



Translation, intercultural communication and German as a foreign language

Accesses, application possibilities, curricular approach

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ภาษาเยอรมันในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ: การเข้าถึง โอกาสนำไปใช้
และการพัฒนาหลักสูตร**

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Abstract

The debate on translation in foreign language teaching is grounded in a long tradition going back to the grammar translation method. This teaching method aimed essentially to develop translation skills. To achieve this, the foreign language learner had to translate sentences and texts into and out of the target language and be hence able to show that he/she had understood the lexical structures and grammar rules of the foreign language and could put them to practical use, independent of context. The first language was the reference system in the acquisition of the foreign language. The opposition to the grammar translation method led to the next teaching methods, such as the direct method and the audiolingual method, to the abandoning of the first language and thus also translation in the acquisition of the foreign language. However, since the 1970s there has been an increasing debate on the purpose of translation in foreign language teaching and learning. Concerning German as a foreign language as a more recent academic discipline there has been little debate on the subject.

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Therefore this research work attempts to discuss the roles that translation plays in the process of teaching and learning German as a foreign language in the context of globalisation and interculturality. On the basis of this discussion, the present work is looking at possibilities for integrating the results of the analysis in the classroom and the curriculum of teaching and learning German as a foreign language in a homogenous learning context.

Keywords: translation; culture; intercultural communication; German as a foreign language

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาประเด็นการแปลในบริบทการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศเป็นชนบทที่สืบทอดกันมาอย่างยาวนาน โดยมีจุดเริ่มต้นจากวิธีการสอนแบบเน้นไวยากรณ์และการแปล วิธีการนี้ตั้งเป้าหมายที่จะพัฒนาทักษะด้านการแปลไว้ว่า ในการแปลทั้งการแปลให้เป็นภาษาต่างประเทศและการแปลมาจากภาษาต่างประเทศนั้น ผู้เรียนจะต้องสามารถแสดงให้เห็นได้ว่า ผู้เรียนเข้าใจ และสามารถนำกฎเกณฑ์ไวยากรณ์และโครงสร้างทางคำศัพท์ของภาษาต่างประเทศนั้น ๆ ไปใช้ได้ โดยไม่ต้องอาศัยบริบท กระแสวิพากษ์วิจารณ์วิธีการสอนแบบเน้นไวยากรณ์และการแปล ได้นำไปสู่การหันหลังให้กับภาษาแม่และการแปลไปโดยปริยายในการเรียนการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศในเวลาต่อมา ดังจะเห็นได้จากวิธีการสอนแบบใช้ภาษาต่างประเทศสอนโดยตรง และวิธีสอนแบบฟังและพูด/ฟังและดูภาพ เป็นต้น อย่างไรก็ตาม ตั้งแต่ช่วง ค.ศ. 1970 เป็นต้นมา มีการตั้งประเด็นคำถามเกี่ยวกับความหมายและบทบาทของการแปลในบริบทของการเรียนการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศมากขึ้นเป็นลำดับ โดยเป็นคำถามที่ไม่ได้เกี่ยวข้องกับเรื่องการแปลในฐานะเป็นเครื่องมือช่วยในการสอนภาษาและไม่เกี่ยวกับแบบฝึกฝนการแปลเพื่อใช้ในการตรวจสอบทักษะทางภาษาทั่ว ๆ ไปแต่อย่างใด หากเป็นประเด็นเกี่ยวกับการพิจารณาการแปลในฐานะเป็นเครื่องมือสื่อสาร (ข้ามวัฒนธรรม) ทั้งในด้านส่วนตัวและด้านอาชีพในโลกยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ และวัฒนธรรมข้ามชาติ เพื่อเตรียมความพร้อมให้ผู้เรียนสามารถประยุกต์ใช้ภาษาต่างประเทศได้



ในสถานการณ์จริง ด้วยเหตุนี้ จึงจำเป็นที่จะต้องให้คำจำกัดความการแปลในการเรียนการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศขึ้นมาใหม่ ซึ่งตลอดเวลาที่ผ่านมามีการพูดถึงประเด็นนี้เลยในสาขาวิชาภาษาเยอรมันในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ดังนั้น งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงเป็นความพยายามที่จะอุดช่องโหว่ทางวิชาการและวิจัยที่เกิดขึ้น ทั้งนี้จะมุ่งศึกษาผู้เรียนภาษาเยอรมันเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในระดับอุดมศึกษาในสภาพการเรียนรู้ที่ทุกคนพูดภาษาแม่เดียวกันเป็นสำคัญ

คำสำคัญ: การแปล; การสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม; ภาษาเยอรมันในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ; วัฒนธรรม

Introduction

Dealing with the translation in the context of foreign language didactics is rooted in a long tradition which goes back to the grammar translation method. This teaching method, in which the learner's native language plays an important role, aimed essentially to develop translation skills. To achieve this, the foreign language learner had to translate sentences and texts into and out of the target language and was thus able to show that he/she had understood the grammar rules and lexical structures of the foreign language and could put them to practical use, independent of context. The opposition to the grammar translation

method led to the next teaching methods, such as the direct method and the audio-lingual method, to the abandoning of the first language and thus also translation in foreign language study. However, since the 1970s there has been an increasing debate on the purpose of translation in foreign language didactics (cf. Königs, 1993, ⁴2006).

My purpose in this paper is to basically reflect on the role of translation in teaching and researching German as a foreign language abroad. The paper is part of a research project that is currently underway at Ramkhamhaeng University under my supervision.



A brief review of translation in German as a foreign language

It is well known that the discussion of the role of translation in the more recent academic discipline German as a foreign language is still in its early phase. There are many possible reasons, which are – according to the opinion of Königs – attributable among other things to the fact „dass viele methodisch-didaktische Überlegungen für den DaF-Bereich aus Deutschland kamen und damit selten eine bestimmte sprachliche Zielgruppe favorisierten“ (2001, p. 955) However, since the learners of German as a foreign language abroad generally form a homogeneous group with a common L1, it is time in the process of globalisation and the resulting meeting and understanding members from other linguistic and cultural communities to answer the fundamental question concerning the role of translation in teaching and learning German as a foreign language (cf. House, 2001, 2010; Königs, 2000, 2001, 2010). The issue is all the more important as the learning

objectives of German as a foreign language, particularly at university level abroad, are more differentiated. The purpose of German study aims not only to teach German language, but also to open up new career prospects for graduates in the free economy. The challenge is to enable the learners to cope with intercultural communication tasks in everyday life. Furthermore, there is outside the German-language area a lack of appropriate academic training as translator or interpreter for the German language. German as a foreign language could help to fill this gap. To achieve this requires the redefinition of the role of translation in teaching German classes at university level.

Translation as intercultural communication and its relevance for learning German as a foreign language

In the age of globalization and interculturality the German-language classroom at university level is facing new challenges.



The preparation of the learners for steadily growing exchange with the members of other cultural communities places high demands upon the curricula. The aim is among other things to enable the learners to act as a mediator between two cultures. In this sense, greater importance has to be ascribed to translation as a genuine means of intercultural communication (cf. Koller, ⁸2011) – broadly conceptualised as communication between people from different national cultures (cf. Lüsebrink, ²2008) – in teaching and learning German as a foreign language. To this end it must be ensured, however, that translation is a feature of both spoken and written language. Our reflections are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). The reason for this is that, despite of the criticism, the Common European Framework of Reference opens up, in view of the requirement of multilingualism, the description and classification of language competences, new horizons, in order to

adapt foreign language learning to the communication needs of the learners outside the classroom. In that regard, the Common European Framework of Reference distinguishes six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) for measuring what the learners can understand and express in interaction and mediating activities (Tim/North/Coste 2001, p. 35 ff.). Furthermore, in the Common European Framework of Reference the term 'mediation' is used as a generic term to replace the negatively term 'translation' related to the grammar translation method of foreign language teaching. The Common European Framework of Reference explains the term 'mediation' this way:

In mediating activities, the language user is not concerned to express his /her own meanings, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. Examples of mediating activities



include spoken interpretation and written translation as well as summarizing and paraphrasing texts in the same language, when the language of the original text is not understandable to the intended recipient [...]

(2001, p. 89 f.).

This means that there is a move from translation as a means to control foreign language learners' metalinguistic knowledge, i.e. their newly acquired grammatical rules and lexical forms, to translation as intercultural competence and interactional skills (cf. Weissmann, 2012, p. 316). Mediating activities include translating and interpreting (interlingual mediating activities) as well as summarising, paraphrasing and commenting in L2 (intra lingual mediating activities) (cf. Weskamp, 2008, p. 6).

Oral mediating activities are characterised by

- simultaneous interpretation (conferences, meeting, formal speeches, etc.);
- consecutive interpretation (speeches of welcome, guided tours, etc.);

- informal interpretation:

- of foreign visitors in own country
- of native speakers when abroad
- in social and transactional situations for friends, family, clients, foreign guests, etc.
- of signs, menus, notices, etc.

Written mediating activities refer to

- exact translation (e.g. of contracts, legal and scientific texts, etc.);
- literary translation (novels, drama, poetry, libretti, etc.);
- summarizing gist (newspaper and magazine articles etc.) within L2 or between L1 and L2;
- paraphrasing (specialized texts for lay persons, etc.).

Though the terms translation and interpretation are used, in mediation it is absolutely no question of training professional translators and interpreters: it is about finding a way between professional translation and translation as a means to improve the intercultural competence and intercultural



understanding of foreign language learners. Mediation considerably differs from professional translation which requires a very accurate and faithful transfer of a text into another language. Mediation, on the other hand, serves to convey a message or text which is linguistically and culturally understood by the interlocutors. In Möhrle's words:

Sprachmittlung [...] dient dazu, das Wesentliche einer Aussage oder eines Textes einem Gesprächspartner verständlich und für seine Zwecke angemessen zu vermitteln oder eventuell den kulturellen Hintergrund zu erläutern, der für das Verständnis einer Aussage vonnöten ist.

(2008, Editorial)

In the light of the above mentioned, it is clear that mediating activities, unlike the translation exercises in the grammar translation method, focus on the spoken language too and make an effort to simulate authentic communicative experience in L2-classroom.

Although the Common European Framework of Reference doesn't develop a stage model of mediating, it opens up new opportunities for shaping translation in the foreign language didactics and, hence, in the didactics of German as a foreign language .

Towards a competence integrative approach of translation as intercultural communication in German as a foreign language

Mediation is a complex language transfer competence which requires extensive competences beyond linguistic abilities. Accordingly, Hallet (2008) proposes the following basic components: lingual-communicative competence, intercultural competence, interactional competence and strategic and methodological competence.

Lingual-communicative competence.

The user/learner is according to her/his language level in L1 and L2 able to recognise the purpose of the communication, and on that basis, to find out an adequate response to the mediation task (cf. Hallet, 2008, p. 4)



The lingual-communicative competence includes, among others, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence.

Intercultural competence. It reflects the appropriate intercultural awareness of foreign language learners, for example awareness of cultural meaning of words. The intercultural competence includes according to the Common European Framework of Reference

- the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other;

- cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures;

- the capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations;

- the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships.

(2001, p. 104 f.)

Interactional competence. The user/learner is able to deal not only with requirements and particularities regarding a social situation, but also the relationship between the persons who take part in the conversation, the purpose of their communication and interaction, etc. (cf. Hallet, 2008, p. 5).

Strategic and methodological competence. The user/learner is able to anticipate the partner's reactions to one's statements. This competence therefore serves to monitor the mediating activities. The strategic and methodological competence is in the view of Rössler (2009, p. 160 f.) especially linked with oral mediating activities which include raising awareness of social strategies, for example, asking for repetition or clarification, expression of emotions, emphasis, gestures and facial expressions, etc.



The redefinition of translation in teaching German as a foreign language requires a knowledge of and adequate familiarity with this competences.

Application possibilities

In the following section, I will discuss general issues on implementation possibilities of mediating activities for teaching and learning German as a foreign language.

I shall use the model example of Weissmann (2012) as the basis of my reflections. Weissmann has developed on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference and *Profile deutsch* Glaboniat/Müller/Rusch/Schmitz/Wertenschlag (2005, p. 59) a model that enables the application of mediation, particularly at university level. The model divides the 'Can-do' descriptions of spoken and written mediation into four types of activities:

<i>Oral text as target</i>	<i>Written text as target</i>
- mediation towards L1	- mediation towards L1
- mediation towards L2	- mediation towards L2
- intralingual mediation (in L2)	- intralingual mediation (in L2)
- triologue (The learner mediates between L1 and L2)	
<i>Oral text as source</i>	<i>Written text as source</i>
- mediation from L1	- mediation from L1
- mediation from L2	- mediation from L2
- intralingual mediation (in L2)	- intralingual mediation (in L2)
- triologue (The learner mediates between L1 and L2)	



One advantage of this model is that oral and written mediation activities are learned equitably. Another point of advantage is the fact that mediation activities help to simulate authentic communicative situations in everyday life. Furthermore, mediations activities can easily be integrated into a progressive approach to foreign language learning, from level A1 to level C2, and be adapted to learners' linguistic and cultural levels. At university level, literary translation can be introduced at level C2, where the student has a good knowledge of the foreign language. Weissmann explains why this is so important as follows:

Il faut rappeler à cet égard que la traduction écrite de textes littéraires complexes remplit une fonction essentielle pour développer les compétences linguistiques, les capacités d'analyse et l'esprit critique des philologues apprentis. Par conséquent, la version littéraire paraît au demeurant un exercice indispensable pour

sensibiliser les étudiants aux spécificités des textes littéraires, parmi lesquelles le fort accent mis sur les aspects formels, la plurivocité du sens, l'historicité de la langue, etc. Préserver un enseignement de version littéraire ne serait donc pas uniquement la conservation d'un vestige du passé, mais remplirait un réel objectif de formation.

(2012, p. 322)

In summary, it can be said that mediation activities provide opportunities to redefine translation at university level, thus providing that they are a viable solution for the future of foreign languages in a globalising and a culture influenced world. This shall also apply to teaching and learning German as a foreign language.

Conclusion

It appears from the above developments that translation as interlingual and intercultural language actions can be integrated into



teaching and learning German as a foreign language to increase the students' communicative competence. The students are not being trained to become professional translators; the translation courses they take aim to improve their general proficiency in German. This means that translation – as House (1986, p. 190) puts it – “is no longer used as a method with which to teach grammar and lexis of the foreign language integratively, but rather as a technique to train students for interlingual and intercultural communication”. Possible ways to do this include spoken and written mediating activities as underlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.



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