



The Role and Importance of Translation in Teaching a Foreign Language

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Abstract: This article examines the role and pedagogical significance of translation in the process of teaching a foreign language. The study analyzes the historical evolution of methodological approaches to translation, from the grammar-translation and lexical-translation methods of the 18th-19th centuries to the emergence of direct methods that excluded translation, and further to contemporary balanced approaches that recognize translation as a supportive instructional tool. The paper distinguishes between translation proper and translation-interpretation, emphasizing their methodological relevance in cases of non-equivalence, semantic divergence, and differences in usage between the native and target languages. It is argued that translation should be applied selectively and strategically primarily at the stages of explanation and evaluation while consolidation and retention of language material should rely on drill and communicative exercises conducted exclusively in the target language.

Keywords: assimilation, lexical-translation, consolidation, drill and speech exercises, target language, retention.



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In foreign language teaching translation may be used, for instance, as a means of conveying the meaning of a word, a phraseological group, a grammar form, or a sentence pattern. Translation is then considered to be a means of teaching a foreign language. From the history of methods of foreign language teaching it is known that the approach to translation has undergone various changes at different times. Thus in the second half of the 18th, and the first half of the 19th century, translation was considered to be a method of instruction. A foreign language was taught through translation; in the grammar-translation method it was mainly from the mother tongue into the foreign language, and in the lexical-translation method — from the foreign language into the mother tongue.

At the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century direct methods appeared and spread throughout the world. Direct methods completely eliminated translation in foreign language teaching. Later on translation was admitted in foreign language teaching, in such methodological systems as H. Palmer's and M. West's, as a means of conveying the meaning of language units.

In the Soviet Union translation has never been taboo in foreign language teaching though its role and place varied. Thus in the conscious-translation method proposed by L. V. Tsherba translation played a great role in the teaching of a foreign language, both for practical and educational ends. Practically translation was to be used as a means of conveying the meaning, as a leading type of exercise for consolidating the language material presented, as almost the only means of-checking the pupils' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and the comprehension of what they read and heard.

It was applied at every stage irrespective of pupils' age, language experience, language material, etc., and throughout the whole process of assimilation, namely: explanation, consolidation, or retention, and checking. Practice has proved, however, that the constant use of translation does not ensure the necessary conditions for pupils' direct comprehension of what they read and hear. As a result they can neither speak nor read the foreign language. Nor can they translate from one language into the other since translation requires the ability to think in both languages. (This is possible on condition that pupils have ample practice for speaking, hearing, reading, and writing in the target language.)

To meet the program requirements translation must now be utilized:

1. As a means of conveying the meaning of a word, a phraseological group, a grammar form, and a sentence pattern alongside with other means; translation being the most economical method from the point of view of the time required.

For example: a flower — цветок; Pete's brother — Петин брат; He happened to be busy — Случилось так, что он был занят.

Besides, translation ensures comprehension of a new language item.

For example: to go — уезжать, уходить, т. е. двигаться (передвигаться) от какого-либо места; to come — приходиться, приезжать, т. е. двигаться к какому-либо месту; I am writing — Я пишу (сейчас, в данный момент).

Translation as a means of conveying the meaning may be used in two ways: translation proper and translation-interpretation.

The teacher uses translation proper when, for example, a new word has a more or less exact equivalent in the other language, e.g., *a flower* — цветок. No interpretation is needed. The teacher uses translation-interpretation when there is something peculiar, specific about a word presented. It may be:

(a) an absence of an equivalent

For example, meal — (1) принятие пищи (Breakfast is the first meal. We have 3—4 meals a day.— Мы едим 3—4 раза в день. Hence there is an expression *meal-time*: What is your usual meal-time — Когда вы обычно едите?); (2) пища, которую принимают, едят (Make a meal of bread and butter. — Поешьте хлеба с маслом. He always enjoys his meals. — Он всегда с удовольствием ест.)

to rain (snow) — такого глагола в русском языке нет (it rains — идет дождь; it snows — идет снег)

(b) difference in the extent of meaning

For example, to go — передвигаться (удаляться от...) любым средством, двигаться, доходить до ...

to drive — вести что-либо (машину, автобус, троллейбус и др.). Hence driver — водитель, вагоновожатый, шофер, машинист; raw — сырой, необработанный; raw material — сырье; raw meat — сырое мясо

(c) difference in usage, i. e., a word forms specific combinations which do not exist in the Russian language. For example, *heavy rain, to pay attention, to meet requirements*, etc.

2. As a means of ensuring comprehension of difficult points in a text — through analysis and translation pupils gain comprehension, as is the case when they are given a text too difficult to understand without analysis and translation.

3. As a means of checking pupils' comprehension of what they read or hear alongside of other means.

These are the cases where translation is desirable and helpful in foreign language teaching. In consolidation or retention of language material no translation should be utilized, however. Various drill and speech exercises must be done within the target language. The teacher must do his best to create the atmosphere suitable for developing pupils' speaking and reading habits and skills.

It is necessary that pupils should follow the rule: "Learn to speak by speaking and read by reading." Translation provides neither the first nor the second. It only helps in obtaining knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but it hinders the development of speech habits and skills, since instead of direct comprehension and expression of their thoughts pupils fall into the habit of translating everything they hear or read, and in this way do not get accustomed to associate the sequence of sounds they hear with the meaning it has in the foreign language, to associate the graphemes with the notions they convey. Under these conditions no speaking or reading is possible. Consequently the teacher may use translation when explaining new material and checking his pupils' knowledge.

GLOSSARY

Language for Specific Purposes (language for special purposes) - accepted in modern linguistics designation of functional variants of the literary language, the service professional communication

Language material - phonemes, letters intonemy, words, phrases, ready-made phrases, grammatical forms, etc., to be studied in the process of mastering a foreign language.

Learning speech situation - a model of a set of circumstances that encourages potential interlocutors to communicate through the use of linguistic resources in the interest of learning speech.

Learning tools - a set of manuals and technical device, by which the teacher teach the language and activities of students on the mastery of the language.

Lesson - the lowest organizational unit of the educational process.

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