

Translation and Language Learning: An analysis of translation as a method of language learning in primary, secondary and higher education

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Proposal for a study of the use of translation in language learning at primary, secondary and higher education in the European Union, with comparisons with Australia, the United States and China.

Proposal presented by:

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Technical organisation: Fundació Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain.

This document outlines a research project to be undertaken for the Directorate-General for Translation from September 2012 to June 2013.

The research will be *descriptive* (showing the traditional and current roles of translation in language learning), *analytical* (analysing the empirical evidence for the many suppositions) and *exploratory* (outlining the possible uses of translation and their degrees of probable acceptance).

The innovative aspects of the proposal include:

- A critical re-analysis of empirical research both for and against the use of translation in language learning
- A focus on translation as a fifth language skill (in addition to speaking, listening, writing and reading)
- Attention to teaching methods integrating cross-language dubbing and the postediting of machine translation
- Attention to the political contexts of language-learning policies
- Development of a companion website for the project.

1. General background

After many decades of being shunned from language learning, translation is gradually being re-introduced as a viable activity in the language class. That much is clear, and the move can only be positive for the general social stock of translation skills. Much care should be taken, however, before anyone simply returns to a teaching methodology that, with some reason, was discredited in the past. The prime purpose of this research will be to promote such care, at the same time as we investigate a range of translation activities that should go well beyond most teaching traditions.

Care must be taken in three respects:

1. *Translation is not just one thing:* Translation can be written or spoken (for the purposes of this research) and can involve providing immediate equivalents to learners, using translation as scaffolding, making learners translate for each other, having learners correct translations, working on back-translations, processing dubbed video content, exploring incorrect machine translations, etc. Much depends on what kind of translation is in question.

When Ulanoff and Pucci (1993) – to take one example from among many – use “concurrent translation” (translating everything as it is said) in the language class (60 primary-school students in a bilingual environment), they find that students stop paying attention to their weaker language, so the translations simply take learning time away from the “four main language skills”. So translation is bad. However, when Prieto Arranz (2002) or Cahnmann (2005) have students engage in liaison interpreting with and for each other, they find significant language acquisition with positive feedback from students. So is translation good or bad? The first difference is that (spoken) translation is being used in an absolute and authoritarian way in the first experiment, and in creative and communicative ways in the second experiments.

2. *Language learning is not just one thing:* It is one thing to learn a moribund language like Classical Greek or Latin, quite another to learn a modern language that is required for communicative use in trade and/or governance, and something else again to learn a language already embedded in a bilingual or multilingual community. The kinds of teaching methodologies developed in the first case need not be appropriate in the others.

To take a contentious example, the use of “immersion” methodologies, where translation into the L1 (first or “home” language) is excluded, has a practical virtue when it is used in the United States to prepare university students for a stay abroad, or to follow up on a stay abroad (cf. Cohen and Allison 2001). However, immersion has very different qualities when it is used to protect a minority language from interference from a majority language, insisting on monolingual education for primary school students. In the case of Catalan in Catalonia, the constitutional legality of linguistic immersion has been an object of legal dispute since 2006, placing the use of translation in a very special political context. For these and other reasons, a careful distinction has to be made between relatively monolingual and relatively multilingual learning environments.

3. *What happens is not always what people think happens:* This is a field where policies have often been based not on empirical data, but on opinions and ideologies, ultimately shaped by political aspirations and commercial criteria.

This partly concerns perceptions. We know that teachers have tended to over-report their use of foreign languages in the classroom, and under-report their use of translation (see, for instance, Legareta 1977), indicating a disjunction between practice and doctrine. This means that the opinions are important and must be taken into account: learning goals are perceived very differently in different communities, as are the repeated presuppositions about the nature and uses of translation. Note that in cases such as the global English-teaching industry, said to be worth some 13.8 billion euros (Graddol 2004), there are strong commercial reasons for publishing textbooks in English only and promoting the ideal of the monolingual teacher. In such circumstances, there are strong reasons for hiding the positive roles of translation.

These three caveats have important consequences for our research methodology.

First, there can be no question of isolating a few pieces of solid empirical research and using them as a sign of what has to be done. We must also pay serious attention to what people think and desire, since relations between languages are ultimately about the ways in which different communities want to interact with each other. This is not necessarily a field in which “best practices” will automatically impose themselves – questions about opinions and beliefs are as important as the analysis of experiments.

Second, description is not enough. Given the importance of the local linguistic environments, it is likely that the teaching rationales in one country will not be directly comparable to those in another. It makes more sense not just to describe what is done and what people think should be done, but also then to propose a range of available alternatives.

Third, the aims of language education must be considered variable. Although it is traditional enough to see the aim as the acquisition of a high level of skills in a language (e.g. speaking, listening, writing, reading), the use of translation may promote other, related aims such as the acquisition of translation competence as a *fifth* basic skill (after Campbell 2002) and the furthering of *intercomprehension* skills (i.e. the ability to comprehend and interact with structures that are common to several languages, cf. Conti and Grin 2008). This widening of the aims should be considered one of the main contributions of the present research.

Third, all assumptions must be tentative. We cannot assume from the outset that translation necessarily improves language learning, just as we cannot assume that it harms it. There will be situations in which certain forms of translation are positive, and others in which they will be negative.

This initial neutrality also concerns our own interests as a group comprising a majority of translation scholars. Although we certainly hope, with the DGT, that the use of translation in language teaching will increase interest in the translation profession, we cannot assume that this aim in any way has greater priority than the acquisition of language skills for general use in communities. We should allow that the learning of translation skills may help develop multiple forms of non-professional translation, some of which could prove incompatible with the long-term interests of the translation profession.

2. Delimitation of the field

2.1. Translation is taken here to include the reception and/or production and/or reworking of spoken and written bitexts within the classroom situation. This includes:

- Concurrent translation, where everything said in one language is translated into the other, usually by the instructor
- Dual language preview-review
- Performance translation or dialogue interpreting
- Identification of non-correspondences between languages and their resolution as translation problems
- Identification of problems in machine-translation output, and their correction
- The use and production of subtitled and dubbed video material.

2.2. Language learning is analysed here at the level of standard or recommended language learning methods in the main curricula at primary, secondary and higher education levels.

2.3. Learning methods are understood here as general sets of activities for language learning, together with their underlying principles. The main learning methods to be considered are, in addition to the various uses of translation: immersion, grammar and dictionary, natural methods, methods based on structuralism and behaviourism, audiolingual methods, communicative methods, and content-based instruction, with analysis of the reasons why most of these methods have traditionally excluded translation.

2.4. Countries: The following countries have been selected for detailed case studies:

Member States: Croatia, France, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom

Comparison countries: Australia, China, United States.

This selection seeks a geographical balance between Member States, including both old and new Member States (Croatia, Romania), a Nordic country (Sweden), one from central Europe (Romania) and one in the Mediterranean area (Spain). Three of the larger Member States are also included (France, Spain and the United Kingdom).

This selection corresponds to countries on which previous research has been done or in which the European Society for Translation Studies will be able to set up research nodes with relative ease (for the administration of questionnaires and discussion groups).

The comparison countries are selected for several reasons: recent experiments with new technologies (Australia), long-term work on bilingual education (United States), and recent interest in the question (China).

3. Research questions

The research questions stipulated in the Call for Tenders are as follows:

1. Can translation contribute to effective language learning?
2. What is the pedagogical value of translation compared to other language learning methods?
3. To what extent does the contribution of translation to language learning depend on the learning objective, i.e. the targeted level of proficiency (fluency or mere comprehension of a language)?
4. Does translation currently form a part of the curricula for language teaching in primary, secondary and higher education in the selected MS?
5. If translation does not form part of the language teaching curricula, is there a willingness to introduce it? If not, what are the reasons?
6. How can translation as a method of language learning be made more attractive in order to motivate the students?
7. Is there a difference in attitude towards the role of translation in language teaching between bi/multilingual and monolingual countries?
8. Can translation be introduced as part of the language teaching curricula with the current teacher qualifications or would additional teacher training be required in certain Member States?
9. Providing examples of how translation activities can be included in a communicative and interactive way in the classroom.
10. Examples of universities where translation is part of the language learning curricula.

4. Research methodology

The research methods used in this study will be:

1. Critical literature review, with re-analysis of the main empirical research on 1) the effects of translation in the classroom, and 2) attitudes toward translation (research questions 1, 2 and 3)
2. Questionnaire surveys of learning practices and perceived benefits (research questions 4, 5, 7, 8)
3. Detailed comparison of case studies, with attention to historical traditions and prevailing language policies (research questions 4, 5, 7, 8)
4. Organisation of structured discussion groups in the case-study countries, with special attention to the relative attractiveness of translation methods (research question 6) and the qualifications required of teachers (research question 8)
5. Based on the previous steps, composite comparisons of the main learning methods, with attention to the reasons for the use of non-use of translation (research questions 1 to 10).

5. Scheduling

Each of these methods comprises a research action, to be carried out in the order presented here, with some overlaps. The order of actions is also coordinated with the deliverables:

0. Inception report

Precisions concerning the technical organisation of the project and the questionnaire; development of the companion website for use in the coordination of the project (making the basic documents and bibliography available to all).

Action 1: Critical literature review

This review will cover as much previous research as possible, without geographical restriction.

- 1.1. Review of empirical research
- 1.2. Review of public policies
- 1.3. Review of general opinions

Action 2: Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire will be delivered via snowball distribution through the members of the European Society for Translation Studies and will be addressed to as many countries as possible, including those on which case studies will later be carried out. It will address the three levels of education. Its purposes will be *qualitative* (information on the policies and dominant practices in each country) rather than quantitative, although numbers of responses will be taken into account in cases where there are serious contradictions. The survey will cover:

- 2.1. Current and historical policies; sociolinguistic setting
- 2.2. Dominant practices in the classroom
- 2.3. Relation between dominant practices and learning objectives
- 2.4. Current opinions (among teachers, students and academics) about the use of translation in language learning.

Interim report

The processing of the above data will enable the drafting of the interim report, which will address the following points (corresponding to the first set of research questions):

1. Current knowledge and opinions on the pedagogical value of translation for effective language learning
2. Dependency on the level of education, sociolinguistic setting, and learning objectives
3. Current place of translation in the curricula for language teaching
4. Current willingness to introduce translation.

Action 3: Detailed case studies

General information on the case study countries will have been gathered in Actions 1 and 2. In Action 3, the information is contextualised in terms of the history, institutions and sociolinguistic configuration of each case-study country, with the assistance of local experts contacted through the European Society for Translation Studies.

The case studies will be carried out in parallel with the discussion groups outlined in Action 4.

Action 4: Structured discussion groups

With the logistical assistance of the European Society for Translation Studies, structured discussion groups will be set up in each of the case-study countries. These groups will mostly be online (Skype or conference call), although face-to-face methods will be used when appropriate. Participants will comprise language teachers at the three levels of education; efforts will be made to include students as appropriate.

The discussion will be structured in such a way that the corresponding results of the questionnaire are checked (following the sections of the questionnaire), the portrayal of the case-study country can be verified, and new ideas on the use of translation can be explored.

Particular attention will be paid to the use of computers, machine translation, and subtitles.

The final part of the discussion should seek out the nature of resistance to translation, and points on which translation is considered attractive.

The discussion groups will also function as a way of promoting local interest in the use of translation, and creating a wider readership for the Final Report.

Discourse analysis of the discussion transcripts will provide more information than can be included in the Final Report, and may serve as material for academic papers following the project.

Action 5. Synopsis and evaluation of ways of using translation

Information from previous research, the questionnaire and the discussion groups will be used to summarise the ways translation can contribute to language learning, and the relative advantages and disadvantages with respect to non-translational methods.

Particular attention will be paid to the use of computers, machine translation and subtitles.

This synopsis will include specific suggestions for making translation attractive to language learners and teachers, with examples from institutions where translation is indeed integrated into language-learning syllabi.

This action should also investigate ways in which some of the concepts currently used against translation – notably Selinker's "interlanguage" (1972) and Krashen's "input hypothesis" (1985) – can also be used to justify the selective use of translation.

Final Report

The final report will bring together all the above results, taking care to present them in an accessible and engaging way. While ensuring its academic credentials, the report will address educational policy-makers and teachers in such a way as to 1) promote a rethinking of public policy in this area, and 2) stimulate teachers and

curriculum-developers to explore the many possible uses of translation. The report will also relate the use of translation to the interests and development of the translation profession.

The report will be delivered in Word2007 format, with no mathematical formulas.

Timetable

		Month									
Action	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
	0	Inception report									
	1										
	2										
	3										
	4										
	5										Final report

6. Methods for summarising, analysing and presenting results

The most useful results will be Tables with updated information resulting from Actions 1 and 2, including links to websites where appropriate.

Maps of EU member states will be presented indicating 1) public policies concerning language learning (if indeed enough countries have public policies at the national level), 2) the dominant language teaching methods (as indicated by our questionnaire), and 3) prevalent attitudes to translation (as indicated by our questionnaire and discussion groups).

A synoptic table of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various teaching methods will be presented as a result of Action 5.

The final report will also include boxes with take-away suggestions for the organisation of language classes with translation.

The highly qualitative nature of most of the variables means that no statistical analysis of any degree of sophistication is warranted.

7. Verifiable objectives

	Action	Deliverables	Date
0	Technical and planning details	Inception report	Month 1
1	Analysis of previous experiments	Interim report	Month 4
2	Mapping of country preferences	Interim report	Month 4
3	Case studies	Final report	Month 9
4	List of viable teaching methods	Final report	Month 9
5	Synoptic tables of comparisons and examples	Final report	Month 9

8. Research team and experience

The research team is strongly interdisciplinary, bringing together a leading linguist who specialises in the role of translation in language learning, a sociologist of

translation, and an expert in foreign-language acquisition and new technologies, with teaching experience in questions of language-learning policy.

Professor Kirsten Malmkær at the University of Leicester is a linguist who holds a PhD in Translation Theory. She is the editor of key reference texts on the role of translation in language learning: *Translation and Language Teaching: Language Teaching and Translation* (1998) and *Translation in Undergraduate Degree Programmes* (2004), and is the author of the entry "Language learning and translation" in the Benjamins *Handbook of Translation Studies* (2010). She is also the author of *Linguistics and the Language of Translation* (2005), co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies* (2011), editor of *The Linguistics Encyclopaedia* (1991; second edition 2002; third edition 2010) and general editor of the most prestigious Translation Studies journal *Target*. Professor Malmkær will work with her network of experts in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and China on the specific question of the role of translation in language learning. As head of the subcontracting unit at the University of Leicester, she will be responsible for organising the literature review, re-assessing the previous empirical experiments, gathering data on the United Kingdom, Sweden and China, and co-authoring the interim and final reports.

Professor Anthony Pym at the Rovira i Virgili University (URV) in Tarragona, Spain, holds a PhD in Sociology and has published extensively on translation and intercultural communication. In 2011-12 he coordinated the study *The Status of the Translation Profession in the European Union* (DHT 2011 TST).

Professor Pym will be responsible for the coordination of the research team, gathering data on France, the United States and Australia, and co-authoring the interim and final reports.

Dr María del Mar Gutiérrez-Colón Plana at the Rovira i Virgili University (URV) in Tarragona, Spain, holds a PhD in Second Language Acquisition and is Director of the URV Masters programme in *Foreign Language Teaching*. She has led research projects on the use of new technologies in language acquisition and distance learning, and has published key articles in those fields. She has given invited lectures in Japan, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as well as numerous papers in Spain. Since 2004 she has been involved in language-learning policy, most directly as a co-author of textbooks for English at secondary level in Catalonia and also in the teaching of courses on language acquisition. Dr Gutiérrez-Colón Plana will be responsible for gathering data on Spain, Romania and Croatia, comparing the various teaching methods, compiling data on education policies, and co-authoring the interim and final reports.

These three main researchers will work with assistance from the following groups:

European Society for Translation Studies (EST): The EST provides a network of more than 400 researchers in Europe and beyond, enabling us to cover numerous languages and countries. Members who have so far expressed a desire to act as nodes in the network for this project include: Professor Gyde Hansen (Denmark), Dr Ignacio García (Australia), Dr Gary Massey (Switzerland), Professor Margherita Ulrych (Italy), Dr Karen Bennett (Portugal), Dr Tom Smits (Belgium, South Africa), Professor Sonia Vandepitte (Belgium), Dr. Daniel Dejica-Cartis (Romania), Professor Azad Mammadov (Azerbaijan), Bogusława Whyatt (Poland), Dr Paola Faini (Italy), Elena Alcalde (Spain), Dr. Alberto Fernández Costales (Spain) and Professor Kayoko Takeda (Japan). In the previous research project on *The status of the translation Profession in Europe*, the EST network enabled us to work with input from some 100 experts.

The logistic support of the EST will be invaluable for the distribution of the questionnaire and the organisation of the discussion groups.

Intercultural Studies Group: Based at the URV, the Intercultural Studies Group organises a doctoral programme and coordinates research projects. In addition to Anthony Pym and María del Mar Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, who are coordinators of the group, the members involved in the elaboration of this project will be the following doctoral and post-doctoral researchers: Conceição Bravo (information on Portugal, subtitling for language acquisition), Anca Frumuselu (information on Romania, subtitling for language acquisition), Costanza Peverati (information on Italy, translation as providing transferable skills), Carlos Teixeira (use of machine translation for language acquisition), David Orrego-Carmona (use of subtitling for language acquisition) and Pınar Sabuncu (re-analysis of previous experiments, translation and language acquisition in Turkey).

The members of the Intercultural Studies Group will assist with the gathering of data on the case studies, the processing of the data from the questionnaire and discussion groups, and pre-drafting of parts of the interim and final reports.

Research Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies: Based at the University of Leicester, the Research Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies (RTISt) hosts staff and PhD student research on a variety of subjects related to translation. In addition to Kirsten Malmkjær, the members of RTISt who may contribute to this project will include Professor of Italian Sharon Wood (translation and language pedagogical methods), Dr Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez (expert in translation and language pedagogy), Danielle Barbereau (Director, Languages at Leicester: coordinating information acquired through her extensive group of language tutors of relevant nationalities with relevant experience in their cultures) and Akiko Sakamoto (research student: discourse analysis of the discussion group data).

Previous projects by the research team

- The Status of the Translation Profession in the European Union (DGT-2011-TST), 2011-12.
- Translation Research Training: An integrated and intersectoral model for Europe (TIME- ITN 2010- 263954). EU Seventh Framework Marie Curie Initial Training Networks (ITN). 2011-15.
- The use of 3G mobile phones (smartphones) for the acquisition of a foreign language (UROV- AIRE), 2011-12.
- English vocabulary acquisition through the use of mobile telephones by university students (ICEI – ICE – FPRO), 2009-11.
- The use of new technologies for language learning through cooperation between the University of Fukuoka and the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV – ACCE) 2008.
- Evaluation of written expression in English by students in Comenius projects (2006ARIE 10065), 2007-08.
- TechLink: The Europe-Asia Localisation Technology Training Initiative (ASIE / 2004/091-744), 2005-08.
- New technologies for the professionalisation of translators (PHB2007-0020-PC, PHB2007-0019-TA), PHB2007-0021-TA), 2008-09.
- Development of online materials for translator training (MQD 2007), 2007-09.
- The impact of translation technologies on technical Catalan (PBR2006), 2006-08.
- Development and consolidation of distance support actions for the learning of English and German in higher education (PID08-PROFID), 2008.
- Evaluating e-learning in the training of translators (2002-2005) BFF-2002-03050.
- Development of audiovisual resources for translator training (2002-03).

- The use of ICT in initial English learning (2001-2002)
- Interlanguage in the distance learning of English by Catalan students (2000-2001).

Further details of work on language education are given in the accompanying documents (technical capacity of main contractor).

9. Indicative bibliography

The following bibliography has been compiled in order to indicate the extent of research and commentary specifically on the role of translation in language learning: in Italian, Turkish, German, Spanish and French, as well as English. We have not included the many works on non-translational language learning and teaching.

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