http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1349-3911
Bozhidar Pitev
Department of Foreign Language Teaching
Sts Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

TEACHING ENGLISH TO ARCHAEOLOGY AND THEOLOGY STUDENTS: A CASE FOR USING TRANSLATION AS A LANGUAGE--TEACHING TOOL

Abstract: This article shares some practical experience of teaching English to students of archaeology and theology at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria. Drawing on this experience, a case is made for actively employing translation as a language-teaching tool in an academic setting. A number of effective teaching strategies are suggested aimed at extending the students' knowledge of the specialised English vocabulary (terminology) of their chosen discipline; sensitizing them to the concept of collocation as a key factor in producing natural sounding speech and writing; students becoming aware of the crucial importance of context when working with (English) texts; gaining confidence in identifying and using complex grammatical structures as they work with authentic material; mastering their speaking skills with plenty of opportunity to debate and deliver talks on topics covered in the texts set for translation; and, finally, students developing essential translation skills, as translation, far from being a relic of the past, is one of the most important and relevant practical applications of foreign language competence.

Keywords: translation, archaeology, theology, authentic material, terminology, English for specific purposes, content-based instruction

WYKORZYSTANIE PRZEKŁADU W NAUCZANIU JĘZYKA ANGIELSKIEGO STUDENTÓW ARCHEOLOGII I TEOLOGII

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje doświadczenia w nauczaniu języka angielskiego studentów kierunków archeologia i teologia na Uniwersytecie Świętych Cyryla i Metodego w Wielkim Tyrnowie. Podstawę tego doświadczenia stanowi teza, że należy aktywnie wykorzystywać przekład w procesie nauczania języków obcych w środowisku akademickim. W artykule został przedstawiony zestaw efektywnych strategii nauczania mających na celu: wzbogacenie słownictwa specjalistycznego (terminologii) studentów danej dyscypliny; zapoznanie ich z pojęciem kolokacji jako podstawowego czynnika tworzącego naturalnie brzmiącą wypowiedź ustną lub tekst pisany; wykształcenie u studentów rozumienia zasadniczego znaczenia kontekstu podczas pracy z (anglojęzycznymi) tekstami; nabycie przez nich pewności

w rozpoznawaniu i używaniu skomplikowanych konstrukcji gramatycznych, które występują w oryginalnych tekstach. Przekład w nauczaniu języka obcego ma też zasadnicze znaczenie dla doskonalenia zdolności studentów w konwersacji oraz prezentacji w języku angielskim dzięki wielu okazjom do dyskusji i wskazania tematów określonych przez tłumaczone teksty. Przekład pozwala ponadto na rozwijanie podstawowych umiejętności translatorskich u studentów, ponieważ nie jest reliktem przeszłości, a jednym z najważniejszych i naturalnych komponentów systemu kształcenia kompetencji językowych.

Słowa kluczowe: przekład, archeologia, teologia, oryginalne materiały, terminologia, specjalistyczny język angielski, zadania oparte na treści

Introduction

This paper focuses exclusively on using translation in teaching English – both general English and English for specific purposes (ESP) – to archaeology and theology students (mostly with regard to archaeology students) within the framework of content-based instruction (CBI). After a brief overview of the problem, we will consider some strategies we have used when doing translation in our classes at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. These will be followed by some examples of topics covered in the texts for translation and a focus on two basic approaches to the translation of specialised texts. Finally, we will discuss motivation and give a summary of the linguistic and general educational benefits of using translation as a language-teaching tool.

But what is so strange about using translation as a language-teaching tool in the classroom that a case should be made out for it? The problem goes back over a hundred years, a period during which language teaching theory has consistently been trying – at least until recently – to deny translation its legitimate role in foreign language acquisition. Translation has been described as "unhelpful to learning, unusable, dull, authoritarian, unpopular, artificial, and slow[ing] students down" (Cook, 2010: 125), and has been effectively outlawed in the classroom. Needless to say, practice has not been entirely in line with theory, but still its reputation as a language-teaching tool has been badly damaged, and translation in many language teaching contexts has been, at least officially, avoided (Cook, 2010: 3–4). Recently these unsubstantiated claims have been contested as they do not seem to be evidence-based but rather reflect economic, commercial and political interests (Cook, 2010: 4, 18–19, 85–102). This paper tries to demonstrate that translation need not be any of the things mentioned above – on the contrary, it can be a rewarding activity, communicative and learner-centred, motivating and highly effective.

1. Theoretical framework: Why translation?

The present discussion is set within a theoretical framework considering, on the one hand, translation as a language teaching tool, and on the other hand, the importance of translation skills for the language learner.

1.1. Translation as a language teaching tool

Translation is a highly effective language teaching tool which can be used to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of the foreign language in all aspects of the language, while developing all four language skills: reading and writing, listening and speaking (see Cook, 2010: 132, 136–143, 148–149). Moreover, translation in language teaching develops a fifth skill no less important and needed – *translation* as a specific skill in its own right.

A number of linguistic and general educational benefits can be gained through using translation in the classroom. They will be summarised at the end of this paper.

1.2. The importance of translation skills for the language learner

Although we do not train professional translators in our seminars, it is perfectly obvious that many of our students will need such skills in their academic and professional lives: translation is one of the most typical practical applications of foreign language competence (see Cook, 2010: xx, 109–112). Two specific points are highly relevant in this respect:

- One is raising students' awareness of the role of collocation as the most important contextual factor for the translator (Newmark, 1988: 212), and of the role of idiomatic (natural-sounding) language in general (cf. Lindstromberg, Boers, 2008: 7–11; Cook, 2010: 98). In the words of Henry Widdowson: "the whole language seems to consist not so much of well regulated generative mechanisms [= *syntax*] as lexical chunks of varying size and variable syntactic adaptability" (quoted in Gerngross et al., 2006: 6).
- And another one concerns the role of specialised terminology in translation: it is an essential element of any scientific and scholarly discourse (cf. Newmark, 1988: 151–152), therefore, being familiar with and able to identify and use terminology in speech and writing are essential elements of students' linguistic and translation competence.

As it is terminology that primarily distinguishes a technical text (Newmark, 1988: 151), it would be suitable to mention briefly some important points which should be given special attention when teaching terms through a text for translation. Starting from a general principle of tackling unfamiliar terminology, students might first be asked to identify and look up any key terms in the text before they start translating it (cf. Newmark, 1988: 152). This often involves a close analysis of the context in which they appear, as some of these lexical items might in fact have

been used with their general lexical meanings, thus not being specialist terms at all. This is why, for example, Christian ascetic terms such as *attentiveness* or *watchfulness*[1] are often accompanied by their original Greek equivalents given in brackets (either in the original Greek script or in Romanised form) when first introduced in the text: *attentiveness* (*προσοχή/prosochi*); *watchfulness* (*νήψις/nipsis*), which removes any potential ambiguity about their reference (see Pitev, 2011: 198). On the other hand, there are terms which are polysemantic even in the same specialist field, and others whose meaning depends on the collocations in which they occur (Newmark, 1988: 152). When dealing with such terms, it is again the crucial importance of context that comes to the fore. Students also need to be aware of the fact that there is a distinction drawn between technical and descriptive terms which, as a general rule, should be translated by their counterparts. Descriptive terms often serve particular communicative functions in the text (Newmark, 1988: 153–154).

It is important to emphasise that employing translation as a language teaching tool by no means rules out the use of other language teaching methods, but rather complements them (Cook, 2010: 156) and can successfully be integrated into a general or specialised language course framework.

2. Practical application/experience with learners at B1–C1 levels

Some experience of using specialised translation as a language teaching tool in an academic setting with learners studying English at B1–C1 levels, mostly students of archaeology, will be shared below.

2.1. Strategies

We will begin with the strategies used and explored when doing translation in our English seminars. It must be noted that behind all these strategies there has been the underlying idea that translation activities should be done for pleasure and should involve discovery in the specialist field where students feel comfortable.

Strategy one: using authentic specialised material as source for the translation texts.

Yet, we have a flexible approach to material: translation work is geared to the learners' specific language level and particular needs, so original texts can often be adapted to suit them.

Strategy two: using short focused texts to be interpreted in class; no written translation is done in the classroom.

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[1] Within the context of Christian ascetic terminology these terms refer to "spiritual sobriety, alertness, vigilance; […] an attitude of attentiveness, whereby one keeps watch over one's inward thoughts and fantasies, maintaining guard over the heart and intellect" (Philokalia, 1995: 437).

Difficult points in the text or ones which are likely to provoke discussion and be rendered into Bulgarian by various equivalents might be worked on beforehand as homework.

The texts are often illustrated to provide the visual background to the topic and help generate interest in it. The captions under the pictures can also be used to show students how they can describe illustrations accompanying a text.

Some texts can be accompanied by visual aids (from publications dealing with the topic under consideration; short videos) and audios (recordings/podcasts). If the text for translation is a transcript of a radio programme, students first listen to a podcast if available.

Certain topics require acquiring visual information prior to doing the translation work (for example, a text dealing with the pre-historic art of the Chauvet cave in France), so students first need to visit specific internet resources.

Strategy three: a practical approach to the selection of topics is preferred: texts highlighting specific cases, not usually addressing theoretical issues.

Students are welcome to suggest topics and/or texts for translation and discussion reflecting their own (research) interests.

Strategy four: ample opportunities to speak are provided at all stages: during interpreting, in follow-up discussions, while giving short talks on the topic either before or after the text has been translated.

Students are often given assignments to do some research and prepare short talks (up to 5 min.) to be delivered in class. They deal with particular aspects of the topic considered in the text. One of the main aims of these talks is to generate discussions actively involving most of the group. If this is done prior to doing the translation work, it can be used to spark the group's initial interest in the topic.

Strategy five: students can be assigned writing tasks (essays) for homework as follow-ups to the translation work done in class.

Students are encouraged to make use of reference tools such as the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary for Students of English* to help them construct their texts producing natural-sounding writing.

Strategy six: most texts set for translation also provide good material for dictations which can be done either before or after students have read and worked with the text.

Students seem to quite enjoy doing short dictations, especially when they are immediately checked in class.

Strategy seven: flexible demands in mixed-ability groups (where no-one is pressed) and a sense of solidarity promoted within the group.

Students work on the translation either together as a team or in pairs, and then take turns presenting a translated version of a sentence or short chunk of the text. It is a team effort, yet allowing friendly competition to see who will suggest the best translation equivalent of a word, term, collocation, phrase or sentence.

And *strategy eight*: trying to create a relaxed informal atmosphere in which spontaneity is encouraged, with a spirit of adventure and discovery prevailing during classes.

2.2. Topics

Some illustrations of topics will now be provided. Topics may cover any issue in archaeology (or theology), any archaeological period of particular interest to students, and may be spread geographically across Bulgaria, the Balkans, Europe, and the world. The examples that follow highlight various archaeological events that have provided useful material for translation in class. For convenience, they are presented here using their geographical locations.

First, there is the local and regional focus – Bulgaria and the Balkans. Here is an example of a topic selected to be relevant to both archaeology and theology students.

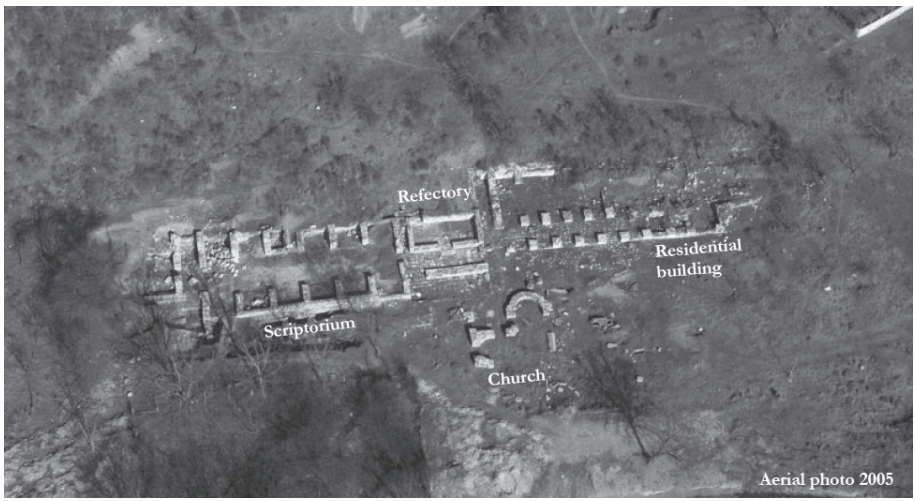

Image 1: An aerial view of the site of the monastery at *Karaach Teke* in the vicinity of Varna, Bulgaria

Image credit: the Navy of the Republic of Bulgaria / Popkonstantinov, Kostova, 2010: 118.

The monastery at *Karaach Teke*, situated in the outskirts of Varna, used to house the largest *scriptorium* in medieval Bulgaria – that is, the equivalent of a modern-day publishing house.[2] It is one of the sites where archaeology students from the University of Veliko Tarnovo have been doing their summer field work, and have been discovering important finds.

[2] I warmly thank Prof. Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Assoc. Prof. Rossina Kostova who gave their permission to reproduce the extracts about the monastery at *Karaach Teke* and the accompanying aerial photograph (Popkonstantinov, Kostova, 2010: 118, 124).

The monastery at Karaach teke: layout, architecture and construction

Karaach teke is situated about 5 km north-west of present-day Varna on the west Black Sea coast. Perhaps the proximity of a natural water source must have been a decisive reason for the choice of the exact location of the monastery. The high terrace of the south slopes of the Frangensko plateau was chosen for the construction of the monastery of Karaach teke for two practical reasons, the relatively slight inclination of the terrain to the south and the availability of a water source, exploited already in the Roman times.

The north-south slope of the terrace and the instability of the sandy terrain had been overcome by means of terracing and levelling. Thus, the church was established in the flattest, south part of the terrace yet on an artificially constructed stone platform that assured additionally the stability of the construction. The communication between the church and the buildings situated higher to the north of it was accomplished by means of massive stone stairs. As evident from the layout of the excavated area of about 10,000m² and the common *opus mixtum* employed in the construction of the church and the buildings north-west of it, the setting of the complex originally ran along the east-west axis. It might be that a landslide at the north-east side of the terrace caused the appearance of the north surrounding wall with pilasters on the interior. Despite tracing a surrounding wall also to the east and north, the reconstruction of the complex of Karaach teke as an entirely walled enclosure remains hypothetical, since the excavations have not attested circuit walls to the west and south yet.

Image 2: Archaeological excavations of the site of the monastery at *Karaach Teke* in the vicinity of Varna, Bulgaria

Image credit: B. Pitev.

In the handout above, students are offered an example of a scientific text that illustrates typical features of academic writing style; further down in the text they come across plenty of terminology in the field of medieval (church) architecture, so the text helps students expand their specialised vocabulary.

Then it is the Mediterranean and the European context. Some examples might include a text focusing on a particular Anglo-Saxon artifact, or a text about underwater archaeology in the Black Sea or the Mediterranean, while another text students have worked on translating provides a glimpse of a most fascinating site featuring Europe's earliest cave paintings (made 35,000 years ago and executed with an amazing technical sophistication) – the paintings in the Chauvet Cave in southeastern France.

And, thirdly, texts dealing with geographically more distant and exotic locations, for example South America (examples include a text about Machu Picchu featuring the hydraulic engineering genius of the Inca, or one exploring the possibility of advanced Indian civilizations that may have existed in Amazonia).

Another example of a distant location was provided by a Polish lecturer – archaeologist Dr Magdalena Łaptaś – who delivered a lecture in English at the University of Veliko Tarnovo (June 2011) on recent Polish archaeological exploration of the medieval Christian heritage of Sudan (specifically, in Banganarti). The lecture was attended by students studying church arts, but the topic was later discussed with archaeology students in their English seminars. We didn't use texts directly from Dr Łaptaś' lecture as it was difficult to select a representative excerpt and it was very technical. The lecture, however, helped generate the initial interest in this archaeological site and its Polish exploration, while a text about Banganarti from a different source was then offered for translation.

Topics do not necessarily deal with sites or excavations – they may treat some more general aspects of interest to students. These have included, for example, a text about employment prospects for archaeology graduates discussing what is specific about studying archaeology (the fact that it develops a lot of versatile and transferable skills, thus preparing students for a very broad spectrum of professional careers). An example of more particular interest to theology and iconology students might be a text dealing with the key features of Byzantine church art and iconography.

2.3. Approaches

Two basic approaches to the translation of specialised texts as a language-teaching tool have been adopted in our seminars:

1) The text offered for translation can be selected because of the fascinating material it contains (texts are *offered* rather than *set* for translation). Any activities aimed at extending students' vocabulary or teaching and practising collocations, grammar points or stylistic conventions follow the features of the text.

2) Alternatively, the material for translation can specially be selected to highlight, introduce or practice various lexical, grammatical or stylistic aspects of English.

For example, to teach basic field archaeology terms and their typical collocation patterns we have used a series of short handouts with definitions and example sentences. A text might include examples of collocations used in an academic context such as the academic profile of an archaeologist. A text can also be used, for instance, to teach the pronunciation of ancient Greek historical names: one such text we have used is about the island of Crete and the civilization of the Minoans. Longer texts, on the other hand, can serve to illustrate the use of complex grammatical structures such as the English perfect tenses or infinitives.

Here is another example: Bulgarian and English punctuation systems are organised along different lines, so punctuation is a particularly tricky and often overlooked area of language competence when teaching English. Texts selected for translation provide excellent opportunities for practicing punctuation skills. In an activity specifically designed to practice the use of commas, students are provided with a "blank" text for translation with no punctuation, and first asked

to insert commas where appropriate (the number of missing commas might be specified).

Thus, a well-chosen text for translation can lend itself easily to whatever classroom application may be required.

With both approaches, vocabulary (either specialised or not) or grammatical structures that are unfamiliar to students might be pre-taught or looked up by them before translating the text.

Alternatively, the words, phrases or structures the teacher wants to focus on can be highlighted in the text for students to work out the meaning for themselves from the context. Such a text with technical terms highlighted will attract the students' attention before they start translating; definitions or translations of the terms could be supplied as a glossary after the text or in a separate handout accompanying the text.

A third way of dealing with vocabulary and structures is just to leave the text as it is to give students the chance to work out for themselves strategies to successfully deal with an unfamiliar text. This involves finding and tackling new words or complicated grammatical structures, distinguishing between general and special reference in the text – that is, between words and terms, or correct semantic segmenting of phrases (cf. Cook, 2010: 140), which are some of the most characteristic challenges when working with authentic (specialised) material. The following sentence, for example, might present some difficulty to intermediate learners attempting to correctly segment it into smaller meaningful chunks (the sentence has been excerpted from a UK training manual on health and safety at work):

Put the following four point pollution incident response plan into the correct order.

These three ways of going about vocabulary and structures develop learner autonomy at three different levels.

2.4. Motivation

We will finally discuss motivation. Using translation as a language-teaching tool can generate high motivation in students for using the language. So, how is motivation increased?

Firstly, motivation comes from working with texts dealing with authentic situations involving real-life challenges in the students' chosen field.

Furthermore, making students feel experts in their own field in the classroom – making them feel at home, in their element – itself contributes greatly to motivation and is a challenge for them. Students tend to forget they are studying English as a subject, and start really using the language as a medium of communication. Thus, rather than just being a simulated environment for the purposes of language teaching (cf. Cook, 2010: 32), the seminar room becomes a forum for discussing real-life and topical issues that students can relate to, that are relevant to their own experience.

Reading aloud and translating a short piece containing, for instance, a comprehensive definition of the archaeological term *tell* (that is, settlement mound) will

lead naturally into a discussion of students' personal hands-on experience of excavating and doing archaeological research on a *tell*: as there are a huge number of prehistoric settlement mounds to be found in Bulgaria, our students' regular summer field work includes examining a *tell*.

Because students are on familiar ground, they also tend to use their initiative and come up with ideas about activities to be done in the classroom, and these are rarely felt a chore or an obligation. These might include further exploring a topic, looking up additional resources in the library or on the Internet, a suggestion for a presentation to be made on a particular subject for next time, watching a film related to the topic of the text they have been translating, or suggesting a new topic and specific texts covering it.

There is another point to be made here. Working with specialised texts and terminology requires good communication across disciplines: it presupposes a close working relationship with colleagues teaching the specialist subjects, especially the archaeological or theological subjects, but also history, geography and other related disciplines, and also keeping track of events in the field.

At the University of Veliko Tarnovo, one way of doing that is by attending the events organised by the Archaeology Club which regularly invites leading Bulgarian archaeologists to deliver public lectures on topics of current interest, or present recent archaeological discoveries to students and staff. The topics cover a wide spectrum of archaeological disciplines ranging from excavation of settlement mounds and paleometallurgy to underwater archaeology and medieval church architecture to geoarchaeology. A lot of our English language seminars with archaeology students have been organised as follow-ups to such events involving follow-up discussions, as well as the reading, analysis and translation of relevant texts. These sessions have also proved to dramatically increase students' motivation.

In a nutshell, using authentic material for translation in class brings up *real-life issues* which help generate *genuine interest* which can lead naturally to *authentic communication in English* (rather than the simulated classroom communication).

2.5. Linguistic benefits

To summarise, here are some linguistic benefits of using translation as a language-teaching tool:

- Learners' reading skills are developed: learners are able to use specialised literature in their own field in English; they encounter and acquire specialised English vocabulary; furthermore, they are able to use English for academic purposes.
- Learners are sensitised to the concept of collocation as a key factor in producing natural-sounding speech and writing; they become aware of the crucial importance of context when working with texts.
- Learners master their skills in speaking and presenting in English as they are provided with plenty of opportunity to comment and discuss while translating, and give talks on topics covered in the texts.

- Learners' listening comprehension skills are developed through listening to their colleagues' talks and participating in discussions, and often listening to a recording of the text set for translation before reading and translating it.
- Learners gain confidence in identifying and using complex grammatical structures as they work with authentic material.

Rather than focusing on structures in isolation, students come across them in context in the process of translation, thus not attempting to put theoretical knowledge into practice, but inferring rules and grammatical meaning and collocation from the texts they are translating, with each particular example serving both as an illustration and a model for them to copy.

- Learners' writing skills are developed by doing follow-up writing tasks set for homework.
- Learners acquire and develop essential translation skills, which form a significant part of their foreign language competence (cf. Cook, 2010: 109–112).

Translation is a widely needed activity today – both professionally and in everyday situations, and those actively involved in it are far from always being professional translators or interpreters. However, the widespread but wrong assumption that the acquisition of a certain level of monolingual competence in a foreign language also makes one a competent translator has had a disastrous effect on the quality of translation. So, students should not be left without the obvious benefits of being acquainted with the basic principles and techniques of translation, on the one hand, and of training in tackling translation problems, on the other (Cook, 2010: 98).

2.6. General educational benefits

And here is a summary of the general educational benefits gained:

- Learners are actively involved in reading, the importance of which is by no means self-evident today.

With its focus on reading, translation is able to provide an alternative to what has been termed the dictatorship of the visual image. This is the growing concern about – to quote Christos Yannaras –

> the replacement of language and conceptual discourse by the visual image. The image […] imposes chosen visual stereotypes and a programmed flow of impressions. It subordinates linguistic meaning to iconic "information" […] [and] diverts language from expressing the experience of living (Yannaras, 2004: 36).

Reading, however, is a completely different kind of cognitive experience involving creativity and critical thinking.

- Learners gain confidence in giving talks and developing their presentation skills.
- Learners are encouraged in using their own initiative and sharing/taking on responsibility for their own learning; learner autonomy is thus increased.
- Learners' general knowledge is extended and their cultural horizons broadened.

- Learners further develop their research interest by translating material they have chosen themselves, thus contributing to their research for diploma theses or papers.

While we do not teach archaeology or theology content, our foreign language seminars still help students broaden their knowledge of the specialist subject they are studying as they are provided with the chance to encounter and work with authentic specialised material in English.

Conclusion

To sum up, practical experience has shown translation to be not just the oldest and a highly efficient language teaching method or strategy, but also one of the most natural and common applications of foreign language skills, especially relevant to the challenges of the present day.

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