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**Strange bedfellows: Translation and Language teaching**

**The teaching of translation into L2 in modern languages degrees; uses and limitations**

**1. Introduction: translation is back! (but... was it ever gone?)**

The impassioned rejection of the grammar-translation method that accompanied the advent of the audio-lingual and communicative approaches to language learning has given way in recent years to a more balanced examination of the potential and the limitations of the use of translation in language teaching and learning. In this paper I would like to explore some of the controversies surrounding the use of translation—and translation into L2 in particular—in the language classroom with a view to advancing towards their resolution. Much valuable work has been done in the past decade in the field of translation pedagogy, but we still lack a strong empirical foundation on which to base our practice. The purpose of the present study is to offer a number of points for reflection which might serve as a basis for much needed empirical research on the topic.

In my institution I am involved in the teaching of theoretical modules on translation at the MA level and of undergraduate language classes that involve the use of translation into L2 to help students acquire the language (in this case Spanish). In my discussion I will be drawing on research done in the field of Translation Studies and on my own experience of teaching language and translation over the past ten years in two European universities, the University of Bayreuth in Germany and the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, where I currently work. I will also be reporting on the responses to a questionnaire completed this year by undergraduate students in the Modern Languages Faculty at Cambridge (see Appendix).

To sum up the argument: proponents of the audio-lingual and communicative methods firmly believed that the use of the mother tongue was counter-productive in the process of acquiring a new language, and that therefore the use of translation in the classroom could do more damage than good, holding back learners from taking the leap into expressing themselves freely in the second language. The scepticism, if not downright animosity, that has surrounded the use of translation in language teaching is often more acute in the case of translation into L2. It is argued that, while translation into the mother

tongue is an activity that graduates might encounter in their professional life, translation into the foreign language is an unrealistic exercise and therefore thoroughly useless.

As a result of this very vocal opposition, translation was banned—in some places, such as in France in 1950, quite literally, banned by legislation<sup>1</sup>—from the languages curriculum in secondary schools and in specialist language schools. However, to a large extent language departments in universities were slower to react to this trend and some never took it fully on board. This reluctance to do away with translation at a time when its use as a language teaching tool was decidedly unfashionable can be explained by a number of factors. One of them was the need to prepare graduates for official examinations which still required examinees to translate a passage or passages into and/or out of their mother tongue. Another reason that we university teachers are perhaps more reluctant to admit to, is the fact that some of the lecturers involved in language teaching have little experience or knowledge of other teaching methods, and often have little interest in finding out about them. This is regrettable but perfectly understandable in a system where those lecturers are going to be evaluated primarily on their research output, not on the quality of their language teaching. In this context, many of these teachers, who may not always feel completely confident in the use of the foreign language, are more comfortable teaching language on the basis of a few passages for translation that they have prepared and used year after year.

I have quoted two negative reasons why some universities have held on to the use of translation in the language classroom, and indeed, quite a few people who have written about the topic seem to think that there was little good reason to keep using translation in this way—I emphasize, *in this way*. The past two or three decades, however, have seen a vast change in attitudes towards translation, both as an academic discipline and as a profession. Translation Studies is now a thriving field of research with increasing institutional standing. While the improved status of translation does not in itself justify its rehabilitation as a language teaching tool, I believe the insights we have gained in recent years call for a reassessment of the role of translation in language pedagogy. To some extent, that reassessment is already underway<sup>2</sup> but, as I pointed out above, there is much work to be done in order to establish an empirical foundation to inform our practice. It may well be that some universities have stuck with translation for the wrong reasons, but

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey notes that “the so-called *méthode directe* was made compulsory by ministerial guidelines back in 1950, but was not actually applied until many years later. The fact that the ban on translation was condemned back in 1987 by the APLV (*Association des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes*) in a special issue of *Les langues modernes* points to yet another gap, this time between teachers [...] and policy-makers” (Harvey 1996: 46).

<sup>2</sup> The entry for translation in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* detects, after a period in which translation in language teaching suffered from “some confusion of purpose”, “signs that synergies are beginning to emerge and to be explicitly acknowledged, leading to more imaginative ways of integrating and adapting professional aspects of translation and even interpretation [...] into language teaching” (Byram 2000: 637).

in this paper I would like to argue that there are a number of *good* reasons for us to continue using translation in language teaching in higher education, provided we think hard about how to go about doing it.

## 2. Methodology for this study

In reviewing the literature on translation pedagogy I have drawn on four types of material that do not always deal specifically with the issue that concerns me here—i.e. translation into L2 as a language learning device—but that I believe can be useful in opening up the scope of reflection:

1. Translator training research, aimed at the training of professional translators (see for example Kelly 2005, Hurtado Albir 1999, Gile 1995, Kussmaul 1995, Dollerup and Lindegaard 1994, Dollerup and Loddegaard 1991, Nord 1991). These works deal mostly with translation into L1; Beeby (1996) is an exception in that she tackles the specific issues involved in the teaching of inverse translation.
2. Research on the use of translation in language teaching. This material also deals mainly with translation into L1, with occasional references to into L2 translation (see Malmkjaer 1998, Sewell and Higgins 1996, Keith and Mason 1987, Duff 1989, Lavault<sup>3</sup> 1985)
3. Practice-oriented works providing concrete advice for curriculum developers and teachers on how to design translation courses and offering suggestions for in-class activities. All of these books also include a substantial theoretical discussion of methodological issues (González Davies 2004, Sonia Colina 2003, Hurtado Albir 1999, Beeby 1996).
4. Translation textbooks<sup>4</sup> (Spanish/English and/or English-Spanish) aimed at modern languages undergraduates (see for example: Lunn and Lunsford 2003, Merino and Taylor 2002, Hervey et al. 1995, Zaro and Truman 1998, Merino and Sheerin 1989).

The desire of translator trainers to distance themselves from mere language teaching and the inclination on the part of some language teachers to regard translation merely as a pedagogical tool, have often prevented dialogue between these different areas. I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that that dialogue can be mutually illuminating and should take place. Having said that, we should be careful not to lose sight of the fact that

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<sup>3</sup> Lavault's work represents a pioneering attempt to apply developments in the teaching of professional translation to translation as a language learning device. In my view her analysis does not go deep enough, but she deserves credit for tackling this important and under-researched area.

<sup>4</sup> I must point out that my review of this material has not been comprehensive and I feel many insights could be gained from looking more closely at published textbooks.

translation into L1 and into L2 are distinct activities, both from a cognitive point of view and as regards their pedagogical value. Equally, translator training programmes and modern languages courses have different set-ups and objectives, and while I believe that there can be a productive exchange between the two camps, we shall have to be cautious when drawing parallels between them.

Finally, I will be drawing on the results of the questionnaire completed by students at Cambridge in order to illuminate from the learners' perspective some of the ideas put forward by theorists and practitioners.

### **3. L1 > L2 translation in language teaching: the case for it**

In looking at the literature on the subject, it is curious to see how inverse translation is often regarded as an undesirable but persistent feature in modern languages degrees. This attitude is encapsulated in Newson's suggested subtitle for his paper on translation into L2: "Making the best of a bad job" (Newson 1998: 63). Indeed, one may wonder, if academics are so convinced that L2 translation is, in short, a bad idea, why are they stoically writing papers on how to best weather the storm, instead of trying to banish it from the curriculum?

One answer may lie in the fact mentioned above that in many institutions L2 translation teaching has spun out of the need to prepare students for official examinations that include this exercise, as opposed to the other way round, i.e. having the exercise included in the exam because it is considered pedagogically valuable<sup>5</sup>. In many countries official examinations are part of a highly formalized procedure and introducing change is notoriously difficult. Hence, understandably, many academics pick the easier battle: how to adjust teaching to the exam, as opposed to the other way round. Another possible answer may be that language teachers, despite their ostensibly negative views about the use of translation, tend to regard it instinctively as an effective method in certain learning situations. In a study published in 1985, Lavault showed how language teachers in French secondary schools routinely resorted to translation in the classroom to varying degrees, even where this procedure was discouraged by official guidelines. Even those teachers who adhered in theory to the communicative method found that, in practice, translation was in certain instances the most efficient way of helping learners grasp a grammatical concept or a lexical item (Lavault 1985: 24-25). Interestingly for our purposes, while not all fifteen teachers surveyed favoured the use of translation into L1, all without exception

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<sup>5</sup> See Klein-Braley (1996: 18) for a (damning) assessment of the prose/translation as a testing procedure.

favoured the use of translation into L2<sup>6</sup> (ibid. 40). Lavault's sample is small, but her analysis nevertheless makes for interesting reading.

Let us begin by summarizing some of the arguments mentioned in the literature against the teaching of translation into L2 as a language teaching device. Some of the objections are shared with translation into L1 while others are specific to inverse translation:

1. Translation is an artificial, stilted 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).
2. Translation into L2 is counterproductive in that it forces learners to view the foreign language always through the prism of their mother tongue; this causes interferences and a dependence on L1 that inhibits free expression in L2.
3. Translation into L2 is a wholly purposeless exercise that has no application in the real world, since translators normally operate into and not out of their mother tongue.
4. Translation and translation into L2 in particular are frustrating and de-motivating exercises in that the student can never attain the level of accuracy or stylistic polish of the version presented to them by their teacher. It seems an exercise designed to elicit mistakes, rather than accurate use of language.
5. Translation is a method that may well work with literary-oriented learners who enjoy probing the intricacies of grammar and lexis, but it is unsuited to the average learner.

(1) In order to understand the first objection, we need to remind ourselves of the teaching practices that proponents of the communicative approach in the 50s and 60s were reacting against. The grammar-translation method required students to translate often unnatural-sounding phrases presented out of context. The focus was on linguistic structure and on written language, and there was no attempt to inscribe translation within a communicative framework or to develop oral skills. In their understandable dissatisfaction with this way of teaching, I believe proponents of the communicative approach picked the wrong target. In a way, translation, misconceived and overused, could be seen as a victim of the grammar-translation method, rather than the source of its evils. The problem was not translation as such, but a teaching methodology that abstracted language from its communicative function. Indeed, translation itself as it takes place in the real world is intrinsically and inextricably linked to a communicative purpose.

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<sup>6</sup> Surprisingly, Lavault finds this finding "surprising" (Lavault 1985: 40). Indeed, her own attitude towards into-L2 translation is somewhat ambiguous. She reports on teachers' perceptions of its usefulness, but later in the book she states that the exercise is "contrary to all serious professional practice, which requires the translator to work always into their mother tongue" (ibid. 79; my translation).

As Duff puts it, “translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?” (Duff 1989: 6; see also Beeby 1996: 13).

(2) As for the second point, research has demonstrated that, in fact, learners of a foreign language do refer to their mother tongue to aid the process of acquisition of L2<sup>7</sup> or, in other words they “translate silently” (Titford 1985: 78). In light of this, translation into L2 can help them systematize and rationalise a learning mechanism that is taking place anyway. It is naïve and simply inaccurate to imagine that learners who only have one or two contact hours of language teaching per week can learn a language by immersion in the same way as children learn their mother tongue.

(3) As for the contention that “real” translators will never need to translate into L2 in their professional life, in many cases this is the expression of an ideal situation rather than a description of actual practice. This notion has persisted in part due to the fact that much research in translation has had literary translation as its focus. It is arguably true that one needs native command of the target language when translating a literary text. However, in the world of commercial or technical translation where most translators operate, specialist knowledge of the field and of the relevant terminology can go a long way towards offsetting the possible shortcomings of employing a translator who is not a native speaker<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, it is surprising that the into-L1-only myth has survived this long. Despite the awareness among many trainers of the need to prepare trainees for this professional reality<sup>9</sup>, in 1998, Weatherby still detected “a stigma of unprofessionalism” attached to inverse translation<sup>10</sup> (Weatherby 1998: 21). One could argue, however, that in the case of modern languages courses we are not aiming to train professional translators and that, therefore, concerns about the actual conditions in the professional world are irrelevant. I believe this objection holds only partially. It is true that we are not aiming to provide fully-fledged translator training, but that does not mean that we should wholly disregard the professional world and, to the extent that that is possible, offer our students some preparation for what they might find outside the classroom<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Hurtado Albir calls this process “traducción interiorizada” (Hurtado Albir 1999: 13).

<sup>8</sup> See Harvey (1996: 59).

<sup>9</sup> Already in 1987, Rommel wrote: “Many employers expect their translators to be able to work both into and out of their language, so that a serious, market-oriented programme must include work into a second language, irrespective of whether this is ideal or not” (Rommel 1987: 13). Around the same time Mary Snell-Hornby stated that “Professional Translators—both in training and in practice—have to translate both from and into the foreign language” (quoted in Weatherby 1998: 21). A decade later, Beeby published a pioneering book on the specific methodology for the teaching of inverse translation; in her introduction she justifies the need for this type of material on the grounds that there is ample demand for this type of courses in translator training institutions (Beeby 1996: 6-7).

<sup>10</sup> The issue of directionality is further complicated by the fact that in many translator training centres classes are not homogeneous in terms of the mother tongue of the students taking part in the course, hence translation will be direct for some and inverse for others (Malmkjaer 2006, Beeby 1996: 15).

<sup>11</sup> I wholly subscribe to Fraser’s point that “the fact that, at undergraduate level, we are not giving a vocational training in translation does not mean that the way translation is carried out successfully in a professional setting has no relevance to its teaching in an academic setting” (Fraser 1996: 123-24).

(4) Regarding the objection that translation into L2 is de-motivating and frustrating for students, and therefore counterproductive, there seem to be widely differing views on this issue. It is of course crucial to set realistic objectives: the expected output will have to be judged by different criteria from those that would apply to into-L1 translation (see Harvey 1996: 58). There is no doubt that creativity is more restricted when translating into a language that is not our own. Unavoidably, given the need to respond to the needs of the learners, the focus of teaching cannot solely be on issues of style, cultural transfer or register appropriateness. Linguistic accuracy, even in advanced courses, will need some attention and, in this sense, the figure of the teacher as the source of “the correct translation” will still loom large. While a native speaker would have the confidence to experiment with non-standard uses of his or her language, a non native speaker would hesitate to deviate from what he or she considers “safe” usage. However, once again I do not think that the special constraints that translation into L2 presents us with should lead us to ban it from the curriculum. As the questionnaire I conducted shows, learners overwhelmingly perceive translation exercises as useful for language learning<sup>12</sup>. In my particular case, it was in response to student feedback that I decided to introduce translation more substantially in my language classes. Translation, by its very nature, is an activity that invites discussion and in my experience students are only too happy to contribute to it, often defending their version with remarkable passion and persuasiveness.

(5) Finally, it is true that translation as taught in the traditional method was wholly unsuited to the average learner without erudite or literary leanings. However, there is no reason why translation should be restricted to literary passages and it certainly can be taught in more stimulating ways than has traditionally been the case. A number of recent proposals, as we will see, do give us reason for optimism.

#### **4. The learner’s perspective: questionnaire responses**

As I pointed out above, students’ perception about translation as a language learning activity seem to be at odds with the line of pedagogical research that dismissed it as utterly useless and even damaging. The questionnaire I conducted this year among students in their second and third year of their modern languages degree at the University of Cambridge confirms this to a striking degree (see Appendix for full questionnaire).

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<sup>12</sup> Lavault points out that one of the reasons quoted by teachers to explain their use of translation in the classroom was that students asked for this exercise and enjoyed it too (Lavault 1985: 34; see also p. 70). Similarly, Conacher reports excellent student response to a translation course (Conacher 1996: 180). Louise Haywood, co-author of the book *Thinking Spanish Translation* (Hervey et al. 1995) also gathered enthusiastic feedback from the students attending her translation course at the University of St Andrew’s in Scotland (personal communication).

In interpreting the responses, it is important to bear in mind that students at Cambridge have a fairly substantial exposure to translation in the form of both translation into English—in their first and fourth (final) year—and into the foreign language—in their second and fourth year. The texts for translation used in these courses are almost exclusively literary or essayistic in nature. Together with more general language classes, translation courses are regarded as “language classes” (as opposed to “content papers”). Their role in the curriculum is threefold<sup>13</sup>:

1. To equip students with the necessary close reading skills to tackle challenging literary or philosophical texts in a foreign language.
2. To sensitize students to issues of style both in English and in the foreign language.
3. To improve their linguistic skills in the foreign language

In many ways, the prominent place that translation occupies in the language teaching provision at Cambridge is a reflection of a traditional approach to language learning. Having said that, individual teachers have a considerable degree of freedom as to how they conduct their teaching, and more traditional teaching techniques co-exist with newer approaches. We should also bear in mind that students arrive in Cambridge after having undergone a highly competitive selection process. Consequently, the type of student admitted to our courses is not fully representative of the average language undergraduate in the UK. We will therefore need to be cautious and avoid making broad generalisations from this sample. Nevertheless, I believe the results are interesting and thought-provoking. The following table summarizes the results for some of the central questions:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Average score / percentages</b>
1. Should translation be taught as part of a modern languages undergraduate degree? Please delete as appropriate. [yes/no]	yes: 100% no: 0%
2. How useful is translation from a foreign language into English as a means of learning the foreign language? Please circle the appropriate number. [In a five point scale where 1 stands for <i>not at all useful</i> and 5 for <i>very useful</i> ]	3.83
3. How useful is translation from English into a foreign language as a means of learning the foreign language? Please circle the appropriate number.	4.6

<sup>13</sup> In the seven years that I have been working in Cambridge, there has not been a Faculty-wide debate on the role of translation in the Modern Languages degree. The aims I report here are based on my own understanding of the function of these classes and on the official information published by the faculty.

[As in number 2]	
4. How useful in itself (i.e. not as a language learning method) is the teaching of translation from a foreign language into English? Please circle the appropriate number. [As in number 2]	3.86
5. How useful in itself (i.e. not as a language learning method) is the teaching of translation from English into the foreign language? [As in number 2]	3.75
8. Do you think you could make faster progress in the aforementioned areas through different means (e.g. in a more general language class, in a literature seminar, through reading, watching films, etc.)? [yes/no]	yes: 46% no: 54%
10. To what extent do you feel the translation classes you have attended in the course of your degree have prepared you for the professional practice of translation? [In a five point scale where 1 stands for <i>they have not prepared me at all</i> and 5 for <i>they have offered excellent preparation</i> ]	3.3
11. Do you enjoy translation classes? [In a five point scale where 1 stands for <i>not at all</i> and 5 for <i>very much</i> ]	3.4

The first thing that strikes us is that all 31 respondents without exception believe that translation should be taught in a modern languages degree. Looking at the responses to questions 2 and 3—on the usefulness of translation as a language learning tool—and to questions 4 and 5—on the usefulness of translation per se—, we observe that in the case of questions 2, 4 and 5 average scores were similar (ranging from 3.75 to 3.86). However, the score for question 3, where students were asked to rate the usefulness of translation into L2 as a language learning device (the issue that concerns us here), was particularly high (4.6). This is a clear indicator that L2 translation is unambiguously perceived by students as conducive to language learning.

This outcome is born out by responses to questions 6 and 7, where students were given a list of areas of language and were asked to tick them according to whether they thought translation into English (question 6) or into the foreign language (question 7) would help them improve in each of those areas. Regarding translation into English, the highest score (93%) went to the learning of vocabulary in the foreign language. As for translation into the foreign language, again vocabulary was mentioned by 100% of students. Grammar (96%), writing (96%) and register in the foreign language (90%) also

obtained very high scores—considerably higher than in the case of translation into English. Again, these results confirm that translation into L2 is consistently regarded by students as a very effective language learning activity—more so than translation into L1.

When asked whether they thought they could make faster progress through other methods (question 8), 54% gave a negative answer. This means that over half of students believe that translation is among *the most effective methods* to learn a language, if not the most effective.

Even though the Cambridge modern languages degree makes no claim to train professional translators, I included question 10 in the questionnaire in order to assess the perception of students as to the professional application of their translation classes. The result (see table) indicates that some students do believe the Cambridge course is equipping them with some professional translation skills, although two of them made the point that, in order to train them for a career in translation, a more varied range of texts should be used in teaching.

Finally, I found the average score for question 11—on whether students found translation classes enjoyable—somewhat disappointing. Looking at individual responses, they are fairly varied, with quite a few students giving fives, fours, threes and twos. This seems to indicate that, while students perceive translation as being useful, it is not an activity that they universally find enjoyable or gratifying. The lower scores may also reflect a degree of dissatisfaction with the way translation is taught by some teachers, but this questionnaire does not give us information to ascertain whether this is indeed the case.

Some of the remarks made by students are worth quoting:

*On the exams and the connection between the teaching and the exam:*

A. "The marks obtained in exam situations vary dramatically to those achieved in class [...] I therefore think that students should be encouraged to practise without dictionaries as well as perfecting their work to be handed in with dictionaries [...] The teachers cannot tell how good a student really is and inform them exactly on how to improve if we are constantly handing in work which is to the highest standard due to much time being spent on it and dictionaries having been used"

B. "I think dictionaries should be used more, possibly in exams because a translator is not expected to translate without a dictionary"

Interestingly, student A suggests that more work without a dictionary should be carried out in order to provide more realistic preparation for the exam, whereas student B would like to see exams modified in order to make them more connected with actual

professional practice. The comment made by student A illustrates the strong exam-oriented focus of many students, who, in their desire to do well, do not stop to question whether exams in their current format are a good testing device or not.

*On the need to increase the presence of translation in the degree:*

"There could be a greater focus on translation across the course—and perhaps a fourth-year option in translation—the course has a strong literary core which centres on essay-writing—it would be valuable to have more translation of varied texts—literature, film, opera, poetry, journalistic writing—for those students who really enjoy it. From first year to the fourth year, translation is considered by most students as additional homework rather than a central part of the course, with most prioritising essays/seminar preparation etc."

*On the "methods" of language teaching/learning:*

"Yes, I believe the translation classes aid the progress made through reading foreign literature, essay writing, films etc. I believe all of these different aspects combined aid fast progress, rather than certain "methods" being more helpful than others. Translation classes are definitely an important tool, but can not stand alone"

*On translation—and translation into L2 in particular—as language learning exercise:*

"I think it really is an essential part of a degree course since it is the best way to test fully that a text has been understood, i.e. you really have to get to grips with the text, unlike a reading comprehension where you might not understand everything but get the gist enough to answer the questions. I think translation into the foreign language is one of the best ways to improve your written command of that language. Both exercises also teach you a lot about your native tongue."

"It's a little artificial at times, I think, because even professional translators would not be asked to translate into a language which is not their mother tongue."

*On the teaching methodology in the translation class:*

"Translation classes last year were not very useful because we would complete a translation at home, get it marked, and in the class we would go around the class each

person translating a line. This put a lot of pressure on the students and when one got it wrong it was really embarrassing. I don't think I learnt any translation skills with that method."

"To prepare for 'real' professional translation I think we should do a wider variety of texts. At the moment all we seem to do is literature (+ poetry). It would be nice to study/attempt journalistic, legal, advertising texts, etc."

#### **4. Clarifying the aims: what are we trying to teach and what are we actually teaching?**

Modern language departments cannot and should not try to double up as translator training institutions. However, I believe that bringing classroom work closer to the professional world can only be of benefit to our students<sup>14</sup>. In my view, the divide between the teaching of translation as a language learning tool and as a professional activity has been overemphasized to the point of preventing useful dialogue and exchange<sup>15</sup>. This divide between the focus-on-language approach (translation as a tool) and the focus-on-communication approach (translation as an end in itself) becomes immediately evident when we compare the rationale that underpins translation textbooks. Let us consider this quote taken from the introduction to the textbook *Thinking Spanish Translation* (1995) by Hervey, Higgins and Haywood:

[...] this course is not a disguised version of the traditional "grammar-and-translation" method of language teaching. Our focus is on how to *translate* from Spanish, not how to communicate in Spanish. We assume that students already have the considerable linguistic resources in Spanish to benefit from the course and that they already possess basic dictionary and research skills. Naturally, in using these resources and skills to produce good translations, they inevitably extend and improve their competence in Spanish. This is an important fringe benefit; but, as we have said, our main interest lies in developing useful translation skills and, generally, in improving *quality* in translation work. It is not to be

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<sup>14</sup> I agree with Klein-Braley when she says that "we cannot—and should not try to—compete with the schools of translation. We are not training translators or interpreters. Our aim must be to enable all-round language professionals to tackle translations themselves for in-house and informal purposes, and also—and importantly—to supervise the translation of texts for public and formal purposes. Should our graduates wish to take up work as professional translators it is essential to emphasize that they need further training at postgraduate level. We can only offer them the bare bones and basic techniques. However, even this knowledge is much more than we are giving them under the present system" (Klein-Braley 1996: 24).

<sup>15</sup> In this sense I share Fraser's wish to "pull down—or at least substantially breach—two barriers artificially erected by teachers, theorists and practitioners of translation. The first is the barrier between translation as a professional activity and translation as a pedagogical exercise, while the second is that between translation and other language-learning exercises in the communicative undergraduate degree" (Fraser 1996: 121).

forgotten that this quality depends on the translator's command of English as much as that of Spanish (Hervey 1995: 1-3)

This declaration of intent highlights two important points:

- The authors are at pains to emphasize that they set out to teach translation, not language<sup>16</sup>. This is quite a radical move if we consider the fact that their textbook is not designed for use in a professional translator training programme, but in an undergraduate language degree. Nevertheless, the authors decidedly and unapologetically place translation, and not language teaching, at the centre. Language learning is seen as a "fringe benefit", albeit an important one.
- The authors stress that their method will take into account the need for improving mother-tongue competence, which is often, wrongly, taken for granted. This is a recurrent complaint in the literature (Mc Cluskey 1987: 17; Rommel 1987: 12; Lavault 1985: 56).

This approach seems to be in stark contrast with the one adopted by Alan Duff in his book *Translation* (1989), published by Oxford University Press in its Resource Books for Teachers series. According to the series editor, Alan Maley: "Its great originality lies in having successfully shifted the emphasis from *learning* translation as a set of discrete skills to *using* translation as a resource for the promotion of language learning" (Duff 1989: 3). While Hervey et al. explicitly set out to teach students how to translate, Duff explicitly uses translation as a tool to teach language<sup>17</sup>. Duff/Maley draw a clear line between translation teaching and language teaching by means of translation.

I believe that the two approaches exemplified here serve different learning objectives and are, in that sense, equally legitimate. However, I would like to query the notion that we are faced with an either/or choice. I agree with González Davies when she recognises that professional translator training can and should learn from research done in the field of language learning (González Davies 2004: 3, 11). Similarly, Beeby finds some of the activities in Duff's book ideally suited for use in language classes in a translator training programme (Beeby 1996: 13). It is a fact that professional translators are engaged in a life-long language learning process and I suspect few if any experienced translators would deny that they still keep improving their L2 competence as a result of their work. Similarly, students learning a language implicitly or explicitly avail themselves of translation whether their teachers like it or not. Given that translation is also a skill in its

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<sup>16</sup> The same view is forcefully expressed by Klein-Braley when she states that, even in non professional courses, "it should be clear from the outset that translation and not language is being learnt" (Klein-Braley 1996: 23).

<sup>17</sup> The same approach is taken by Marsh when he states that "What we should *not* be doing is taking translation, a means, and making it the end of the language teaching process" (1987: 28).

own right, and one that has a professional dimension, why not offer our language students the opportunity to have a taste of it and, why not utilise it in order to improve their linguistic competence.

Another important factor in defining our objectives and methodology will be the level of linguistic ability of the learners. It is a widely held view that translation is not a suitable exercise in the initial stages of learning (see for example Marsh 1987: 30, Snell-Hornby 1985: 21, Thiel 1985: 126). It is argued that, before they can tackle translation productively, learners need to have acquired a significant level of proficiency in the language. It is no doubt the case that in order to extract the full pedagogic potential from translation, students need to have moved beyond beginners level and, where their linguistic competence allows it, we should be aiming at exploiting translation for all it can offer beyond the acquisition of certain structures or lexical items (e.g. sensitiveness to register, cultural knowledge, intercultural and stylistic awareness, etc.). However, I personally see no reason why translation should not be introduced at an earlier stage if our teaching objectives justify its use. To give a simple example: to speakers of English, the Spanish construction with the verb *gustar* (“a mí me gusta el cine”) often appears puzzling. In my experience, a very effective way of clearing the confusion is to explain that the verb *gustar* requires a sentence construction similar to the one that the verb “to please” requires in English (“cinema pleases me”). In a case like this, offering students a literal, even awkward-sounding, translation solves in two seconds a problem that longwinded explanations in the foreign language would probably not clarify half as effectively<sup>18</sup>.

Rather than limiting the use of translation to advanced levels only, I would prefer to view translation activities as forming a continuum between the extremes of hyper-literal, explicative translation<sup>19</sup> (to be used in concrete instances as in the example just given) and that of communicative translation as it takes place in the professional world. In the former, the L1 translation is merely a tool—and a very effective one—to help learners grasp a particular L2 structure. As such, stylistic considerations are set aside. In the latter, the focus is on the communicative value of a given text. Learners are then expected to produce a text that could function in the L2 culture, and we are not so much testing their knowledge of specific structures as their flexibility in using the language, their awareness

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the pedagogical benefits of explicative translation see Butzkamm 1985.

<sup>19</sup> I believe this is the kind of approach described in the following quote: “In language teaching the use of translation as a linguistic encoding or decoding exercise requires a close, rather than a ‘free’, translation strategy. In L1-L2 translation, the L1 text or sentences are often constructed, or less obviously chosen, to ‘force’ the learner to use particular parts of the L2 language system. In such cases, the L1 text is simply a means of getting to the L2 and has no particular value of its own, and there is some burden on the learner to recognise what structure or vocabulary item is being prompted, like understanding the rules of a game” (Byram 2000: 634).

of style, register and extra-linguistic factors. In my view, both approaches, provided they are carefully applied, have their place in the languages classroom and they should be viewed as mutually enhancing rather than exclusive.

## 5. Recent approaches in translation pedagogy: a brighter future

Looking at the more recent literature on translator training, the question of whether translation can and should be taught at all has largely been replaced by the question of *how* we can best teach it. However, concrete suggestions as to how to design and implement in-class activities are still few and far between. As González Davies points out: “although much has been written about the translation process and product, there is very little about class dynamics. Preparation of trainers seems to focus either on a prescription of how translation *should* be taught—paradoxically, without giving any practical ideas on how to go about it—*or* on a description of what happens in translation, but not of what happens in the classroom” (González Davies 2004: 1).

In her edited volume *Translation and Language Teaching*, Malmkjaer, argues that many of the objections to the use of translation in language teaching would be addressed by bringing the work done in the classroom closer to the actual practice of translation (1998: 6). She argues that translation, if taught in a way that resembles the real life activity of translating, can bring into play the four basic language skills and yield benefits in L2 acquisition. Already in the mid-eighties Lavault (1985: 108) and Keith and Mason (1987: v-vi) stressed the need to link translation teaching to professional practice, even in general undergraduate teaching<sup>20</sup>. The days of de-contextualized translation teaching, they then said, had passed<sup>21</sup>. The volume edited by Keith and Mason is interesting in that it brought together contributions from experts in the field of translator training and also from those concerned with the use of translation as a language teaching tool. The editors speak of a certain “creative tension” (Keith and Mason 1987: v) between the two camps, but obviously considered that dialogue and interaction between them was possible and potentially fruitful since they chose to include both under a single volume.

It is worth noting that some of the problems that have been identified in relation to the pedagogy of translation as an end in itself, also apply to its use in language teaching. Hurtado Albir mentions the following (see Hurtado Albir 1999: 18-20):

1. Lack of clear criteria in the selection of texts for translation, which tend to be literary.

Where the criteria are made explicit, these are thematic or grammatical.

<sup>20</sup> The same view is expressed in Klein-Braley 1996: 23, Fraser 1996: 123-24 and Fawcett 1987: 37.

<sup>21</sup> It is a sobering thought that as early as the mid eighties language teachers in universities were already arguing against teaching methods that are still present today in some quarters.

2. Lack of procedural guidance. Instructions to the learner were often limited to the injunction “Translate”. Learners are not presented with a method to avoid falling into the same pitfalls.
3. Lack of differentiation between direct and inverse translation, assuming that the objectives and methodology are the same in both cases.
4. Lack on integration in many textbooks of the theory and the practice of translation. They seem to assume that operative knowledge (how to translate) will derive mechanistically from declarative knowledge.

Translation textbooks serve as a useful indicator of current trends in translation teaching. I have not carried out an extensive review of available publications, but from surveying a number of recently published works, I believe there is, again, reason for optimism. There are still a number of textbooks which apply a traditional approach (see for example Merino and Taylor 2002, Zaro and Truman 1998), but alongside them a growing number of innovative proposals have emerged (González Davies 2004, Lunn and Lunsford 2003, Hervey et al. 1995). On the whole, it seems that teaching methodology is adapting to the times and taking on board reflections coming from research in translator training and translation theory.

The work of Hurtado Albir and González Davies, although aimed at the training of professionals, is refreshing in that it incorporates insights and methods from the field of foreign language teaching<sup>22</sup>. In her edited volume *Enseñar a traducir*, Hurtado Albir and her team apply the task-based methodology—seen by many as “the new orthodoxy” in language pedagogy (Nunan 2004: 13)—to the teaching of professional translation. González Davies also draws heavily on the task-based methodology for her classroom activities, even though she favours a flexible approach in what she calls, borrowing a term from Kumaradivelu, the Post-Method Condition (González Davies 2004: 6). I quote here a definition of task by one of the leading proponents of the method:

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is

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<sup>22</sup> In particular, she mentions the work carried out by Duff (1989) and Grellet (1991) in the context of language teaching as potentially productive in professional translation pedagogy (Hurtado Albir 1999: 21).

used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes. (Ellis 2003: 16)

Looking at this definition, it is easy to see why the task-based approach appears to lend itself particularly well to the teaching of translation, and, I would add, to the use of translation in language teaching. Here are some of the reasons why:

1. The focus is on using language that is pragmatically appropriate to a certain situation or communicative purpose. Much of the literature in translation pedagogy also emphasizes the need to present translation as a communicative activity<sup>23</sup>.
2. A corollary of the above is that, in order to complete the task, learners need to focus primarily on meaning rather than on form.
3. Nevertheless, the task can be formulated in such a way as to predispose the learner to use certain linguistic forms. This will be particularly the case at the focus-on-form end of the continuum we described above, especially in the initial stages of learning.
4. The task is designed to resemble the way language is used in the real world. In the case of translation tasks, this will mean bringing classroom work closer to the professional practice.
5. A task may engage a variety of language skills and cognitive processes.

According to Hurtado Albir, the task-based approach addresses some of the problems present in traditional translation pedagogy: first, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering a truly active methodology; second, it is process- rather than product-oriented; third, the learner learns by doing: s/he acquires certain notions, but also and more crucially acquires problem-solving strategies<sup>24</sup> (Hurtado Albir 1999: 56).

Interestingly, the classroom activities presented in González Davies are designed for translation both into L1 and into L2. Unlike Beeby, González does not see the need to differentiate direct and inverse translation in terms of the methodology applied to teach them. For her, the emphasis is on transferable translation skills, not on a particular language pair (González Davies 2004: 8). Again, I find this approach refreshing in that it builds bridges between areas that have often been regarded in isolation. In my view, many of the suggestions in González's book would work very well in the context of a language class. Of course, our expectations of the learner's output would differ according to the language direction of the translation activities, but this does not mean they cannot be pedagogically valuable in either case.

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<sup>23</sup> See for example Fraser 1996: 122.

<sup>24</sup> Critchley et al. also emphasize the importance of teaching translation as a problem-solving activity rather than as a de-coding process (Critchley et al. 1996: 116).

## 6. Conclusions

- While it is important to recognise the distinction between the teaching of translation as an end in itself (professional translator training) and its role as a means of learning a language, in my view this distinction has often been overemphasized to the point of impairing a productive exchange between the two areas. In this regard, I believe it can be helpful to view the translator as a life-long language learner and the language learner as a natural translator.
- Related to the above, translation in language teaching can only gain from a closer connection with translation as a professional activity. Even where our objective is not to train professionals, we can still gain valuable insights from translator training methodology.
- Similarly, I would also like to re-open the debate on the widely-held view that translation can only be productively applied in the more advanced stages of learning. If we view translation into L2 in a continuum that can go from an extreme focus on language structure to a focus on communicative purpose, we will have a more realistic and inclusive model for its pedagogical use.
- A number of highly innovative and creative approaches to the teaching of translation have emerged in recent years. Once again, these approaches highlight the need for flexibility and adaptability to the needs of learners, as well as the need to build bridges between language teaching and translation pedagogy.
- There is enough evidence to suggest that translation has an important role to play in language teaching, but more empirical research is needed. In particular, we need to gain further insight into its effectiveness relative to other language learning activities.

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