



THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract. This thesis examines translation as a pedagogically regulated activity in foreign language teaching. It treats translation not as a mechanical transfer of isolated words, but as a form of meaning mediation, contrastive analysis and intercultural interpretation. The thesis explains how translation tasks support vocabulary acquisition, grammar awareness, reading comprehension, written production and learner autonomy when they are used selectively and connected with communicative aims. The discussion also defines methodological limits: translation should not replace target-language interaction, pronunciation practice or spontaneous speech development; it should function as one component of an integrated language-teaching system.

Keywords: translation, foreign language teaching, pedagogical translation, mediation, plurilingual competence, contrastive analysis, intercultural communication, vocabulary, grammar.

INTRODUCTION

Translation has occupied an unstable position in the history of foreign language teaching. In the grammar-translation tradition it was commonly linked with memorization, rule explanation and the rendering of sentences from one language into another. Later, direct, audio-lingual and communicative approaches criticized such practice because it often reduced oral interaction, encouraged dependence on the first language and placed accuracy above communicative use. This criticism was justified when translation was treated as the only teaching method. However, the complete removal of translation from the language classroom produced another methodological imbalance, because multilingual learners naturally compare languages and use previous linguistic experience to understand new meanings.

Recent language pedagogy has moved from a monolingual ideal toward a plurilingual understanding of communication. The CEFR Companion Volume gives particular importance to mediation, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and the learner's role as a social agent who makes meaning accessible to others [1]. This approach creates a more precise place for translation in foreign language teaching. Translation is not identical with old sentence drills; it can be organized as a task in which learners interpret content, select contextually adequate linguistic forms, adapt information for a recipient and justify their choices. The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Education also shows that translation is now studied as an educational practice connected with language learning, professional communication and intercultural competence [2].



The purpose of this thesis is to determine the pedagogical functions and limitations of translation in foreign language teaching. The central question is not whether translation should be used in every lesson, but under what conditions it contributes to language development. The thesis proceeds from the following assumption: translation is effective when it is purposeful, level-appropriate, text-based and assessed according to meaning, register, coherence and communicative adequacy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The thesis is based on theoretical and methodological analysis rather than classroom experiment. The material consists of recent scholarly and institutional sources on translation in language education, mediation and plurilingual pedagogy. Foundational but outdated items were excluded from the final reference list in order to keep the bibliography consistent with current discussions. The selected sources include the CEFR Companion Volume, a contemporary handbook on translation and education, a peer-reviewed study on the boundaries between pedagogical translation and code-switching, the METLA teaching guide for language educators, and a 2024 study on pedagogic mediation in the foreign language classroom.

The descriptive method was applied to define translation as a classroom activity. The comparative method distinguished pedagogical translation from code-switching and informal use of the first language. The functional-pragmatic method evaluated tasks according to purpose, audience, context and genre. Pintado Gutiérrez's discussion of conceptual boundaries is relevant because it separates general language alternation from translation tasks with a clear source text, target text and reflective procedure [3].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that translation can perform five interrelated pedagogical functions in foreign language teaching. The first function is lexical development. Translation obliges learners to notice that words do not have stable one-to-one equivalents. Meaning depends on context, collocation, register and communicative situation. For example, the English verb make changes its rendering in combinations such as make a decision, make a mistake, make money and make someone happy. A translation task therefore helps learners see vocabulary as a system of contextual choices rather than a list of dictionary equivalents. This is particularly useful for academic and professional language learning, where precision and genre awareness are required.

The second function is grammar awareness. Many grammatical categories in English do not correspond directly to categories in another language. Tense forms, determiners, modal verbs, passive constructions and fixed word order may require explanation through comparison. Translation allows learners to observe how the same meaning can be expressed by different grammatical means. Such comparison reduces literal transfer, because students learn that formal similarity does not always guarantee semantic or pragmatic accuracy. A well-designed translation task therefore works as a metalinguistic exercise: it develops conscious control over form without isolating form from meaning.





The third function concerns reading comprehension and written production. When learners translate a text, they must identify the main idea, internal logic, cohesive devices, implicit meanings and stylistic features before producing the target version. This process is deeper than answering short comprehension questions, because translation requires full reconstruction of meaning. In written production, students must also manage coherence, punctuation, word order, terminology and register. Translation into the target language strengthens productive accuracy, while translation from the target language develops interpretive competence and the ability to express information clearly in another linguistic system.

The fourth function is mediation. In real communication, language users often need to explain information from one language to another: summarizing instructions, clarifying a notice, reformulating academic content, helping a peer understand a message or adapting information for a different audience. Such activity corresponds to the mediation perspective described in contemporary European language education. The METLA guide emphasizes that mediation tasks should have a clear context, a defined recipient, a communicative purpose and opportunities for reflection after task completion [4]. This means that translation in the classroom should not be limited to checking correct equivalents; it should require learners to ask who needs the information, why it is being transferred and what form will make it understandable.

The fifth function is intercultural competence. Languages contain culture-specific politeness formulas, forms of address, idioms, metaphors and conventional ways of requesting, apologizing and expressing gratitude. Literal translation may preserve lexical meaning but distort social intention. For that reason, learners must compare not only linguistic forms but also cultural norms. Pedagogic mediation research identifies the teacher's role in organizing learning, communication and sociocultural interaction in the foreign language classroom [5]. Translation supports these three dimensions when learners analyze why one version sounds natural and another version is grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate.

The results also indicate that translation has clear methodological limits. It should not dominate lessons focused on pronunciation, listening fluency or spontaneous oral production. If every utterance is translated, learners may delay direct processing in the target language. Translation must therefore be balanced with speaking, listening, discussion, role play, project work and independent reading. Its use is justified when the objective is semantic precision, contrastive awareness, mediation, writing quality or intercultural interpretation. The teacher should formulate the purpose of the task before giving the text; otherwise translation can easily become a mechanical exercise.

CONCLUSION

Translation has a legitimate but carefully limited role in foreign language teaching. It supports vocabulary acquisition, grammar awareness, text comprehension, written production, mediation and intercultural competence. Its value lies not in returning to the grammar-





translation method, but in using translation as a reflective, communicative and context-sensitive activity. When learners compare languages, interpret meanings and justify choices, they develop more precise linguistic judgment.

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