EVALUATING TRANSLATION IN THE ALGERIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

Slimane Boukhentache [1]
Jijel University (Algeria)
Laboratory of Research Studies in Literature, Language, Didactics, and Translation
s_boukhentache@univ-jijel.dz

Abstract: Emerging approaches to language teaching acknowledge the value of translation as a pedagogical tool and a social skill, and innovative translation activities have been formulated to substantiate this evolving translation pedagogy. Nevertheless, most of studies on pedagogical translation have focused on oral-based translation activities and a few of them have been directed toward the analysis of translation activities in the English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) textbook. This study used content analysis to investigate the extent to which translation activities are used in Algerian English language public school textbooks. The findings indicate that the textbooks are hardly integrating bilingual activities. Additionally, the existing activities are tentative and linguistically-driven; furthermore, these tasks are a way from tapping at the development of communicative competence and bilingual/multilingual competencies. Consequently, it is strongly recommended to integrate more functional activities into the textbooks and standardize this pedagogical practice.

Keywords: Algerian English language textbooks; bilingual education; code switching; translanguaging; translation.

---

[1] Corresponding author : Boukhentache Slimane
Authors' ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2541-9241

1. Introduction

After being fundamental to foreign language teaching in the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), the use of translation has waned within the subsequent language teaching approaches. The popular language teaching methods that superseded GTM (i.e., Direct Method [DM], Audio-Lingual Method [ALM], and Communicative Language Teaching [CLT]) consider distinct languages as separate systems that should be taught independently to avoid interference between them. Consequently, it is deemed imperative to teach the vocabulary and grammar systems of the target language naturally without mediation in the learner mother tongue or in any other community languages.

Nevertheless, translation has known rapid resurgence as a pedagogical tool to EFL instruction. It has actually become a hype term. Cook (2010) firmly argues for the reintegration of translation into the landscape of language teaching; he holds that that the use of the learner mother tongue could significantly contribute to target language development. Likewise, Asselah-Rahal, Blanchet, Méfidène (2007) emphasize the importance of capitalizing on the learner's native language to develop expertise in the new language. Furthermore, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) strongly highlights the role of translation in mediating between speakers who speak different languages (Trim, Coste, & North, 2001).

Paradigm shift from only-English instructional pedagogy to translation-based pedagogy has equally affected material design. A number of scholars suggests series of translation activities. Amongst these new syllabus specifications are the use of portfolios (CEFR, Trim, et al., 2001), cultural translation (Cook, 2010), bilingual dialogues (Weschler, 1997), and translation of functional texts (Blamchet, 1988). The reintegration of translation into the framework of language teaching has a quite different format and function from the old GTM practices. Instead of literal translation, functional-communicative activities are used. For example, students could be asked to translate recipes and discuss both the product and the procedure.

A few studies have looked at the use of translation in EFL textbooks. Among the scarce papers on this topic, one study was conducted by Bahumaid (2009) in United Arab Emirates; this investigation looks at how translation can be used in the textbook to promote intercultural content and suggests a judicious and limited use of comparative translation strategies to enhance intercultural competence. Likewise, three more studies were carried out in the Algerian context. The first study by Asselah-Rahal et al. (2007) explores how French is used in Algerian foreign language classrooms and syllabuses. They found out that secondary school Algerian foreign language teachers and students code-switched from other foreign languages (e.g., English and Spanish) into French. Equally, they pointed out that the foreign language teaching materials introduced bilingual tasks within the context of the 2003 School Reform.

The third study by Lahiouel (2013) addresses the worth of the newly introduced translation activities into the Algerian EFL middle and secondary school textbooks. He concluded that the innovative syllabus specifications are not conveniently incorporated into the textbooks. The textbook users actually negatively perceive them. Accordingly, the textbook designers need to review their framework of translation strategies to make translation activities more effective and popular.

This study looks at the extent to which the Algerian EFL textbooks integrate translation contents as instructional tools to enhance teaching. It examines the primary, middle, and secondary school EFL textbooks that were the outcome of the 2003 School Reform. Consequently, this paper comprehensively examines the Algerian EFL teaching

course books to see the extent to which the current education framework is in line with the new pedagogy of pedagogical translation. For the sake of this study, pedagogical translation could be defined as a deliberate and controlled use of translation tasks for assisting English language learning/teaching.

Hence, this paper poses the following research questions:

a) To what extent do the Algerian EFL textbooks integrate pedagogical translation?
b) What are the translation tasks and resources used to promote foreign language learning/teaching?

2. Literature Review

Translation is probably the oldest and most controversial foreign language teaching technique. It was initially used for the teaching of Greek and Latin from the 16th century to the end of the 19th century. Instruction in these dead languages focused mainly on the study of prestigious classic texts (e.g., Homer and Virgil) for literary and cultural discovery, and the teaching methodology relied heavily on translation and excessive study of grammar.

The subsequent method, GTM, partly borrowed the use of translation methodology for the teaching of the emerging modern languages (e.g., French and English). GTM employed translation to convert target language sentences into the mother tongue and practice grammar and vocabulary usage: translation was employed as a tool to promote reading and writing. Nevertheless, despite the innovative translation techniques brought up by GTM, its excessive focus on grammar and its neglect of speaking led to the wholesale rejection of both the method and translation technique : throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

The DM, which followed GTM, completely excluded translation pedagogy. The influence of the pedagogical insights of 19th Century Reform Movement, which equated foreign language instruction with native language learning, culminated in the advent of the DM, which relies exclusively on natural language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Only the target language is allowed in the classroom.

Howatt (1984) calls the use of only-the-target-language approach to foreign language learning/teaching the monolingual approach. Monolingual learning/teaching is based on the premise that learners should be immersed in the target language input and that no other than the target language should be used. The modern EFL methods that applied this principle are the DM, ALM, Situation Language Teaching (SLT), and CLT (to some extent).

Despite the popularity and long lifespan of the monolingual approach, it is not universally acknowledged. Firstly, as early as the 1920s, Harold Palmer's Oral Method considered translation as impeccably beneficial for language contextualization (Palmer, 1921b, in Thornbury, 2017, p.110). Likewise, humanistic language methods (such as Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and Suggestopedia), which developed in the 1970s, permitted judicious use of translation.

Additionally, preclusion of translation is apparently ideologically-laden. According to Blanchet (2008), prohibition of translation under the guise of language immersion is intended to efface home and less 'prestigious' languages. It is equally erroneously argued that mother tongue interference is an unsurmountable setback to foreign language learning , and, according to Blanchet, it is misleadingly supposed that 'high-status' languages are resistant to translation.

Furthermore, Cook (2010) argues that some narrow interests motivate the proscription of translation. He mentions, for example, that it is easier for English-speaking teachers to teach through a monolingual approach, as they are unfamiliar with students' home languages,

and it is, equally, easier for material designers to devise monolingual rather than bilingual teaching materials. All these factors contributed to the denigration of translation teaching technique, though it is omnipresent in foreign language classrooms.

The development of CLT in the 1970s and 1980s has slightly affected the status of translation in language teaching. CLT has actually placed translation in a "*grey zone*" (Kerr, 2014, p. 23); that is, it is minimally accepted under certain conditions. This shift in stance has given rise to concepts like incidental and judicious use of translation. It follows then to say translation has not regained its popularity and legitimacy that it enjoyed before the rise of direct teaching pedagogies.

Nonetheless, 21st Century has known the emergence of concurrent educational trends that support translation from varied perspectives. First, the Council of Europe- a lever of change in the field of foreign language teaching-adopted the concept of plurilingualism to refer to the ability of the learner to use his/her language codes harmoniously and flexibly, alternating back and forth from one language variety to another (Trim, et al., 2001, p. 4). Espousing pluringualism entails the rejection of the view that languages are compartmentalized and have no connections between them. The plurilingual approach to teaching then taps at a plurilingual competence through diversified linguistic codes.

Additionally, the Council of Europe introduced the translation mediation competency. Mediation refers to the capacity to make communication effective among speakers who cannot understand each other (Trim, et al., 2001, p.140). This process involves translating, interpreting, meaning making, and meaning negotiation across cultures. For example, translating written texts to others involve the use of the mother tongue and working on cultural and linguistic nuances of the involved languages.

Another educational practice that has boosted translation use in another distinct form is translanguaging. The latter refers to the use of a number of linguistic systems of the learner inside the classroom to learn a foreign language. Cen Williams systematically introduced this practice (dual language use) into his teaching of English in Wales within the frame of his PhD research project in the 1980s. Students were, for example, invited to read a text in English, then to discuss its content in Welsh.

Williams' supervisor – Colin Baker – promoted translanguaging and expanded its use. Baker and Wright (2017) propose a comprehensive framework for bilingual education to leverage the learner's full capacities; they point out to the significance of bilingual literacy, cultural awareness, target language support, and translanguaging.

Another prominent advocate of translanguaging is García (2009). García considers translanguaging not only as a pedagogical tool employed to perform well in a foreign language classroom, but also as a social behavior. More specifically, translanguaging is not the simple act of code switching in the classroom, but also the act of communicating dynamically in real life, drawing on a single and mixed language repertoire that encompasses multiple languages.

The theoretical basis of translation provided by the proponents of this instructional strategy is substantiated in practical classroom activities. There are today various language translation activities that could be integrated into bilingual and foreign language instructional materials. Unlike the traditional grammar translation activities, which are exclusively linguistic, more progressive translation activities, are, to use Weschler's (1997) words, 'functional' translation activities. These innovative activities keep up with current foreign language trends that focus on communicative language teaching.

García, and Li (2017), Baker and Wright (2017), and Weschler (1997) provide a rich typology of translation classroom activities. García and Li's activities propose code mixing even within a single written or oral production in order to promote genuine bilingual competencies. For instance, a learner can write a composition in both Spanish and English. Baker and Wright advocate sequential use of translation within one activity, for example, receiving input in English and discussing it in Welsh. As for Weschler, he encourages the use of bilingual activities, for instance, giving the same dialogue to student A in English and to student B in Japanese, then discuss and play it out collaboratively.

This study draws on the translation activities provided by the aforementioned authorities in the field of translation. The innovative translation activities are applied to Algerian public school English language textbooks to see to what extent they are aligned with the new trends in translation use in EFL.

3. Methodology

This study applies content analysis method. It evaluates the alignment of the Algerian EFL textbooks with the new trends in pedagogical translation. In other words, it evaluates the textbooks against a set of translation activities derived from the review of the literature. The aim is look at whether the textbook activities use translation to support English language learning. In line with Tomlinson's (2011) view on content analysis, this study identifies the components of the teaching methodology (learning activities); however, it does not look at their effectiveness. The analysis is restricted to material conceptualization.

The textbook analysis used the following sample of translation tasks as indicators of the use of pedagogical translation in the teaching framework of the Algerian EFL textbooks:

- Input in one language and output in another
- Oscillating between languages within a single activity
- Bilingual/multilingual texts
- Bilingual/multilingual glossaries
- Preliminary work in L1 (e.g., brainstorming a writing topic in L1)
- Summarizing contents of lessons in L1 and L2
- Contrastive analysis between L1 and L2
- Translating passages from one language to another
- Translanguaging information activities (e.g., information-gap and jigsaw activities)
- Practicing grammar through translation

The evaluation criteria presented above are overarching labels for unlimited number of translation activities; they are synthesized from the works of prominent advocates of translation use in EFL, namely, García, and Li (2017), Baker and Wright (2017), Weschler (1997), and Kerr (2014).

The Algerian textbooks that were analyzed encompass all the English language course books used in public schools. They include two primary school textbooks (*My Book of English: Primary School Year 3/ Year 4*), four middle school textbooks *(My Book of English: Year 1/Year 2/Year 3/Year 4)*, and three secondary school textbooks *(At the Crossroads/Getting through/ and New Prospects)*. These books are all written by Algerian teachers, inspectors, and university teachers.

The analysis of the textbooks was carried out through careful readings of the textbooks and the application of translation activity labels to relevant data. Additionally, frequency counts (how often activities appear across units and sequences?) was done to help identify the most common translation activities. Semantic differential scale with a continuum of *'existence - - - Non-existence'* was implemented. The rater can mark data between two extremes,

allowing to approximately gauge the frequency of themes or patterns. Additionally, According to Dornyei (2007), this scaling measure allows the accurate measure of the presence or absence of certain specific characteristics in the object of study when there are no clear categories.

4. Results

The following table presents the findings from the content analysis of the Algerian EFL textbooks.

Table1:

Results from Textbook Analyses

Item	Existence	–	–	–	Non-existence
Input in one language and output in another				✓	
Oscillating between languages within a single activity					✓
Bilingual/multilingual texts					✓
Bilingual/multilingual glossaries	✓				
Preliminary work in L1 (e.g. brainstorming)		✓			
Summarizing contents of lessons in L1 and L2					✓
Contrastive analysis between L1 and L2		✓			
Translating passages from one language to another				✓	
Translanguaging information activities (e.g., information-gap and jigsaw activities)					✓
Practicing grammar through translation					✓

The findings indicate that the textbooks do not satisfactorily adhere to translation pedagogies. Most of the activities specified in the content analysis grid (such as use of translation-functional activities) are not utilised. Nevertheless, some translation exercises, though few and tentative, are incorporated into the textbook teaching frameworks. The textbooks use Arabic input to facilitate understanding contents, incorporate bilingual/multilingual glossaries, and propose contrastive analysis between English and French.

5. Discussion

The use of translanguaging activities is still fairly ignored in the Algerian EFL textbooks. There are no activities that encourage, for instance, oscillating between English and Arabic; besides, there are a few activities that provide input in the mother tongue and encourage production in the target language. Only one task, for example, in the first-year middle school textbook provides input in Arabic. Students are given classroom regulations in Arabic, and they are asked to write about them in English.

Similarly, a single exercise is employed in the third-year primary school textbook (page 24) to capitalize on L1 content. The exercise gives the names of school subjects in Arabic and invites students to match them with their corresponding English words. Cen Williams

31

initiated this pedagogical strategy in Welsh schools (García, & Li, 2017, p. 20) to enable students better understand content and, consequently, focus on communication turns and skills in the target language.

Moreover, the textbooks do not use translanguaging communicative activities. This strong asset of translation should be exploited to facilitate communication among students. Weschler (1997) considers the provision of comprehensible input in the target language (using L1) as far more advantageous than incomprehensible contents. Apparently, the monolingual approach is still dictating the EFL teaching methodologies.

The most remarkable translation syllabus specification involved in almost all the textbooks under consideration is the use of bilingual (Arabic/English) and trilingual glossaries (Arabic/French/English). The glossaries are placed at the end of the book; they include the most common words covered in instructional units. This specification is probably supported by the students who usually write equivalents of English words in French and Arabic.

Another translation exercise integrated into the first-year secondary school textbook, *At the Crossroads*, is contrastive analysis. A table is presented, highlighting the differences in the pronunciations of French and English words like 'Table' and 'Orange'. The intended purpose is to raise learners' awareness about the differences in the pronunciation of false cognates. Another pronunciation activity in the same textbook asks the students about which consonants they do not have in their language.

The other type of language component tapped at through translation activities is vocabulary. The second-year secondary school textbook, for instance, asks students how they call 'twin towns' in their language. This practice is crucial for not only learning the target language, but also the mother tongue. According to García, and Li (2017), one of the chief aims of translanguaging is the development of bilingual competence, that is, the learning of all the linguistic systems available in the classroom. This emerging tendency in the Algerian books is further reinforced by an activity in the first-year secondary school textbook that asks the meaning of the French abbreviation R.S.V.P (Répondez s'il vous plait) which means '*can you answer, please?*'. These results concur with the findings of Lahiouel (2013) who investigates the use of translation in the former English language textbooks (p.43). He points out that there were activities that ask students to translate English words into their language. This practice is gaining popularity in Algerian textbooks.

In summation, the Algerian public school EFL textbooks slightly use translation activities and resources; additionally, the translation activities, used so far, are tentative and linguistically driven. Nevertheless, translation use in the textbooks is becoming accepted and normalized.

6. Conclusion

Translation is gaining prominence within foreign language teaching/learning frameworks. However, its use has underwent profound modification in comparison to its initial GTM's format. The aim of translation is no longer limited to the mastery of language per se; rather it is more related to communicative and functional aspects of languages. Several protagonists of translation have developed communicative-translation activities that could enhance and speed up foreign language learning, and texts designers are already considering translation as a legitimate language teaching technique. Still more, some fervent advocates (García, 2009) of translation attempt to develop bilingual competencies, that is, a unified competency that integrates and uses languages readily not only in a classroom, but also in social contexts.

The application of the translation typologies of instructional activities indicate that Algerian public school EFL teaching materials are still a long way from using translation more acceptably. Only a few activities are integrated into the textbooks; besides, most of these activities are linguistically-driven (such as the inclusion of bilingual glossaries), rather than functional. Consequently, huge efforts are needed employ translation technique for boosting communication skills and bilingual or multilingual competencies, which are nowadays validated by prestigious educational organizations such as the Council of Europe.

Nevertheless, the resistance of stakeholders might obstruct evolution in the teaching theories. The old representation of translation is considered inappropriate and undesirable, and the new version of translation might be unfamiliar to teachers, students, and parents. Consequently, it is imperative to familiarize teachers with the new translation techniques and display how this new instructional methodology could facilitate foreign language processing.

Future studies could look at teachers' and teacher trainers' familiarity with the new trends in translation use. They could be shown samples of innovative translation activities and asked to express their opinions towards them. This survey could unveil their readiness to embrace more progressive pedagogies and challenge potential wrong mindsets toward translation that have been cherished since the downfall of GTM.

References

Arab, S. A., Riche, B., & Bensemmane, M. (2007). *New prospects: Secondary school education-year three.* ONPS, El Achour.

Asselah-Rahal, S., Blanchet, P., & Méfidène, T. (2007). *Plurilinguisme et enseignement des langues en Algérie : Rôles du français en contexte didactique.* EME & Inter Communications.

Bahumaid, S. (2009). The use of translation tasks for integrating intercultural content in TEFL course books: A case study. *University of Sharjah*: United Arab Emirates

Baker, C. & Wright, W. E. (2017). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Multilingual matters.* Multilingual Matters.

Bouazid, T., Samara, A., & Boukri, N. (2017). *My book of English, middle school, year three.* Casbah-Editions.

Boukri, N., Chenni, D, & Smara, A. (2019). *My book of English, middle school, year four.* Casbah-Editions.

Charit, S., and Zitouni, M. (2023). *My book of English: 4PS.* ONPS.

Cook, G. (2010). *Translation in language teaching: An argument for reassessment.* Oxford University Press.

Dorneiy, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies.* Oxford University Press.

García, O. (2009) Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In A.K. Mohanty, M. Panda, R. Phillipson and T. SkutnabbKangas (eds) *Multilingual education for social Justice: Globalising the loca*l. Orient Black Swan.

García, O., & Li, A. M. (2017). Translanguaging in bilingual education. *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, 117-130.

Kerr, P. (2014). *Translation and own-language activities.* Cambridge University Press.

Hammoudi, A., Boukri, N. Smara, A. (2016). *My book of English, middle school, year 1.* ENAG-Editions.

Howatt, A. (1984). *A history of English language teaching.* Oxford

Lahiouel, A. (2013). Translation exercises in the Algerian English school textbooks: A worth or a hurt? *El-Tawassol : Langues, Culture et Littérature*, 33, 38-49.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching.* Cambridge University Press.

Riche, B., Arab, S. A., Bensemmane, M., Ameziane, H., Hami, H. (2006). *Getting through*: *secondary education*: *Year 2*. ONPS, El Achour.

Riche, B., Arab, S. A., Ameziane, H., Hami, H., & Louadj, K. (2006). *AT the crossroads*. Secondary education: Year one- teacher's book. ONPS, El Achour.

Tamrabet, L., & Chenni, A. (2022). *My book of English: Primary school year three*. ONPS.

Thornbury, S. (2017). *Scott Thornbury's 30 language-teaching methods*: *Cambridge handbooks for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (2011). *Materials development in language teaching* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Trim, J. L. M., Coste, D., & North, B. (2001). Common European framework of reference: Learning, teaching, and assessment. Council of Europe. Language Policy Unit.

Weschler, R. (1997). Uses of Japanese in the English classroom: Introducing the functional-translation method. *Kyoritsu Women's University Department of International Studies Journal*, 12, 87-110.