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Teaching translation as part of a practical EFL course in teacher training groups

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to provide instruction on how to teach translation as part of the practical English course in the university context. Such modules are included in programmes dedicated to teacher training groups or business English groups and are characterised by a limited number of hours devoted to translation training. This is why, unlike in the case of translator training groups, where students have much more time to develop their skills, the teacher has to carefully plan the curriculum paying attention to every detail and make the most of every translation class conducted with and for his or her students. The following paper tries to point out the most important issues which need to be presented and discussed during translation classes, as well as provide the teacher with sample questions and tasks that may be used for training. In particular, it focuses on the following strategies that ought to be applied in translation: changing the order of words; dividing longer sentences into shorter ones; combining shorter sentences into longer ones; generalisation; simplification and omission; clarification; and changing grammatical categories of words.

Keywords: teaching translation, teaching in the university context, EFL

1. Introduction

Teaching translation and interpretation is a relatively well-developed area with a large number of textbooks, courses, and training materials. However, they are usually intended for training future translators and interpreters who have already mastered a foreign/second language at an advanced level and who just need to develop their professional technique. Nevertheless, the ability to translate texts seems to be crucial also for other language users. Second language teachers can serve

as a prime example here. They need to be capable of translating foreign texts to their students, especially if they apply some elements of grammar-translation method, and moreover, they are frequently asked to do various translations, as L2 teachers are expected to be proficient users of a particular language. Not only do they translate texts for their superiors, friends and colleagues, but they also often act as interpreters in their schools, for example, during meetings with foreign visitors or Erasmus partners.

This is why practical academic courses in English as a Foreign/Second Language usually include a translation module. It is taught as one of the crucial skills, together with practical grammar, conversation, or listening comprehension. Nonetheless, one should not bite off more than one can chew: it is necessary to remember that language teachers do not train to become translators and that the balance between the development of various skills has to be kept. It is especially vital as the number of classes devoted to translation is normally relatively limited (for example, in comparison to translator training programmes).

2. The nature of translation

As Gerding-Salas (2000) notices, every translation by its nature has more than one purpose; however, there is one which is always the most important: to enable cross-cultural communication. And since nowadays one can observe progressing globalisation, the world is changing rapidly, and various businesses and services are constantly developing, there is a growing need for translators and interpreters, who are bilingual (or even multilingual) cross-cultural transmitters of culture and information. Even though they should translate from their second language to their mother tongue, the market requirements often result in translators translating various texts out of their native language, which is much more difficult and may lead to somewhat worse quality of the output (e.g., Newmark 1995).

Translation and interpretation ought to be done by highly trained professionals because of the inherent risks they carry. Incorrect translation may not only lead to confusion, misunderstanding, or hilarity, but also cause health hazards or even death. Mistakes in texts and documents concerning areas such as medicine, science, law, or technology can take their toll (Gerding-Salas 2000). Although numerous examples could be cited, some are particularly striking. For instance, between

2006 and 2007, forty-seven patients of one of the hospitals in Berlin had their knee joint prostheses wrongly implanted due to a faulty translation of the instruction from English to German. The phrase “non-modular cemented” was translated as “not requiring any cement,” and so the prostheses were implanted. When the serious mistake was discovered, the patients were asked to attend the hospital once again, and they had to be re-operated. But one-third of them had already been suffering from agonising pain and other side effects (Lepiarz 2007). Another example described by Gerding-Salas (2000) concerns a Chilean exile who had been granted a refugee status in a non-Spanish-speaking country and was supposed to have a minor surgery in order to remove a skin blemish from her face but, due to a translation mistake, was almost anaesthetised for a breast surgery. Finally, an example concerning foreign affairs. In 2006, in a Polish newspaper *Życie Warszawy*, readers could find a headline “Erika Steinbach insulting Polish insurgents.” The article said that Erika Steinbach (at the time president of the Federation of Expellees) demanded consultations concerning commemorating the Warsaw Uprising, arguing that “It is our business. We were to destroy Warsaw.” The article caused a lot of confusion, aggressive comments of the media and politicians, as well as the risk of deterioration of relationships between Poland and Germany. However, it turned out that there was a mistake in translation. The words actually said by Steinbach were completely different and not intended to insult anyone (Plona 2006).

The examples described above clearly show that translation is a very responsible task and without appropriate training and understanding of its nature, it should not be undertaken. Delisle (1981) highlights that translation is a very difficult task indeed and creates continuous problems, obstacles, and difficulties deriving from misunderstanding of the source text or inability to find appropriate terms in an output language. Preckler (1995) mentions other sources of serious difficulties of a semantic nature, such as cognates, deceptive cognates, calques, institutional and standardised terms or neologisms, as well as those connected to “cultural untranslatability,” including idioms, sayings, proverbs, and puns. Untrained translators are often unaware of how cautious they should be translating those words, phrases, or expressions in order to avoid interlingual interference or serious language misuse (Kussmaul 1995).

The most obvious thing, but at the same time the most surprising one (for non-professional translators), is mentioned by Belczyk (2009). It is the simple truth that translation does not consist in just exchanging (for example) English words for Polish ones, and that translators are not translation machines or engines and thus should not act like ones.

Belczyk (2009) highlights that literal, word-for-word translation will never be successful since various words may have many meanings, they are set in a particular context, and they function in a different culture. What is more, syntax is often completely different in various languages. The lack of knowledge in this area leads to application of grammatical calques and awkward, non-existing structures. For instance, it is impossible to translate literally English passive structures into Polish, as in the latter language, they are formed in a different way and are used less frequently and in different contexts than in English. Thus, it can be stated that translation is in fact an interpretation of the source text and its explanation in the target language. It is crucial *what* message is conveyed, not *how* it is done. Of course, it cannot be forgotten that the “how” is also important in numerous cases (especially in practical texts, such as instructions), but it is the target language that governs that “how.”

Here one ought to mention the *skopos theory of translation* (e.g., Vermeer 1978; Reiß and Vermeer 2010). It frequently happens that inexperienced translators simply read and start translating the text without thinking carefully why they are doing it. The *skopos* theory means a more functional and sociological approach to translation. According to it, translators have to think about their translation in advance. They need to determine who the recipient of the final text is going to be and what purpose the text is supposed to serve. The purpose is a key word here. It shapes the form, structure, register, and range of vocabulary used in the output. Also the recipient influences the translated text, as it has to be adjusted to the potential reader – to be natural and comprehensible, leaving no room for suspicion that it is a translation, not an original text (e.g., Nord 1997; Reiß 2000). A famous quote by Yevgeny Yevtushenko clearly illustrates the nature of translation: “Translation is like a woman. If it is beautiful, it is not faithful. If it is faithful, it is most certainly not beautiful.” Even though it should perhaps not be taken too literally, it certainly suggests the necessity to treat translation as an act of creating a new text.

3. Issues and challenges

As one can see above, there are numerous traps and difficulties connected with translation, not to mention the necessity to teach the very basics, such as translation techniques and strategies. While translation

training groups are given ample time to learn and develop these techniques or to practice with various texts designed for different groups of recipients, teacher training groups have a very limited time to develop translation skills.

Then a natural question arises: how can a translation course for teacher training groups be designed in order to make it as effective as possible despite all its limitations? Those frailties include a limited number of hours devoted to translation classes, the lack of theoretical translation background, as well as the specificity of the teacher training programme.

The first job for translation teachers here is to determine what is necessary to teach and what kind of translation tasks can be encountered by their students in the future. These considerations set a *skopos* for teaching adjusted to the group of recipients. There are several options in this area. The teacher may try to transfer as much professional knowledge as possible, hoping that the learners will acquire it, or concentrate on selected aspects which are more relevant to a teacher's job.

Another task faced by the teacher is to find appropriate books and materials which will be easily understood by the learners. They must convey the message concerning translation in an approachable way, without using too specialised terms and vocabulary, and must not be too long or detailed because of the time limitations of the course. The style and examples should encourage readers to try translating on their own.

Moreover, one must not forget that while skills such as grammar, speaking, or pronunciation need to be mastered at an advanced level by all teachers-to-be – a point which is indisputable, as they will act as language models for their own students in the future and will have to be able to teach those skills as well – translation may not be in the centre of interest of all the learners attending teacher training groups. Some of them will naturally be willing to practise it, as they may be eager to acquire new qualifications in the future and become not only teachers but also translators or interpreters. However, the rest of the group may not be interested in translation at all since their only goal may be to teach language learners in the future. The teacher's task here is to make the latter subgroup aware of the fact that they have to be able to translate texts correctly, without making the most common and obvious mistakes, also in a teacher's job. Nevertheless, this heterogeneity within the group can make teaching translation more difficult and demanding than in the case of a class whose members show a comparable level of interest.

Another matter worth thinking through are the methods applied during translation classes. Such classes are usually planned as a practi-

cal subject, not a lecture. This is why they often have a fixed pattern: students are given some texts to translate, they work in pairs or on their own, then the translations are read out and discussed in an open forum, and finally, there is an (optional) discussion concerning the mistakes made and the difficulties encountered. Other teachers prefer to treat translation as homework – the texts are translated by the students at home and they are controlled, corrected, and discussed in the classroom. Very rarely are the students asked to read some publications concerning the translation's theory.

The final problem encountered by translation teachers during both the stage of classes planning and the classes themselves is the assessment of students' translations. How should mistakes and errors be treated? How much can be expected from non-translation groups? To what extent are the style and register important? Is it enough if the translations are just correct, or should they be remarkably good? These and other questions are frequently asked by the teachers who give translation classes to teacher training groups and who are aware that their subject is not the core one for this particular group of students.

4. Implications

My personal experience as a teacher giving translation classes to both teacher training groups and translator training groups prompts me to put forward the following proposals concerning both the design of such classes and the procedures which need to be implemented during the meetings in the classroom. Even though there are no simple solutions to all potential problems encountered by both teachers and students, a couple of useful hints and tips may make the translation work much easier. The key to success consists in careful planning of classes, using a whole variety of strategies and exercises, and adjusting to the learners' needs.

4.1 To teach or not teach (or what is necessary and what can be omitted)?

Basically, in my opinion, it is a good idea to teach (or at least to outline) as much as possible. The fact that teacher training groups consist of and educate foreign language teachers-to-be does not necessarily mean that

these students will not be willing to change or extend their qualifications in the future. In order to do so, they need to be familiar with the topic of translation and know what the job of a translator or interpreter involves. What is more, language teachers are frequently asked to translate various texts, and they often do so in order to earn some extra money. As a member of a Facebook group of English teachers, every day I notice at least several posts concerning the topic of translation. Teachers are asked to translate various texts (for example, documents, letters, theses, or articles), or they offer such services themselves. They ask questions concerning vocabulary and specialised terms, translation techniques, correctness of the chunks of the text they have written, or fees they should charge for their translations. Even though most of them seem to know very little or nothing at all about translation, they undertake such tasks. One can suspect that in this situation, their translations may not be of the best quality and may contain various mistakes. As Okrent (2016) notices, “[k]nowing how to speak two languages is not the same thing as knowing how to translate. Translation is a special skill that professionals work hard to develop.” Also Lipiński (2006) highlights that even though the ability to speak at least two languages is crucial when one wants to translate texts, it is still not sufficient, as the process of translation is very complicated and requires considering numerous linguistic and extralinguistic factors. This suggests that it should be done only by professional translators. But since the reality is very different, our job as translation teachers is to prepare also other graduates of English studies to face this difficult task.

4.2 So how to teach it all?

In view of the considerations above, I strongly believe that the more knowledge is imparted to the students, the better for them. The very first thing I always start with is the explanation what translation is. Students need to be familiarised with the fact that they are not translation engines and must not translate a text literally, word for word. In order to do so, the teachers have to redesign their thinking of practical translation classes. If they expect good, correct translations from their students, they have to provide them with appropriate tools and techniques first. It cannot be expected that the students will discover this kind of information themselves. Personally, I find moderated discussion, brainstorming, and asking questions most effective in this area. It is far from a traditional translation class, but I always start my courses with such an introduction to a new topic. Activation techniques mentioned

above help students understand more and concentrate properly on the material being discussed.

The very first question I always ask is *What do you think translation is?* which can be supplemented by supporting questions, such as *How should we translate texts?* and *How shouldn't we translate them?* The aim of such a discussion is to provide students with a clue that they cannot translate anything literally. But it is most effective when they discover it themselves during the discussion. Another important question, *Why can't we translate anything word for word?* should lead to a discussion on differences between languages – on the level of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, idioms, register, and others. Students have to be cognizant of the fact that English and Polish are different systems and that their structures are different – some of them are correct in one language but not in the other, or some of them may be awkward, unnatural, comical, or inappropriate when translated directly from the other language. Moreover, students need to learn that the final, translated text has to sound natural in the output language. The aim of the translator is to produce a text which does not give any clue that it is a translation and not an original text. In order to achieve it with students, it is worth working firstly on some examples – not complete texts but a couple of sentences which cannot be translated literally if they are to be understandable and sound deft in the output language. Thus, we will show the learners some basic techniques and strategies, such as dividing longer sentences into a few shorter ones, joining shorter chunks into longer ones, changing the grammatical category or part of speech, generalisation, changing the order of words or information, and substitution (see more in Section 5).

Another basic concept is the notion of *skopos* (e.g., Schäffner 1998; Vermeer 1978, 1989). The teacher has to explain to the students that they always have to think about their translation in advance. Even though the *skopos* theory was first proposed in order to improve the translation of advertisements and commercials, it was developed further, and its assumptions can and should be applied to other areas of translation. It is advisable to work with a set of various texts, establish a different *skopos* for each of them, and subsequently discuss together how the translated texts should finally look like (taking into account such elements as register, vocabulary, grammatical structures, the structure, and the layout of the text). It is crucial to show the students that they need to be able to empathise with the potential readers of their translations and that they have to foresee the receivers' expectations, needs, and interests, as well as adjust to the language they use (for instance, one cannot expect a stay-at-home mother or father, who might be interested in an article on child psychology published in a popular magazine, to

follow the language used by a professor of psychology addressing fellow scholars – the language of the article has to be simplified and by nature must be more colloquial). The elements which need to be taken into consideration are many – it is not only the recipients of the text and their profile, but also the medium in which the translation will be published, such as a magazine (what kind of? who for?) or the Internet website (again: what kind of? who for? national or international?). Thus, the very phase of planning ought to be performed thoroughly and take some time.

4.3 Should I tell them to work individually or let them work in groups?

Another matter worth rethinking is whether the act of translation should take place in small groups of students, pairs, or maybe individually. Some teachers and researchers (e.g., Hubscher-Davidson 2007) advocate allowing students to work in groups as a very effective method of learning since they gain experience in terms of reader expectations, develop their responsibility as translators, learn to discuss and defend their translations, think about their decisions, and serve as critics to each other. Zeng and Lu-Chen (2002) highlight that students learn best through social interactions which enable them to work toward a common goal through sharing information and solving the same problems.

While it is true that benefits accruing from teamwork cannot be denied, at the same time, the teacher cannot yield to the temptation of working with his or her students using only this method. It may be appealing to stick to it – fewer translations to check, fewer translations to discuss, faster and more effective (?) work, and less attention paid to the class working on the task. However, it is not exactly what the job of a translator looks like. Translators usually work on their own, and our students need to be capable of doing so. Still, sometimes they do work in pairs or even teams – this also has to be practiced. Hence the task a translation teacher has to face is to find the golden mean.

My experience shows that it is very effective if we divide the planned assignments into two groups. Thus, half of them can be translated individually and the remaining half, in pairs or small groups. Working individually prepares students to become independent translators (either professional or not, translating some texts only from time to time, in accordance with the needs), teaches them to be responsible for their own decisions, develops their self-reliance, and allows the teacher to obtain

more translations of a particular text, which can then be discussed and compared, demonstrating clearly that there is nothing like the only one correct target version (at least when we think of general, not specialised texts) and that we can find various solutions which aptly translate particular sentences or paragraphs. However, it sometimes happens that texts are pretty long and the deadline is tight, and then translators need to work in pairs or in teams. They should be prepared for such a situation. This is why some texts must be translated in pairs, and some – in groups. The students learn to co-operate, negotiate, persuade, and reach compromises. They must achieve a coherent text, which not only does not look like a translation, but also does not imply that it was created by a group of people (thus the style, vocabulary, register, and structures must remain consistent throughout the whole translated text). What is important in the group work is controlling whether one or two students do not dominate the conversation while the others are silent and passive. In such a situation, there are more downsides of this method than advantages, and the teacher must react. In order to minimise the risk of imbalance within the group of students, it is necessary to change groups every class, check the dynamics, and observe different kinds of behaviour. Students working with different partners every time become more flexible and adjust to new situations and environments faster and more easily.

4.4 Other things that need to be taken into account

It is vital to persuade the students to concentrate on different phases of the process of translating a text instead of focusing only on a final product which is to be handed in after the class. One has to give thought to the phase of decoding the source text, planning the translation, and then recoding it into a target text. All those phases are very important, but we have to bear in mind that students work in various ways, with some of them instinctively focusing on the result while others concentrating on the process of translation instead (e.g., Hubscher-Davidson 2007). That is why, for example, Gile (2005) suggests application of evaluation exercises which consist of both process-oriented and product-oriented phases. It is crucial to devote some time to practicing both of them in order to develop appropriate strategies for each phase, as well as help students reflect on various sides of their performance and progress.

Another matter worth rethinking is translating texts in the classroom vs. treating translation tasks as students' homework. As with the

questions mentioned in the previous points, it cannot be stated that only one method is appropriate and ought to be applied during any translation course. On the one hand, if students translate texts during classes, they have a possibility to work in pairs or groups and learn how to translate things quickly (which can be demanded at school, during trips, or at meetings), while teachers have a chance to observe the class dynamics, their students' co-operation, and other elements of classroom interaction. On the other hand, such a translation product is handed in just after its completion, not giving the students an opportunity to double-check it or return to it after some time. This is undoubtedly an advantage of working at home. The task of the teacher is to tell the students that when they work at home, they need to start their task early enough to complete a number of its phases. It is not only an analysis of the source text, translation planning, and writing the final product. It is highly advisable that having translated a text, the students should put it aside for some time and then return to it to double-check it. It is much easier to find some mistakes, inaccuracies, or awkward phrases after a short (or, preferably, longer) break in working on a particular text. Another step worth taking is to ask another person (who is not familiar with the original text) to read one's final product to make sure that it sounds natural and appropriate in the target language. It can be a student's parent, partner, or neighbour. If the reader decides that the text "reads well" and looks natural, the translator has achieved his or her goal – the final text does not look like a translation, is understandable, and should be well received. If there are some parts which need improving, the reader will inform the translator about this fact, for example, by saying that some fragments are incomprehensible or that a passage or a phrase does not look natural. Having corrected the translation, the student may hand it in to the teacher, confident that its quality is much better than that of a text translated during classes.

5. Practical translation tasks for classroom use

The following section presents sample questions which can be asked during the first meeting with students and sample tasks which can be carried out during further translation classes. Naturally, they can be modified and adjusted to particular groups. It is also advisable to create more similar exercises and sentences to work on, basing on the presented ideas.

5.1 Introductory questions

During the first meeting with your students, brainstorm together the following questions:

- What do you think translation is?*
- What should we do first when we want to translate a text?*
- How cannot we approach this task?*
- Can we translate a text word by word?*
- Why cannot we do that?*
- What are the possible differences between the input and output languages?*
- What are the possible cultural differences which may pose difficulties in translation?*
- What else do we have to take into consideration while translating a text?*
- What traps do you think a translator may encounter in an input/output text?*
- Do you know any difficult or tricky words/phrases/terms which may easily be mistranslated?*
- Have you ever heard of any mistakes in translation which resulted in funny/awkward/tragic incidents? What can be done to avoid such situations?*
- How would you then describe the “correct” procedure of translating a text?*

Let your students speak and discuss the ideas with each other – do not turn the class into a lecture. When students reach some conclusions on their own, they will be easier for them to remember. Just moderate the discussion and provide them with useful hints and additional questions. Lead the conversation in the direction described in Sections 2 and 4.2 above. After that, provide your students with some materials on the skopos theory of translation (depending on how much time you have, reading it may be treated as homework, and the conclusions and findings can be discussed during the next class).

5.2 Developing basic translation strategies

The conscious and deliberate use of various translation strategies is crucial in successful translation (e.g., Owji, 2013). The following subsections will help you work on basic translation strategies, such as changing the

order of words, dividing longer sentences into shorter ones, combining shorter sentences into longer ones, generalisation, simplification, clarification, and changing grammatical categories of words. Naturally, these are only some of the whole multitude of existing strategies which are worth discussing and developing; however, they constitute a good start when one wants their translations to look natural.

Changing the order of words

Present your students with the following sentences to translate (copy them without underlining). Let them work on their own. The sentences may seem very easy, but many students will probably stick to the original word order (I have seen countless translations with “jabłkowego soku” in place of “soku jabłkowego”). Discuss the results together to check whether the sentences sound natural in the output language. Brainstorm the possible solutions and try to translate the sentences once again (together), changing the order of the underlined words. The natural-sounding solutions/translations into Polish are provided in brackets.

I really liked Anna's sister. (Naprawdę lubiałam sióstrę Anny.)

She went downstairs to drink a glass of apple juice. (Zeszła na dół, by napić się szklanki soku jabłkowego.)

Find and talk with Adam. (Znajdź Adama i porozmawiaj z nim.)

The Atlantic is the second largest ocean in the world after the Pacific. (Atlantyk jest po Pacyfiku drugim co do wielkości oceanem na świecie.)

As well as helping fish to swim, scales protect their bodies from physical damage. (Łuski ułatwiają rybom pływanie, a także chronią ich ciała przed uszkodzeniami mechanicznymi.)

In 1386 Władysław II Jagiełło, Grand Duke of Lithuania, became King of Poland. (W 1386 roku wielki książę litewski Władysław II Jagiełło został królem Polski.)

Dividing longer sentences into shorter ones

Present your students with the following sentences. Ask them to translate them so that they sound as natural in the target language as possible. Check and discuss the translations together. Probably few students will cut these long sentences into shorter ones. Suggest this solution and try to work on them together, cutting each into at least two shorter ones. Brainstorm the idea of dividing long sentences into shorter ones and the naturalness of the achieved effect. Suggested translations are provided in brackets, but there are more possible final versions.

This long-pedestrianized street makes it a perfect place to walk and shop in numerous fashionable boutiques, the one essential stop being a small outlet store where you can find the latest fashions at very reduced prices. (Ta długa ulica została wyłączona z ruchu samochodowego/kołowego i idealnie nadaje się do spacerów, podczas których można zrobić zakupy w modnych butikach. Koniecznie trzeba wybrać się do małego outletu, gdzie można kupić modne ubrania w bardzo niskich cenach.)

At secondary school, it was easy to resist being caught up in the drive to experiment with sex, drugs and how many nights you could stay out without getting Social Services involved, not just because I didn't have the big boobs or great hair that membership of such groups required, but because I could see that an array of GCSEs would serve me better in the long run than a plethora of STDs. (W szkole średniej łatwo było mi się powstrzymać od eksperymentowania z seksem i narkotykami, czy też uniknąć zwrócenia na siebie uwagi opieki społecznej przez nocne uciezki z domu. Nie było to jednak spowodowane brakiem dużych piersi czy też bujnych włosów, co było cenione w takich kręgach, lecz świadomością, że dobre oceny na świadectwie bardziej przydadzą mi się w przyszłości niż cały pakiet chorób wenerycznych.)

Combining shorter sentences into longer ones

Present your students with the following paragraphs containing sets of short sentences. Ask the students to translate the paragraphs so that they sound as natural in the target language as possible. Check and discuss the translations together. Again, it is highly probable that few students will combine these short sentences into longer ones. Suggest combining sentences and try to work on them together. Brainstorm the idea and the achieved effect and try to reach a conclusion whether they sound better and more natural after the changes have been made. Suggested translations are provided in brackets, but there are more possible final versions.

Alison entered the room. She looked around carefully. Finally, she sat at the table. (Alison weszła do pokoju, rozejrzała się ostrożnie i w końcu usiadła przy stole.)

In those days bathrooms in some rich houses began to be built as separate rooms. They were equipped with toilets, washbasins and mirrors. (W tamtych czasach w niektórych bogatych domach zaczęto budować łazienki jako osobne pomieszczenia wyposażone w toalety, umywalki i lustra.)

It is said that a housewife was frying pancakes when she heard church bells. She got really stressed. She rushed to the church, still carrying the pan. She was also wearing her apron. This is how the famous Pancake Race at Olney was born. (Powiada się, że pewna pani domu smażyła naleśniki, gdy usłyszała dzwony kościelne. Bardzo się zdenerwowała i pośpieszyła do kościoła wciąż ubrana w fartuch i w dodatku trzymając patelnię w ręku. Tak się narodził słynny wyścig z naleśnikiem w Olney.)

Generalisation

Firstly, talk with your students about the necessity to generalise some terms or phrases. It may be unavoidable when some words have a couple of meanings and the text does not imply directly which of them is the correct one. For instance, the verb *go* can mean both *iść* and *jechać* in Polish (actually, there are many more possible translations). You can discuss the possible translations of the following, very simple sentence:

Yesterday we went to the shop.

Some students will probably translate it as *Wczoraj poszliśmy do sklepu* while others will choose *Wczoraj pojechaliśmy do sklepu*. Both translations may be correct, but if we are not sure whether the agent walked or used a vehicle, it is safer to translate the sentence as *Wczoraj wybraliśmy się do sklepu*. We can generalise it even further and say *Wczoraj byliśmy w sklepie*. Now, try to work on the following sentence:

There were a lot of beautiful green bracken.

If your students look up the word *bracken* in a dictionary or encyclopedia, they are likely to end up with a sentence like *Było tam wiele pięknych zielonych orlic pospolitych*. However, if the text is not dedicated to botanists, it will sound more natural if the translator uses a more general term, namely, *paproć* ('fern'), thus translating the sentence as *Było tam wiele pięknych zielonych paproci*. Such a translation not only sounds more natural in the target language but is also more understandable for an average reader. And the final sentence to discuss:

Both cops were eating doughnuts in their car.

The word *doughnut* may turn out to be problematic here. If translated as *pączek z dziurką* or *pączek wiedeński* (as many dictionaries or websites suggest), it will cause the sentence to sound unnatural and too long.

If translated as *oponka* (lit. ‘tyre+diminutive’), it will sound comical, forming an association between *oponki* and *auto* and thus giving an impression that the cops were actually eating tyres. In order to avoid such effects, it is better to choose a more general word and translate the sentence as *Obaj policjanci jedli pączki w swoim samochodzie*.

Simplification and omission

Another matter worth discussing with the students is the need to simplify (or even omit) some parts of sentences which are unnecessary in the translated text. Brainstorm the situations in which you and your students would find some information non-essential or even disturbing. Then tell them to imagine that they are to translate a text into Polish, but the text was originally written for Americans. Present the students with the following sentences (without underlining) and ask them to do translations:

The board was 2 meters (6.6 ft) long.

The Sejm (which is the lower house of the Polish parliament) consists of 460 deputies elected by universal ballot.

To bake the cake, preheat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius.

Check the translations and discuss which parts should be omitted. In the case of the first sentence, the information about the length in feet is crucial for American readers, who do not use the metric system, but it is unnecessary and disturbing for Polish readers, who are unfamiliar with the US customary system of measurement but use metres on a daily basis. Thus, the translated sentence ought to be as follows: *Deska miała 2 metry długości*. The second sentence contains additional information explaining what *Sejm* is. But since the text is about the Polish parliament and Poles are familiar with it, this explanation would be awkward and incomprehensible. So the sentence can be translated as: *Sejm składa się z 460 posłów wybieranych w wyborach powszechnych*. Finally, in the last sentence, the translator can omit the information about the scale of Celsius. Since in Poland only this unit of temperature measurement is used, no-one would mistake it for Fahrenheit, and the translation *Żeby upiec to ciasto, rozgrzej piekarnik do 200 stopni* will be perfectly understandable and natural.

Clarification

This is the opposite process to simplification and omission. Explain it to your students that sometimes they need to add some information when the recipients of the translated text may be unfamiliar with some

phenomena or realities typical of another language or culture. Brainstorm what kinds of situations your students as L2 teachers expect to be new or problematic for Polish learners of English. Then discuss the differences between languages (for example, Polish and English) which may require applying some additional words or structures so that the translated text is understandable for the readers and grammatically correct. Provide your students with the following sentences and ask them to translate them so that their translations sound natural in the target language.

The House of Lords meets in the Palace of Westminster.

The prices of new cars fell by 12% last year, the sharpest drop for 5 years.

The most famous painting on exhibition is "Self-Portrait with Wife" by Wyspianski.

Check and compare the translations together, paying attention to their naturalness in Polish and thinking whether they would be understandable for Poles. In the case of the first sentence, the translator should bear in mind that Polish readers may be unfamiliar with the British parliament and its structure, so some information on the House of Lords ought to be added: *Izba Lordów (wyższa izba brytyjskiego parlamentu) obraduje w Pałacu Westminsterskim*. The second sentence does not need any cultural clarification; however, the nature of Polish requires adding some words in order for the sentence to look natural: *Ceny nowych samochodów obniżyły się o 12%, co stanowiło największy spadek od 5 lat*. A similar situation can be observed in the last sentence: *Najbardziej znanym obrazem na wystawie jest „Autoportret z żoną” namalowany przez/autorstwa Wyspiańskiego*.

Changing grammatical categories of words

Since Polish and English vary to a large degree, changing grammatical categories of words is often crucial and unavoidable in translation. Some phrases translated literally are not only awkward and unnatural in the target language; it may also happen that they do not exist in that language. It can be necessary to change the number, tense, negation, or voice. Brainstorm this idea with your students and find as many examples of words and structures which cannot be translated literally and which need considerable changes in translation. Then present your students with the following sentences and ask them to translate them into Polish, making any necessary changes. Correct translations are provided in brackets, together with comments.

The news is devastating. (Wiadomości są druzgocące. NUMBER)
It was the first presidential election in this country. (To były pierwsze wybory prezydenckie w tym kraju. NUMBER)
How do I get to the city centre? (Jak się dostanę do centrum? TENSE)
The building retains its original shape. (Budynek zachował swoją pierwotną formę. TENSE)
He will wait until you go out. (Będzie czekał dopóki nie wyjdiesz. NEGATION)
It wasn't unlike him. (To było w jego stylu. NEGATION)
Carly was given a box of chocolates. (Carly dostała pudełko czekoladek/bombonierkę. VOICE)
We were informed about the accident by the police. (Policja poinformowała nas o wypadku. VOICE)

5.3 Concluding remarks

Naturally, the tasks and exercises presented above constitute only a basic introduction to translation practice. In order to achieve a reasonable degree of proficiency, students have to translate many more sentences, applying not only particular strategies, but also their various combinations. The next step consists in translating whole paragraphs and texts, such as magazine or online articles (general or popular, not specialised ones). They need to be approached very carefully and analysed thoroughly, according to the rules described above (see, for example, Section 4.2). When working on these complex tasks, it is necessary for students to remember about the translation strategies they were familiarised with and not to succumb to the temptation of translating the whole texts literally.

Reflective questions

- Q1: What are the major difficulties you encounter when you are to teach translation to teacher training groups?
- Q2: In your opinion, what are the most common false beliefs concerning translation?
- Q3: List some characteristic features of a traditional, lecture-like approach to translation teaching. What are its drawbacks? What do you think are the advantages of a more open approach consisting in discussion, brainstorming, and collective work on difficult or problematic texts?

Practical tasks

- T1: Imagine that you are a student and you are going to participate in translation classes. Consider your expectations of the teacher's role. Make a list of things the teacher can do to assist your learning and make translation tasks easier and more understandable.
- T2: Design a classroom activity which leads to students realising what translation really is.
- T3: Design a classroom activity consisting in various options of translating the same text, depending on the following variables: the recipient (at least two different ones) and the medium of publication (at least two different ones).

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