techniques suggested in this paper: translation activities during the teaching learning process in the classroom and translation activities after the classroom teaching. Then, the specific language skills will be the target in this kind of teaching such as: skimming and scanning, reviewing materials being taught, making question as well as answering, summarizing, presenting, and some other skills related to skills needed while studying. It is hoped that students at university level will be more interesting and creative since the teaching of foreign language is related to their field.

Keywords: translation, content-based instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is an important language skill to master. It is also can be used as a method and technique in language teaching. However, along with the development of many models of methods and techniques in language teaching, translation is almost forgotten since this technique cannot be able to make the learner use language actively in terms of speaking and listening. And also, this technique is not a quick technique for mastering foreign language. In addition, translation is often considered as an old fashioned and it is less successful in improving oral language skills. As it is known that one of the oldest methods in language teaching is the Grammar Translation Method, the method which is based on translation skill. This method appeared based on the assumption that learning a foreign language means translating it into the first language, including grammar. However, after some evaluations, it is shown that the disadvantage of this method is that the foreign language learners can only understand the target language but they cannot use it in oral communication actively. Therefore, for some periods of time, Grammar Translation Method began to be changed by other methods such as Direct Method, Audio Lingual Method, and so forth.

In addition, there is another opinion which makes the use of translation method or technique to be hampered. It is the assumption that translation skill requires specific knowledge in language (linguistics) both in target language and first language as well. Therefore, translation techniques does not applied in school since it is regarded as a high-level skill that requires specific knowledge in target language in order to translate well. Thus, translation is only studied in foreign language department since it needs linguistics to support the skill.

Recently, however, the attitude of language teachers has begun to change. Translation is again being considered by experts in language teaching. Experts in EFL assume that translation is one of the appropriate pedagogical instruments for EFL environment, so that translation needs to get a place and should be modified (Widdowson 1978:18, 1991:62, Harmer, Ellis 1992:46; Ur, 1996:40). In addition, Duff (1989) stated that if designed well then translating activities will help to improve the four language skills

and develop more accuracy, clarity and flexibility. Therefore, it is not the time to ignore translation in general language teaching. After finding some advantages of using translation techniques, experts in EFL have started to consider this technique as an important technique to be used in the language teaching process.

Actually, it can be denied that the translation process itself is unconsciously happened during teaching and learning process. When learner expresses something in the target language, automatically what is being expressed will also exist in his first language. Besides, the comparison of grammar and concept between target language and first language is also taken place unconsciously during the communication. Ross (in Mehta, 2010) explained that if students are aware of the difference between first language and second language, language interference can be reduced. Translation in a second language classes are also offered a way to highlight the similarities and differences between the first language and second language. Thus, if it is used properly, translation is good to be applied in order to increase students ability in understanding the target language. One of the ways is by using the specific instruction such as content-based instruction which collaborates the language teaching and the content itself. If it is combined with translation technique, some benefits will be achieved.

By looking at some facts about the use of translation above, thus the question is how is the advantage of using translation in the language classroom? How far translation can be used as the language teaching technique in teaching and testing the foreign language ability? How is the implementation of language skills in content-based instruction? Those questions will be answered by the following discussion and by giving example of how to apply translation technique in foreign language teaching in the classroom.

2. ADVANTAGE OF USING TRANSLATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROCESS.

Translation is sometimes regarded as a fifth language skill beside listening, speaking, reading and writing. Naturally, the process of translating occurs in any activities related to bilingual or multilingual. So, when students learn a foreign language, the process of translating or at least the process of comparing the target language and the first language will automatically occur. Schweer (in Mehta, 2010) stated that the main usage of translation in teaching English is to utilize translating for comparing grammar, vocabulary, word formation and other elements of language in English and the learner mother tongue. The process of translating in term of comparing will make the learner aware of the differences between the two languages, and if the learner aware of these differences, so the interference of mother tongue can be reduced (Ross in Mehta, 2010).

Related to what Ross explained above, Duff (1989) said that translation is not as difficult as it seems. He explained that there are four reasons why translation has a good advantage in classroom teaching. First, the influence of L1 is very high that it often interrupts the use of L2 or target language. Therefore, in this position, the shapes of thinking are formed or conditioned by L1, while on the other sides translation will give helps in better understanding.

Secondly, according to Duff, translation is a natural and important activity which is happened all the times and will always be needed. When communicating in the target language, the translation process will automatically continue in the student's thought so that it really helps the learner to understand what is being conveyed and received in the target language.

Finally, Duff explained that linguistic competence is "a two-way system". That is, linguistic competence includes two systems side by side, the language reality itself as one of the important aspects and the consequences of using the language itself which produce some benefits for: a) inviting speculation and discussion, b) developing specific qualities needed for all languages: accuracy, clarity, and flexibility, c) developing teachers competence in choosing the materials in order to describe the aspects of a certain language, and this will enable students to see the relations between the language user and the grammar of the language used, and d) encouraging students to apply and practice a wide variety of styles and registers. Therefore, it can be seen that linguistic competence does not depend on the language user individually but it also involves the environment which will give the respond or the environment in which the communication established.

From those four advantages of translation explained by Duff above, it shows that translation is not only a skill possessed by a professional one yet translation has become part of the activities in the communication itself. Translation naturally occurs in reading and writing activities, so teachers can apply it in the process of teaching foreign language in the classroom. In reading and writing, the influences of L1

will help to establish frame of thinking about the materials in the foreign language. Therefore, translation in language teaching is not something to be denied.

3. TRANSLATION AS A TOOL IN TEACHING LANGUAGE

In order to use translation as a tool in teaching foreign languages, Newmark (1981) gave some guidelines for teachers and students. He said that teachers are expected to have the following skills: a) Teachers should be well organized and able to present a syllabus to students; b) Teachers should be confident, avoid mistakes, have the will give science and knowledge in students and not just teaching; c) teachers should have a good skill in translation; d) have a good mastery of pedagogical techniques; e) ready to apply methods; f) listen to students' suggestions; g) treats translation as a form of linguistic exploration; h) good mastery of both the source language and the target language. It seems that what Newmark suggest are the general competence of a good language teachers.

Next, for students, Newmark underline the following skills: a) sensitivity to language; b) ability to write neatly; c) knowledge of good cultural background; d) mastery of the text being translated; e) good reading knowledge; f) Common sense; g) discrimination; h) speed in the work; i) the ability to think of several things at a time; j) attention to detail matters. Thus, the skills Newmark described above will need to be owned or possessed by using translation as a tool for teaching in the classroom.

Back to the Grammar Translation Method, there are actually some things that can be drawn from this method which can be referred to be developed. Freeman (2000) provides several techniques related to the GTM, they are: 1) Translation of a Literary Passage (Translating target language into the language of the user), 2) Reading comprehension questions (Finding information in the reading text, making inference and relate it to personal experience), 3) Antonym/Synonyms (Finding antonyms and synonyms of the word or group of words being studied), 4) Cognates (Studying patterns of speech/sound correspondence between L1 and the target language), 5) Deductive Application of Rule (Understanding grammar rules and exceptions, and then applied them by making own sample), 6) Fill-in-the blanks (Filling in the blanks in the sentence with a new word or part of a particular grammar), 7) Memorization (Memorizing vocabulary, grammar rules and grammatical paradigms), 8) Use Words in Sentences (Students create sentences to show that they understand the meaning and usage of a new word they have got), and 9) Composition (Students write about a topic using the target language). These techniques shows that there are several steps in translating, starting from translating reading texts, translating words, and learning the sounds related to L1. Those steps or processes are then combined with other activities such as the application of making sentences, finding antonym and synonym, and ended by writing activities for writing skills.

4. PURPOSE OF USING TRANSLATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

From several points given by Freeman above, it is shown that translation can be used as tool or technique in language teaching, but the focus is mostly on reading and writing skills. It is also stated by Careres (in Mogahed, 2010) that: "*Translation is an artificial exercise that has no place in a communicative methodology. Also, it is restrictive in that it confines language practice to two skills only: reading and writing*". Therefore, if a teacher chooses translation for teaching language, so the focus of the teaching will be reading and writing skill (written cycle), not for listening and speaking (oral cycle).

Based on the purpose that translation tends to be used for written cycle, thus, it is suggested that translation will used for teaching other than beginners. It is because by using translation for beginners, the intervention of L1 (while doing translation) will make the learners continuously associate the target language with L1. This causes their language produced unacceptable. In addition, the goal of the foreign language learning tends to the understanding of language aspects and it will disturb the use of the foreign language if translation is given earlier.

Moreover, there is a question occurred about whether translation is needed by students and whether students will use translation during studying foreign language. Widdowson (1983:20) answered this question by explaining that translation is a real activity in communication. He gave some example showing that students use translation activities as follows: "*...for peers, decode signs and notice in the environment, translates instructions and letters for friends and relations, etc.*" This also was confirmed by Duff (1989) that "*translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?*". Thus, translation activities actually are done by the students unconsciously. However, but what the students' need here is the translation which helps them to develop knowledge about language being studied, not translation that being done professionally. So, it means that it is a means to an end, not to an end to be achieved.

5. CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

One model of language teaching which is quite popular recently is content-based teaching content or Content- Based Instruction (CBI). Content-based instruction is often used for teaching foreign language at the high school and university level. This teaching focuses on the collaboration between teaching language and other fields. Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) gave five reasons for the use of CBI. First, from the ESP point of view, the successful of a foreign language teaching can be seen from the syllabus used, that is, the syllabus should consider the use of the target language in order to become relevant with the students background knowledge or field. Second, the use of informal content is assumed to be relevant with the students that it can increase students' motivation and interest, thus the teaching can be more effective. Third, CBI approach applies pedagogical principles that is the teaching learning process should be built from the students experience from their background knowledge. Fourth, language should be taught through a specific focus contextually. Last, based on the research about second language acquisition, the 'input' in the target language has to be understood by the students (Krashe, in Snow and Wesche: 1998).

Actually, there is no specific model of CBI since most of the models are modified from several approaches. The famous model of CBI includes *sheltered content course*, *theme-based approach*, *adjunct courses*, *Language for Special Purposes (LSP) courses*, dan *Foreign Language Across Curriculum (FLAC) Programs* (Stryker and Leaver, 2007; Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989). The models are created and modified based on the needs of specific learners and groups including demography changes in the English-speaking universities and also the need of English as an international language for teaching and academic texts used by countries around the world (Crandall and Kaufman, 2002) . In addition, Crandall added that the CBI has been developed for the following:

“...in order to response the needs of college and university for enhanced academic English language proficiency. Thus, both language and content faculty gain in their understanding of the interplay of language and content and the respective contributions of all faculty to enhancing the language and academic proficiency of English language learners.”

Therefore, CBI is also developed due to the change of the contexts, needs and teaching materials resources. However, the changes are really depends on several factors: the purpose of the language teaching, the students' background and needs, the situation of the department and boards where the teaching process is conducted, and the teaching staffs available. Furthermore, since CBI is related to the content or teaching materials being taught in the target language, then Stryker defined CBI as the integration of certain content with the purpose of language teaching. The language curriculum will directly be based on the students' academic needs. In short, Stryker concluded CBI into three main point called 'element', they are: 1) based on subject-matter core, 2) the use of authentic language and text, and 3) based on the needs of specific language learners.

6. TRANSLATION AND CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

As stated above that CBI is combining the teaching of specific content in the specific field with the teaching of foreign language as the target (Brinton , Snow and Wesche , 1989; Stryker and Leavers , 1987). In this case, translation is one of the activities required in the learning process. Translating activities can be done as part of the process, but it can also be used for assignments after the class. For example, English teaching for education department with the specific topic in the education area such as the theory of pedagogy, in this case, language driven is used. It means that the focus is the language skills but not fully the content. The function of the content here is just the subject being talked as the media for using language skills in the target language. For this, there are two models proposed in the teaching learning process:

6.1. Translation as the process in the classroom activities

There are several steps that can be done for the process of translation in the classroom. First, as in CBI activities, literature are given related to the educational theories where the sources are taken from some books related to other subject in pedagogy or education such as educational psychology, children development, etc. in the first step, reading is the major activity to comprehend the text. It also can be done by skimming or scanning or reading in details. While reading which is integrated with classroom discussion about literature given, the translation can be done in this occasion especially about the difficult material. A variety of techniques can be inserted, for example, providing about 10 t 15 minutes to translate a several paragraphs, and then doing question and answer about the content to avoid misunderstanding.

This is one of the concept of CBI that is to integrate the teaching of content and to use language skills in target language.

The next activities are to make summary (writing skills), to retell the content by students' own language (listening and speaking skill), and followed by other activities related to language skills. And last, since the focus is to learn about language skill, thus the assessment is also emphasized on language skills. The content is used as the media to assess the language skills. Therefore, translation in this case is a tool to help students doing the target language skills.

6.2. Translation after classroom activities

In this model, translation becomes one of the major activities that will be included into the assessment. First, as the first model, some interesting literatures in education field, such as educational theories, in English are given to the students related to their field. Then, about 15 minutes, the skimming is done following by question and answer in the target language in order to comprehend the material given.

Next, students are asked to come in front of the class to explain the materials for example about the expert in education, the content of the theories, etc. It is assumed that they have understood about the materials since it is related to other subject that they have already taken. After explaining, the students are asked to make a summary about the materials. The first assessment is done for their summary (as writing skill) and their ability in explaining the material in front of the class orally (speaking skill).

Last, students are asking to find other sources in English related to the topic that they have just studied in the class. Students may choose some specific theories, not all, and then they explore their knowledge by reading more from the sources they found. After that, students are asked to translate the material they have found into Indonesia and this will be discussed and assessed in the next meeting. So, translation is done outside of the classroom. It is done after they have already understood the material in the classroom before. So, at least the vocabulary and some specific terms have already taught in the classroom, thus it will help them to translate the different sources.

Those two kinds of translation activities can be applied in CBI. It is hoped that translation can help students to study about the specific material they need as well as target language skills. The interesting materials will motivate students to study since they will think that the material is related to what they need. In other side, students are required to use the target language in the learning process.

7. CONCLUSION

Translation is a skill which is considered as the difficult skill since it needs other language skills and knowledge. Therefore, people think that it is a professional skill that can be done by specific person in that field. However, translation actually has some advantages if it is applied in the language teaching. It can be done during the classroom process together with other language skills in the target language. On the other hand, for the specific level, translation can be a specific part of activities which is assessed through the language teaching process.

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