FOLLOWING THE PATHS OF TRANSLATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: FROM DISREGARD IN THE PAST TO REVIVAL TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY

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… to pretend that students do not have a first language is perverse.
(Soars, 1991 cited in Souza, 1996: 3)

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a time of unprecedented growth of interest in translation practice in the language classroom. A brief overview of the historical origins of translation seems to be an indispensable requirement as we set up to develop a study on translation in language teaching. Outlining its development over time will also show how translation eventually got to have such a bad reputation within the language teaching community and how the traditional arguments against the use of translation in language teaching can all be refuted if classroom translation dresses a modern garb. Being anchored on theoretical grounds will, undoubtedly, help us gain a better understanding of the present situation and a better fit for envisaging future perspectives in translation spheres.

Origins and Early Views of Translation

Before the 19th century the *scholastic method* was traditionally used by individuals studying the written form of a language

independently, and also for teaching Latin and Greek in grammar schools. "The scholar would study the grammar of a language, and read texts, almost invariably religious or literary, with the help of a dictionary and the acquired grammar" (Malmkjaer et al., 1998:2), which normally involved writing down a translation of the text. It worked well for scholarly studious people who wanted to learn to read.

By the end of the eighteenth century the *grammar-translation* method emerged from attempts to adjust the scholastic approach as a way of teaching modern languages in secondary schools in Prussia to large numbers of students of different learning abilities in groups. Instead of using whole texts, the so called grammar-translation method used translation of individual sentences specially devised to exemplify certain grammatical features. "This meant that the examples could be graded for difficulty and that the grammar could be taught systematically" (Howatt, 1984: 132, cited in Malmkjaer et al., 1998: 3).

The first objections regarding the use of translation in language teaching were brought about by members of the early Reform Movement in the late 19th century, and were reinforced in the 1960s and 1970s by people who defended *the Direct, Natural, Conversational, and/or Communicative* methods of language teaching. The pendulum's swing seems to have turned to the opposite direction of the grammar-translation method, as it becomes evident in the three fundamental principles of the movement: "the primacy of speech; the importance of connected text in teaching and learning; and the priority of oral classroom methodology" (Howatt 1984: 171-2, cited in Malmkjaer et al., 1998: 3). The second of these principles refers to forming appropriate 'associations' (from the emerging science of psychology) in the new language, only feasible when dealing with whole texts. The use of isolated sentences in translation exercises was thought to lead to 'cross associations' between the two languages, hence hindering the development of the foreign language.

The Natural Method was based on the philosophy that:

> learning how to speak a new language… is not a rational process which can be organized in a step-by-step manner following graded syllabuses of new points to learn, exercises and explanations. It is an intuitive process for which human beings have a natural capacity that can be awakened provided only that the proper conditions exist. Put simply, there are three such conditions: someone to talk to, something to talk about, and a desire to understand and make yourself understood (Howatt 1994:192, cited in Malmkjaer et al., 1998: 4).

As a matter of fact, this method had been a common practice in private home tutoring using a foreign language since the 16th century. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1476-1827) was the first to introduce the method to group teaching. Nevertheless, it was Maximilian Berlitz (1852-1921) who first applied the Natural Method on a big scale, opening "schools for the large numbers of immigrants who were arriving in the USA… in urgent need of learning to produce and understand speech" (Malmkjaer, 1998: 4). In Berlitz's manuals for teachers translation is banned under any circumstances.

Lado (1964) was one of the most outspoken anti-translationists discouraging translation as a substitute for language practice. Gatenby (1967) echoes the kinds of objections raised by Lado and adds that translation cannot be used as a testing device either. He believes teaching by translation, especially literal translation, is bad pedagogy because it doesn't measure comprehension. Gatenby also poses that our whole endeavour should be to train the students to dissociate the two languages so that they can use the foreign language without having to think.

In her paper *Translation and Language Teaching*, Kirsten Malmkjaer (1998:6) provides a list of arguments which are usually held by opponents of translation in language teaching. Translation:

- is independent of the four skills which define language competence: reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- is radically different from the four skills.
- takes up valuable time which could be used to teach these four skills.
- is unnatural.
- misleads students into thinking that expressions in two languages correspond one-to-one.
- prevents students from thinking in the foreign language.
- produces interference.
- is a bad test of language skills.
- is only appropriate for training translators.

Taking into consideration the fact that these arguments have stubbornly survived for such a long time, Malmkjaer (1998) acknowledges that there must be some truth in them. Yet, she argues that their validity appears to depend on the kind of translation students experience. The author then embraces the mission of trying to prove how these traditional objections regarding the use of translation can all fall away if classroom translation acquires a professional resemblance.

Addressing the Arguments Against Translation in Language Teaching.

The translation component of the grammar-translation method resembled what Vienne (1994) called *translation in a void*, the prevailing approach in translation training in many university courses in foreign literatures and languages until the late 1970s / early 1980s. Texts handed in to be translated were not always complete and students had no idea where they came from, what kind of text they were, or even why they were translating them. The only thing

students knew was that the teacher wanted to test or train their language competence or ability to translate. In a similar fashion, even translation training skills, beyond competence in the languages involved, had often been neglected as rightly pointed by Nord (1997: 8).

The middle of the century had brought about an age of vigorous international expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity. The world had suddenly become unified by two dominating forces - technology and commerce. Hence the urgent need for translation of the non-literary text type. One further example should clarify other changes taking place in this *Brave New World*:

> In the translation of scientific and academic papers, instructions for use, tourist guides, contracts, etc, the contextual factors surrounding the translation cannot be ignored. These factors include the culture of the intended readers of the target text and the client who has commissioned it, and, in particular, the function which the text is to perform in that culture for those readers (Schäffner, in Baker, 1998: 235).

This background scenario gave rise to a new *'functionalistic'* approach to translation called *'Skopos Theory'* which advocates that "the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translational action" (Nord, 1997:27). This notion of purpose highlighted by functionalism supplied exactly what was missing in the *translation in a void* model.

Fortunately, as a result of this new way of looking at translation, many teaching professionals in the field no longer share the early view of translating. Since the late 1970s, "translation has come to be seen, increasingly, as a complex process involving a variety of behaviors and skills together with and / or based on a variety of cognitive components which are the building blocks of translator intelligence" (Wills 1996: 161, cited in MalmKjaer et al., 1998: 7). Necessarily, this new perspective had a bearing on the use of translation in the language classroom.

We now turn to the issue of how all these behaviors, skills and cognitive components operate in a text-production process. If only because translation is essentially text-production, *or is it not*? From a *functionalist* point of view, a translator has a given amount of time to produce a text in a Target Language (TL), which must fulfill a specific spatiotemporal setting. The Target Text (TT) has to draw on the Source Text (ST), which is written in another language, the Source Language (SL). The ST also has a purpose, readership and spaciotemporal setting which is never quite the same as those of the TT. The translator engages in at least five activities to complete the process: *Anticipation; Resource Exploitation; Co-operation; Revision; and Translation* (which all subsume other activities commonly considered *sine qua non* in language learning activities)*.* There seems to be, in principle, no fixed order in which the activities must occur. They may draw on each other as well as feed into them (Mackenzie, 1994). During *anticipation*, translators study the context for the ST- who has written it, why, when, for whom – and also for the TT – who wants it, why, when, and for whom. This activity involves gathering resources such as dictionaries, originals, similar TL texts, and possible cooperation with other translators, etc. *Resource exploitation* concerns analyzing the texts collected during anticipation. *Translation* begins together with resource exploitation and usually raises several problems which are often solved during the period of *Co-operation* between translators or experts. Problems and solutions adopted are documented for possible discussion with the client. The outcome of *Revision* is the final version of the text. Despite the somewhat divergent points of view usually held by the translator trainer and the language teacher, herein lies the site where we can envision a fruitful relationship between translation in language learning and teaching translation as a skill in its own right (one dressing a professional look). Cooperation between the two groups can be promoted, as I shall stress below.

In the light of what has been presented above in the description of the translation process, we are, hopefully, well equipped to start

focusing on each one of the objections to translation in language teaching more directly. It is clear that an *acceptable translation* requires a great deal of reading, writing, speaking and listening, which proves that translation is not independent of the other four skills. When translating language students may be practicing them all. (Isn't this highly interactive and communicative in nature? How could the sympathizers of the communicative approach have been blind to this? Perhaps because Cognitive Psychology had not opened their eyes wide enough yet!?). If translation depends on and includes the other language skills it cannot be radically different from them; there being no reason to consider translation as a time waster in language teaching. It then follows that a properly situated translation task can be as natural as any other classroom activity, for it caters for most or all of the four skills regarded crucial in classroom practice. Vienne (1998) comes here to our rescue when finding it obvious that the activities involved in situational analysis and resource research and exploitation also benefit language students *per se*, in several ways: "They provide a life-like focus for meaningful spoken and written language production and reception, requiring students to use both (all) their languages for particular, easily identifiable purposes, both transactionally (to obtain and provide information) and interactively (to get along with others involved in the activity)" (Vienne, 1998: 116, cited in Malmkjaer et at., 1998) (see Brown and Yule, 1983, Ch. 1). Vienne goes on to say that, ideally, discussion, inquiries, reading and writing should take place in the foreign language, admitting, notwithstanding, that even first language activities might be beneficial provided they involve matters related to foreign language or culture. Accordingly, one-to-one correspondence will not represent any danger if *real-life translation* is emulated in the classroom. Consequently, such natural situations do not prevent students from thinking in the foreign language. Rather, they are requested to think in both languages. Although one may object that translation produces interference, it similarly encourages awareness and control of interference as with

bilinguals. If enough groundwork has been provided in class before the translating of a text, it can even serve to test student's ability to apply all of the skills.

The work of Schäffner (1998) might bring some support here. She offers a list of benefits of translation as a means of improving linguistic proficiency. Translation as a pedagogical exercise seeks (ibid: 125):

(a) to improve verbal agility (e. g. through reverbalization or reformulation of the source text, which would often be the text in the foreign language, the L2)
(b) to expand the students' vocabulary in L2
(c) to develop their style
(d) to improve their understanding of how languages work
(e) to consolidate L2 structures for active use
(f) to monitor and improve the comprehension of L2

Finally, translation is not only appropriate for training translators. Language learners may also profit from as many applications of their linguistic skills (including translation) as possible for at least three reasons (besides the ones mentioned above): first because many language specialists though not translators may "enter professions in which a basic understanding of the processes involved in professional translation may be useful" (Malmkjaer, 1998: 9). Secondly, language students may not find immediately the kind of job they had first idealized, and may have to resort to translation as a professional activity. Thirdly, in university education the current trend leads to generality with later specialization; there being no harm in some preparation for later specialization.

Having addressed in succession all the objections raised in the previous section against the use of translation in language teaching, Malmkjaer (1998) reinforces that she does not mean that all foreign language teaching can be carried out through translation. Again, I sympathize with her when she says that her intent is to show that

"translation might profitably be used as one among several methods of actually teaching language, rather than as mere preparation for an examination" (op. cit.: 9).

Towards Revival and Current Views of Translation Teaching

In exploring the origins of translation we have seen that being against translation in EFL is ancient history. Indeed, the use of translation in language teaching has apparently received unfavorable acceptance by most language teachers; in many cases being only introduced because it is a component of examinations. Translation has been particularly disdained within the EFL community where it is now beginning to regain respectability among teaching professionals due to the remarkable change in the role it has assumed in language teaching in recent years. At any rate, translation seems bound to remain a relevant component in many language courses all over the world.

Authors who are in favor of using and developing this skill are now easily found. Therefore we now propose to engage in a brief overview synthesizing the ideas of some current researchers on translation teaching in language environments.

Starting in the eighties, Atkinson (1987) gives three main advantages for allowing limited L1 use in the classroom, in his article *The Mother Tongue in the Classroom: a neglected resource?* The first is that translation is a learner-preferred strategy. He asserts that "… prejudice is not a satisfactory reason for prohibiting students from engaging in learning activities in which they may well have more faith than other more 'communicative', 'affective', or 'humanistic' approaches" (ibid: 242). By the same token, Danchev (1982) (mentioned in Harbord, 1992: 351) argues, rather convincingly, that "translation / transfer is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable part of second language acquisition even when no

formal classroom learning occurs". I agree that learners will inevitably (unconsciously) attempt to correlate target language and mother tongue structures, irrespective of teachers' permission to translate. The second argument for mother tongue use is adherence to a humanistic approach thus permitting students to say what they want sometimes. However, once the student has made himself understood, he should be encouraged to express his meaning in English. It should be made clear that this is hardly promoting a major return of L1 use in the classroom. The third reason Atkinson presents for the use of first language is related to an efficient use of time needed to achieve a specific aim.

When discussing the rights and wrongs of using L1 in class the present researcher thinks that the crucial point in translation is not merely seeing it as a saving time device for 'more useful activities' nor for simplifying things for the teacher or the students. Instead, as Harbord (1992: 355) says (referring to Duff 1989):

> it should be used to provoke discussion and speculation, to develop clarity and flexibility of thinking, and to help us increase our own and our student's awareness of the inevitable interaction between the mother tongue and the target language that occurs during any type of language acquisition.

It is hard to think of a better way for triggering this kind of discussion and speculation than having students introduced to comparison of texts (translations). On this matter Schäffner (1998) comments about her teaching practice:

> Parallel texts are analyzed, in order to compare the formal structures and properties of the text types in the two languages, in order to see how the same ideas are expressed, what lexical or grammatical structures are used for identical situations and contexts, in short, to draw the distinguishing traits of text types in the source language and culture and in the target language and culture (ibid: 127).

Another relevant issue focused by Atkinson (1987) is that misconception concerning the importance of accuracy in language learning urges to be explicitly clarified in the classroom. Thus translation might be used to promote *guessing strategies* "(in this respect another frequent misconception needs to be overcome, i. e. that guessing is in some sense tantamount to cheating)" (Atkinson, 1987: 246). He exemplifies this by suggesting that true cognates, an exercise which involves translation of a group of words, some *known* false cognates and some *unknown* true cognates, both revises previously learned items and gives students the satisfaction of expanding their vocabulary by themselves.

Titford (1983) corroborates Atkinson's view by providing two translation techniques – *the word-for-word spoof*, and the use of *back-translation*, both of which resort to what the learner already knows by provoking him into finding translations for himself. It is his belief that translations, if rightly regarded, can greatly contribute to the teaching of advanced learners. He gives two main reasons for using translation with such learners: translation is a *problem-solving exercise* and also a *cognitive exercise*, having an important role to play in this context. In short, he attributes translation a "*bridge* function which enables students to relate form and function in their L1 to form and function in the L2" (Titford, 1983: 53).

Although generally in favor of L1 use, Atkinson (1987: 246) warns of the dangers of overuse:

> 1.   The teacher and / or the students begin to feel that they have not 'really' understood any item of language until it has been translated.
> 2.   The teacher and / or the students fail to observe distinctions between equivalence of form, semantic equivalence, and pragmatic features, and thus oversimplify to the point of using rude and inaccurate translation.
> 3.   Students speak to the teacher in the mother tongue as a matter of course, even when they are quite capable of expressing what they mean.

4.   Students fail to realize that during many activities in
the classroom it is crucial that they use only English.

Having traced the paths of some translation scholars during the
eighties, we proceed in this journey through the tunnel of time and
are finally brought back to the 1990s where we realize that translation
does not have to argue the case of its own existence any more.

More recently, a survey undertaken by Swell (1996) about the
teaching of translation at British Universities, indicates that it is
taught "as a way of improving students linguistic proficiency"…
"to consolidate L2 constructions for active use" and… "monitor
and improve comprehension of the L2" (Swell, 1996: 137, cited in
Anderman, Malmkjaer et al., 1998: 45). The study also
demonstrates that translation courses continue to attract students
for "very many lovers of language love to translate" (ibid); a feature
which Anderman believes, should be capitalized on.

Following the same line of thought, Richard Stibbard (in
Malmkjaer et al., 1998: 69) acknowledges the first language as a
valuable asset to the learner and claims that "its use in EFL settings
is by no means detrimental to foreign language development". He
still remarks that translation can be a useful pedagogical tool provided
there is a sound understanding of the many factors affecting the
translation process. Moreover, he is convinced that translation can
be productively used in the general language classroom, and even
hints translation to be a universally useful activity which should be
included in a teaching program as a *fifth skill* together with the four
other skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Exceptionally noteworthy is Adelina Ivanova's (1998) paper –
Educating the Language Elite where she tackles the cognitive
complexity of translation. More precisely, language learner's
translation processing and its underlying cognitive mechanism
(particularly interlanguage connections) are taken into account.
Specially insightful is the link she makes pointing out the common
features translation shares with metalinguistic tasks and reading-

writing, thereby suggesting translation to be "a skill requiring highly analyzed knowledge and high control" (Ivanova, 1998, cited in Malmkjaer, 1998:95). The author engages in a tentative analysis to show that translation as a skill demands deeper level processing. Translation is said to have a very complex goal structure for being enclosed in several contexts: "interlinguistic (L1 and L2 knowledge), intercultural (L1 and L2 cultures), communicative (**ST** writer-translator-**TT** readership), professional (agency-translator-client)" (ibid: 95); a structure which requires constant activation and maintenance in translating. Furthermore translation comprises complex language processing requirements encompassing selection, co-ordination and monitoring of information at different levels (orthographic, semantic, syntactic, and discoursal).

Looking back upon early views of the translating process when it was conceived as merely transcoding *word-for-word* one realizes it has come a long way. It has, unquestionably evolved into a much more sophisticated concept which is bringing about studies on the complex sequences of the human and machine processes. A good example is Sager's (1993) *Language Engineering and Translation: Consequences of Automation,* where he asserts that "…readers in general and translators in particular have in their memory an inventory of patterns for structuring, classifying and interpreting experiences, and that they have various procedures for performing translation processes on the documents they encounter" (ibid: 203). This idea of *an inventory of patterns* leads us to an even more recent publication by Katan (1999) where he very clearly displays one of the new trends in Translation Studies: the *frame-driven approach.* Neubert and Shreve (1992: 6) define frames in terms of "organization of experience and knowledge repertoires" (ibid, cited in Katan, 1999: 124), and suggest that in the translator's mind there is a *virtual translation* which is "a composite of the possible relations between a source text and a range of potential target texts" (ibid). Holmes' (1998) *mapping theory* had already proposed a similar map/frame metaphor. Bell (1991: 161) sums up the difference between

the coding-encoding approach and the more recent frame-driven approach stating that "Current thinking among translation theorists… insists that a translated text is a new creation which derives from careful reading; a reconstruction rather than a copy" (ibid, cited in Katan, 1999: 125). Correspondingly, this new approach has attributed the translator a new role: that of the *cultural mediator*. In fact "an essential difference between a traditional translator and a mediator is the mediator's ability to understand and create frames" (Katan, 1999: 125). By understanding the frames of interpretation in the source culture, the mediator will eventually be able to produce a text "which would create a similar set of interpretation frames to be accessed in the target reader's mind" (ibid).

Definitively, the role of translation cannot be restricted to mere preparation for examinations or as a test of language proficiency. It has, hopefully, become clear that translation can be a useful pedagogical tool in language classes, provided the types of translation exercises used in language teaching resemble the types used in translator's training programmes. The approaching millennium urges teachers to start making translation suitable to the changes in circumstances being coined in language teaching territories. Meta modes, virtual translation, and frames for accessing the target reader's mind are current concepts which are, no doubt, signaling a new shift in the pendulum. By portraying a critical reaction against earlier dominant paradigms in translating, these issues represent potential avenues for future research as we near the 21st Century.

Concluding Remarks

The present paper has not meant to be a thorough coverage of translation history or theories. I have only examined some major issues surrounding the field which were relevant as the main theoretical underpinnings for the task we set up to pursue here: the assessment of the role of translation in the language class.

After providing a brief overview of the origins and early concepts of translation the arguments against translation in language teaching were addressed and the move towards revival was discussed. Finally, current views of translation practice were appraised.

My own attitude toward translation use in the language classroom may have shown through from the very epigraph before the introduction. I strongly believe that if classroom translation dresses a modern garb, one that resembles real-life professional translation, giving students opportunities to exercise in *situational analyses*, *resource research* and *exploitation*, we will be benefiting professional translators themselves, for many of today's language students will become tomorrow's clients. We will thus be promoting co-operation between the two groups to their mutual benefit. Students would thereby become aware of the situation of a professional translator "with whom they would know how to co-operate for better translations, leading to better international communication between businesses and other bodies "(Vienne, 1999: 115, cited in Malmkjaer, 1998 et al.). Ambitious (or Utopian?) though it may seem!

There is one essential point we cannot lose track of: the teaching of translation within an ESL syllabus is comparable to a *medicine* "which will have a beneficial effect only when properly administered and in the right dose" (Ivanova, 1998: 105, in Malmkjaer et al., 1998).

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