

## Issues in Teaching Translation

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**Abstract** *The present article aims initially to present some major theoretical reflections about the translational process and the many various approaches when it comes to the texts to be translated. Then it elaborates on a subsequent teaching procedure carried out with undergraduate translation students. The methodology of this article, consists of a step-by-step, either sequential or successive procedure for workshops, has proven quite successful in translator training at an undergraduate level. The educator is understood as a facilitator of the translation task: The article underlines that the nature of the lesson is quite cooperative and tackles concepts such as the profile of the educator, that of the student, the necessary infrastructure for the teaching and learning processes as well the assessment process. Most of the transfer process is carried out by the students both collectively and individually. The article elaborates such aspects as Influence of the mother tongue, naturalness of the activity, the skill aspect, the reality of language. In conclusion after the methodology proposed and the relevant processes are discussed, the article will conclude with the idea that translators—as every “professional”—should have life-long training which starts at undergraduate level of studies, this is why the teaching of translation at this level is crucial for the future.*

**Key words:** *Teaching, translation, educator, undergraduate students, SL, TL.*

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### 1. Background

Translation as an activity has existed in Albania but most of the translators were either educated abroad or self taught. The only public translator training institutions in Albania have been and still are the Universities, more specifically, the Departments of English Language with the respective staff specialized in translation theory and practice. This paper will mainly be based on research work undertaken in the Department of English Language of The Faculty of Foreign Languages of Tirana University. This Department offers courses in Translation and Interpretation at both cycles of studies, BA and Master level. In Albanian Universities, translation practice and theory is a compulsory subject for undergraduates in foreign language departments, starting in the second year of the first cycle of studies.

With regards to the students' expectations related to translation as skill or future job, they consider it attractive and as an interesting working sector due to the “satisfying” salaries. Now that Albania is heading towards the European Integration and when we consider the situation within Europe where at least 35 languages are used (BBC, 2001), professional training in translation and interpreting are vital.

The formal education in foreign languages in Albania started on 16th September 1957 when The University of Tirana was founded under the name of State University of Tirana. Translation back then was part of the English language teacher education. After the 90's the Department of English Language offered three different programs of study in languages, namely: 1) English Language and education, 2) British and American Studies, 3) Translation and Interpretation studies.

Albania adopted in 2003 Bologna Process in Higher Education. The application of Bachelor' studies with the new Bologna Charter started in 2005, and in 2008 it was introduced the second cycle of studies.

After the first three years from the adoption of the Bologna Process the programs and the curricula were reviewed based on the challenges and issues encountered. During the first two years of studies all students are offered the same program, including compulsory and optional subjects. The students choose the direction of their studies in the third year. The faculty of foreign languages of Tirana University offers three study programs: Foreign Languages, Communication & Culture and Translations & Interpretation. The study programme has a balance of both practical and simply academic subjects. The vision of this Faculty is to transform all students into proficient FL user and specialists. In order to do that, in the first year of studies, a lot of focus is given to the development of the students' language and communication skills as well as to strengthen the weaknesses that some students may present. New student-centered approaches have been adopted in classrooms, but that still needs to be widespread.

Second Cycle of studies at Tirana Faculty of Foreign languages comprises 210 students, out of whom 100 study English. Technical – Literary Translation and Interpretation is one of the major courses with 119 students enrolled. 94 students specialize in English Translation and Interpretation Studies. The goal of this course is to prepare and qualify professional translators and interpreters in fields such as pragmatics, technical, scientific and literary translations. Another aim of this course is the improvement and development of practical competencies in translation and interpretation by using the appropriate logical capacity of language communication and interpretation. Students are provided with skills in the professional area of translation and interpretation. the purpose of developing and improving the practice of research in the field of translation and interpretation.

## **2. The importance of translation teaching**

The role of the translators has come to grow because of the growing international commerce, globalization etc. and the translators being more and more often mediators of culture and realities as they convey meaning as precisely and faithfully, possible. Translation is related to Teaching foreign languages, too, with the latter being a very useful means of testing reading and comprehension ability in the source language as well as the target language. Translation develops three qualities essential to all language learners: flexibility, accuracy and clarity. It trains the learner to search flexibility for the most appropriate words and accuracy to convey what is meant precisely (Duff, 1989). Thus, in terms of cultural as well as linguistic abilities the students improve their competencies in the source as well as target languages and cultures, specifically with regards to morphological, syntactical, lexical and stylistic units and structures. The aim of teaching translation is not simply and only related to upgrade bilingual skills of the students, but to help them understand that translating is not at all about replacing words from one language to another, but that of expressing ideas for another, target, readership. The students should recognize through their practical translation classes that not being the author of the source texts they should be loyal as much as possible to the meaning according to the target audience. Only then will they be able to do the best possible translation work after graduation.

## **3. Teaching resources**

The adequacy of the training content heavily depends on the clarity of the relevant teaching objectives (Delisle, 1981). There is close interaction between learning outcomes and teaching materials and methodology. The different departments of English in Albania use their different textbooks. Many of the books on translation courses have been published after the 1990s in the form of theoretical lectures by the lecturers of each University. These are widely used in most departments of English Language. Individual professors, also follow the general guidelines on teaching materials for English-Albanian Translation courses which rely mainly on three pillars, each of them based on the framework curriculum: the students needs, alternating the approaches of translation practice in combination with theoretical aspects and finally develop translation skills and critical competence to assess translated texts. Teachers use selected texts suiting the language level of the students, to illustrate word and sentence translation, paragraph translation and even translation of an entire text which is assigned as a course task at the end of the term. Teachers try to design comparative translation exercises, assessment and translation of different styles. Students are introduced to a variety of related or unrelated texts to help the students feel specialized but not overspecialized.

## **4. Teaching methods**

The translation process is a highly complex example of language manipulation (Snell-Hornby 1988, and Bernstein 1983). But, when aspects of complexity have to be identified and held steady for discussion in classroom settings (Malmkjær, 1998), translation problems often prove to be interesting, and sometimes illusive. The lecturers have to overcome personal bias (interpretations), yet, they have to set fair criteria for assessing translation problems.

Generally what the teacher does is to concentrate mainly on the semantic transformation aspects that occur to a text being translated neglecting thus the cultural exchange aspect of translation teaching. Nevertheless they are aware that translators must be very cautious to cultural differences and it is the teachers who have a crucial role in promoting the cultural consciousness. Hence, in the discussion of the following selection taken from actual material used in teaching, the emphasis is on the parts of the text which instigate students questions should be practical and instructive, and teaching methods should not be monotonous.

Training and qualification of teachers is very important and also the teachers should have a broad knowledge of translation studies and theories, linguistics, literature, stylistics and other relevant areas of learning. What is more

important, translation teaching staff should be competent to make a natural connection between translation theory and translation practice and apply them accordingly. Teachers of translation themselves should be well experienced in translating and preparation of academic articles or books about translation studies. Another important aspect of the translation teaching process is that related to the familiarity of the teachers with the most commonly made mistakes by the students and their ability to analyze the reasons why such mistakes occur from the point of view of linguistics, culture, style, literature and so on. One of the most affective approaches to translation theory and practice classes according to my experience is that where the teacher has the students do translation exercises before the proper theoretical lecture takes place. After the exercises have been concluded then the teacher will explain the theoretical lecture on the bases of the exercises previously done by the students. This approach can only be effective with the most experienced teachers, those that are well familiar with translation studies and theories and good practitioners. Most importantly, the translation teachers should be highly qualified translators and then be capable to demonstrate translation theories and skills practically and clearly in order for the students to perceive and acquire the proper knowledge and skills. All translation teachers are faced with the challenge of the right teaching approach. Another approach that is common in the praxis of translation teaching, with a view to the combination of theory and practice of translation, is that when the teacher focuses on translation skills first, then as a second step is the assignment of a task. The third step is that of going through each and every one of the tasks submitted by the students and only following these, as a fourth step the teacher will deliver a theoretical lecture underlining mistakes to be avoided, mistaken translations and pinpointing the correct translation on the board. Most other teachers find appropriate that their students self-correct the respective translations and find their mistakes, they look at the reasons for these mistakes, and are assumed to better the translation work on their own. Translation teachers and lecturers pass a lot of time with textbooks, students' notebooks, internet resources practicing translation work themselves to cultivate their own experience and knowledge.

## 5. Improvements in translation teaching

The teachers are key actors for the improvements needed in terms of translation teaching quality. Most commonly articles on linguistic issues are published in the journals published by any of the Universities, thus, that of Shkodra (annually), Elbasan (biannually), Korca (annually), Gjirokastra (biannually). There isn't a separate journal or magazine concentrating on translation issues, only. With regards to reference books, each of the Universities has a library which have benefited from donations of the British Council or other projects.

Issues of concern are the teaching programme and how it works in other European Countries which have adopted Bologna process, textbooks, content, methods, evaluation and the like. The situation is more or less the same in all departments of English Language.

Another issue regarding the improvement of research in translation teaching is related to the fact that not all students with good bilingual skills can translate well. Seemingly, there is a gap between the knowledge of both languages and the artistic requirements of translation; this is where translation teaching should intervene. Translation methodology should provide for a solution so that even those who are not born with the talent for perfect translations with the right teaching objective, a concrete applicable teaching programme, a set of practical textbooks and an experienced teacher, students will be prepared for the world they are trained for with the relevant competencies that being a translator involves.

After the theoretical teaching process for the reinforcement of the theoretical material, exercises and exams are a very important tool. They should reflect the content of the course and address the barriers faced by the students in order for the teaching to be useful and fruitful.

A test should not be another task during which students merely translate words, sentences or even paragraphs as it wouldn't reflect the overall grasping of translation theory and practice. When designing translation tests and exams we should bear in mind and ensure that the test is feasible for the students and that partially the questions are related to theory of translation and partially to practice. Exercises in a test could be fill-in-the-blanks type, essay answers, translation analyses, discussion of one of the theories, choosing accurate translations. Another component of the testing system is related to the last but not least part of the translation course, thus, interpreting. Research on interpreting is rare.

There are certain factors which contribute to the problems of students related to translation:

(a) their approach regarding their future profession: the students don't realize the importance of translation, so their tasks are done carelessly, irresponsibly; (b) Weak bilingual basis: the students don't have sufficiently good knowledge of either Albanian or English. It is quite often that they make grammatical and spelling mistakes, create sentences Albanian in structure but English in wording. Those that don't have a sound foundation of Albanian language writing abilities have a hard time to catch up with the others; (c) Rhetoric and style: students lack a clear awareness regarding style and the often mix different styles together. (d) Don't use dictionaries or encyclopedias: students commonly ask their teachers about the

meaning or spelling of a new word rather than looking it up in a dictionary. There are some students who use pocket dictionaries or mobile phone dictionaries without considering the definition, characteristics and usage of specific words. All these issues can be improved by improving in turn the teaching method and pay more attention to students' needs and thinking methods, too.

## 6. Conclusions

Nobody is born a translator. At Tirana Faculty of Foreign Languages each year almost 100 translators have their degrees in the first and second cycles of studies. The new reforms University of Tirana is undergoing in the framework of Bologna Process, reflect a good will from teachers of translation to collaborate and have more fruitful and effective translation classes. New curricula have been discussed and compiled and are now being implemented for all subjects including Translation.

The teachers of translation according to Zamel (1985: 96-97) should try "to respond by participating in the making of meaning means that we no longer present ourselves as authorities but act instead as consultants, assistants, and facilitators. Thus, rather than making assumptions about the text, taking control of it, and offering judgmental commentary... we need to establish a collaborative relationship with our students, drawing attention to problems, offering alternatives, and suggesting possibilities."

There is general agreement that translation definitely is a subject that should be discussed and teacher-student communication as well as collaboration amongst colleagues within a cooperative learning environment are basic elements of the process.

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