



Translation in foreign language teaching: A case study from a functional perspective



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ABSTRACT

There is little research available on using translation as a tool to develop students' translation and communicative competence in foreign language programmes. This paper aims to fill this gap by reporting the results of a localized empirical study, using a functionalist theoretical framework. After a pre-translation source text analysis of three texts with EU topics, data were collected by two methods: a linguistic analysis of the student translations of these texts to identify and analyze the most common translation problems, and semi-structured interviews to explore their individual difficulties. The results show that a functional approach can sensitize students to the relationship between text and context, which can develop their cultural and textual awareness. Since the students' translation problems stem from various individual difficulties, exploring and analyzing them can provide valuable additional information for the teacher about the translation process.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in the role of translation in various disciplines focusing on culture, language, and communication, including ELT. Translation is becoming increasingly important particularly in non-English speaking countries, where it plays a crucial role not only in intercultural communication but also in expressing and preserving national identity. Even though the global industry of ELT is still primarily a 'monolingual enterprise' (Pennycook, 2008), and the most popular foreign language teaching methodologies, such as the communicative approach, still emphasize the target language and its dominant norms, local practices are slowly responding to this trend, particularly in non-native contexts, allowing the use of the mother tongue and translation in the foreign language classroom. The general negative attitude towards translation is partly related to the Grammar-Translation method, in which most of the translation tasks involved the mechanical translation of isolated sentences instead of authentic texts in real communicative situations. However, modern translation theories emphasize functionality, and translation activities always refer to the translation of carefully selected, authentic texts with a clear context and purpose (Nord, 1997). This approach views translation as a communicative activity, which can develop not only students' translation skills, but also their communicative competence in the native and foreign language.

Luckily, in the past few decades, several authors have proposed the rehabilitation of this useful skill in foreign language teaching, especially in non-native contexts (e.g., Cook, 2010; Duff, 1989; Malmkjær, 1998, 2004). Among the benefits,

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they mention that translation expands students' vocabulary in the target language, develops their style and verbal agility, improves their understanding of how language works, consolidates target language structures for active use, and monitors and improves comprehension in the target language (Schäffner, 1998, p. 125). In her functionalist textual approach, Nord (2005) has emphasized that a contrastive analysis of the source and the target text develops metalinguistic awareness of the structural similarities and differences between the two languages, and makes students more aware of the norms and conventions of communication in both cultures. Apart from benefits related to the foreign language, translation can also develop students' native language competence if the students translate into their mother tongue. Klaudy (2004) has pointed out that students have to use their mother tongue consciously during authentic translation activities, which will make them more confident, sensitive, and reflective language users. Finally, Vermees (2003) has argued that translation can be a useful tool to develop students' writing skills.

Although in translation studies there is increasing research on translation competence and its acquisition (e.g., Campbell, 1991; Göpferich, 2009; PACTE, 2011; Pym, 2003) as well as pedagogical issues related to syllabus design (e.g., González Davies, 2004; Gouadec, 2007; Hatim & Mason, 1997; Kelly, 2005; Nord, 2005), the main focus has been professional translator training. Relatively little attention has been paid to translation courses incorporated into foreign language programmes. This localized empirical study aims to fill this gap by focusing on Hungarian learners of English, who are novice translation students. The research was conducted on a small corpus of student translations, drawing on Nord's (2005) functional model, and aimed to identify and analyze various translation problems that novice translation students face when attempting to translate three different English texts with EU topics. The study also explored students' individual difficulties, which are the possible sources of their translation errors. Motivated by these aims, the research addressed the following questions:

- (1) What translation problems do novice students face when attempting to translate three particular texts with EU topics?
- (2) What individual difficulties do they have that can account for these problems?
- (3) How can these problems and difficulties orientate teachers in designing tasks and activities for the students?

Revealing the most common translation problems and individual difficulties can provide valuable insights into the competence level of a particular group of students, and thus can guide the teacher in the design of translation courses incorporated into foreign language programmes. The results of the study may be useful for teachers of English as a foreign language for two reasons: firstly, developing translation competence by using authentic translation activities is useful in itself because translation skills are often required on today's job market; secondly, by activating various language skills, translation can also contribute to the development of students' overall communicative competence in the foreign and native language.

2. Background to the study: EU English and translation in the English BA programme

The growing number of translated literary works, media content and technical texts indicate that translation is becoming an increasingly important form of European intercultural communication, parallel with (and maybe as a response to) the global spread of English. Although critics (e.g., Phillipson, 2008) have pointed out some discrepancies in the EU's language policy, which may inadvertently contribute to the advance of English across Europe, the EU explicitly promotes multilingualism by acknowledging the equal status of the languages of the member states and seeing translation as an essential intercultural activity. As a result, translation is no longer considered a highly specialized skill, but an essential competence required by most employers. It can be viewed as an adaptable, multi-purposed skill, which can be used by "intercultural mediators, foreign trade experts, international marketing professionals, global content managers, multilingual secretaries or diplomats" (Calvo, 2011, p. 14). She has pointed out that this view of translation has changed significantly over the past few decades, similar to IT skills or language skills.

European higher education institutions had to adapt to the gradual changes generated by European integration by reforming the content of their degree programmes. In Hungary, it has been recognized that in addition to developing students' English language competence and increasing their cultural background knowledge, English BA courses should equip students with transferable skills. After the adoption of the two-tier system in European higher education – in line with the Bologna model – the bachelor–master division was introduced in most degree programmes. These reforms had a considerable impact on the design of undergraduate courses, including English studies. One concrete step in Hungary was to integrate translation and ESP (EU English) courses into the new English bachelor's programmes. This idea is based on the assumption that students with a bachelor's degree in English need skills and knowledge that can advance their career in a multilingual and multicultural Europe. It is highly probable that most of these students will need to do translation and mediation tasks and will encounter various spoken and written English texts with topics related to the EU and its relationship with Hungary, including actual EU laws. Thus, translation and EU English have direct relevance to the students' personal life and career. EU English in this sense refers to a variety of English used in EU institutions and official EU documents, as well as in other texts which deal with various European and local topics but are produced outside EU institutions. These texts use a specific EU language, mostly EU-specific terms, grammatical structures and discourse features, and are related to a number of disciplines depending on their topic. Reading and discussing these texts is extremely useful to students for their information content. On the other hand, translating them and comparing the two versions can develop students' translation as well as their foreign and native language skills, allowing them to focus on specific linguistic and cultural differences. This is in line with the idea that the notion of language competence in foreign language education should refer to "the ability to translate,

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