

Task-based Approach in Teaching Translation: A Case Study in Jouf University

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Abstract

Task-based approach is commonly used in second language teaching and it has been adopted in translation teaching too. However, driven by the lack of studies on task-based approach in translation especially in the very early stages of teaching translation, Saudi universities are no exception, this study focuses on the significance of implementing this approach in teaching the first practical translation course in a translation academic programme. It mainly examines the development of translation competence through task-based approach. A case study at English language department in Jouf University has been carried out where 39 students were taught using this method in their first practical translation course. Li's (2013) customized model, namely task-based teaching in translation, is adopted here and the tasks were specifically selected to develop students' translation competence in general and their bilingual competence in particular. The results drawn from this study found tangible development of students' translation competence as well as bilingual competence.

Keywords: task-based approach, translator training, translation competence, teaching method

1. Introduction

Choosing an effective method in teaching has not always been a simple task especially when there are a number of good teaching methods. It is always up to the instructor to adopt the method that he or she believes is appropriate to the students. In translation teaching, there is a variety of teaching methods that are practised by instructors. Some adopts one method in one stage and changes the method based on students' levels while others use a combination of methods throughout the journey of teaching translation. Process-based approach (Tirkkonen-Condit, 1989; Königs, 1996; Jääskeläinen, 1987; Lörcher, 1992; Gile, 1995, 2009), product-based approach (Atarti, 2005; Al-Mijrab, 2005), social constructivist (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993; Kiraly, 2000, 2003; Rosas, 2004; Gouadec, 2007; Pym, 2009; Baumgarten, Klimkowski and Sullivan, 2010) and task-based approach (Albir, 1996, 1999, 2007; Davies, 2003, 2004; Kelly, 2007) are all well-known in translation teaching. However, it is important to choose the suitable teaching approach that serve best in developing students' skills and their knowledge in a certain course. Also, there are effective teaching approaches for students, who are at early levels of their education, and other approaches for students who have reached an advanced level. For example, Gile (1995) has advocated using process-oriented approach in the early stages of teaching which focuses on the learning process itself rather than the outcome.

2. The Task-based Approach in Language Teaching

Another interesting approach is the task-based approach which was firstly brought into language teaching by Candlin (1987) and the idea was to shift the focus of students when learning a language towards the task they are working on to develop their language skills. A number of models for task-based approach were developed (see Willis & Willis, 1987; Nunan, 2004; Sekhan, 1998), but the most frequently used model was introduced by Willis (1996) which consisted of three stages, namely, pre-task (preparatory activities prior the task to familiarize students with the intended task), task (the main task which students work on with the teacher as a facilitator) and post-task (students report their feedback on the task for the purpose of sharing and development of skills).

3. The Task-based Approach in Translation Teaching

As far as translation teaching is concerned, this approach was firstly advocated and applied in translation teaching by Albir (1999) though a lack of empirical studies on using task-based approach in translation still

exists where the most recent ones were in 2012 (see Li, 2013; Rezvani, 2012).

As for task-based approach in translation, which is what this paper examines, translation task refers to “a unit of work in the classroom, representative of translation practice, formally directed towards learning how to translate and designed with a specific objective, structure and sequence” (Ablir, 1996 cited in Sachinis, 2011). The process of dividing the learning process of translation competence into the right translation tasks is important stage as these tasks decide what students will learn. According to Davies (2004), translation tasks should be based on clear learning outcomes. Therefore, selecting appropriate text for students to develop certain translation competences is significant step in this approach. There are a number of advantages for adopting this approach which are: (a) simulating real world tasks, authentic sometimes, (b) grasping principles and acquiring solve-problems strategies (Albir, 2007).

A number of studies examined using the task-based approach in translation in different translation areas such as business (Li 2013). However, there is no empirical study in translation teaching investigated using task-based approach in teaching students in the very early stages of learning how to translate. Therefore, this study examines the application of task-based approach specifically to learners who are considered to be beginners in translation. Li (2013) has customized the cycle of task-based teaching proposed by Willis (1996) to suit translation as shown in table 1.

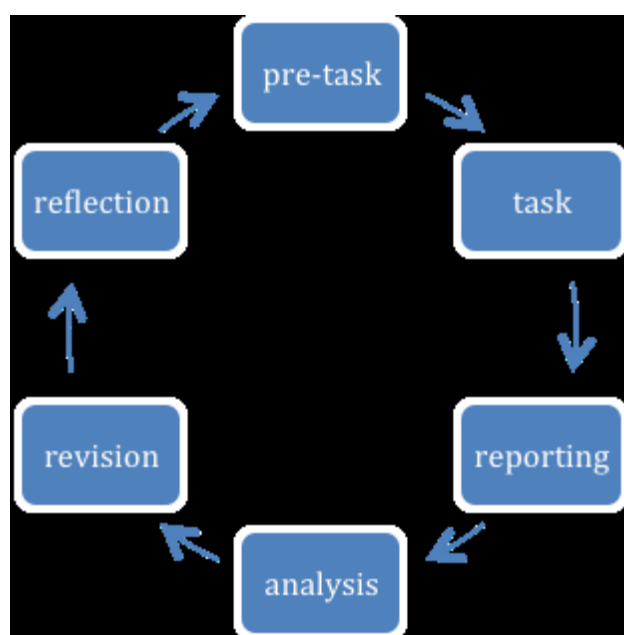


Figure 1. Cycle of Task-Based Teaching in Translation (Li 2013)

The above model suggests that the task-based approach in translation needs to go through 6 stages in order it can work effectively. These stages are the following:

3.1 Pre-task Stage

In this stage the teacher should provide instructions for students to follow, examines the terms and conditions for that work, remind students of translation strategies, methods and techniques they have learned and provide them with the resources they need. It is important that the involvement of the teacher is kept very limited in order students can rely on themselves and develop their skills autonomously.

The students should study the terms and conditions of the translation work (developing translation knowledge competence), think about useful resources (instrumental competence), read thoroughly in the TL and SL to get a good understanding of the subject (bilingual competence), identify relevant terminologies (extra-linguistic competence) and decide which strategy and technique to choose (strategic competence).

3.2 Task Stage

The teacher is merely a facilitator. The students work on the tasks in pairs or groups (bilingual, strategic and psycho-physical competences), search for necessary knowledge and resources (competence of instruments and

extra-linguistics) and communicate with the client for clarifications (competence of translation knowledge).

3.3 Reporting

The teacher organizes the groups and can provide feedback on their translations and the processes of translation. The students reflect on their translation processes, summarize their translation problems and solutions etc. (translation knowledge competence) and work with each other to ensure consistency of translation (developing strategic competence).

3.4 Analysis

The instructor determines intended learning objectives through the task and he or she discusses and analyses parts of the task. The students and the teacher do a sound analysis of some translations (developing the competence of translation knowledge).

3.5 Revision

The instructor provides assistance to students through revision and edition of the task the task and may provide assistance to enhance the quality of the work. The teacher can help in the final assessment of the translation. The students revise and edit their translations based on the feedback from the analysis (translation knowledge competence) and assess, finalize and produce the translation.

3.6 Reflection

The instructor reflects on the entire process of translation from a pedagogical perspective and writes useful notes for future teaching. The students reflect on project management, implementation of translation plans, quality and communication with the client as well as the translation problems and what solutions and strategies they used (translation knowledge competence).

4. Method

This study took place in English department at Jouf University, Saudi Arabia in December 2019. The department offers an English Language Undergraduate Degree and one of the courses a student takes is “Introduction to Translation” which consists of two main parts, firstly, the theoretical part which introduces students to the definition, types and methods of translation, and secondly, the practical part. The significance of choosing this course in particular to use task-based approach lies in its being the first course a student takes in translation where he or she has not grasped a lot of skills in translation so that the examined teaching approach in this study can be evaluated and the progress students will make can be noticeable. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of adopting this method in translation in general and for students who just started to learn about translation in particular, taking the development of translation competence in general, which includes translation knowledge competence, extra-linguistic competence, strategic competence, psycho-physical competence, instrumental competence and bilingual competence. Also, it aims to take the development of bilingual competence in particular, which includes the ability to use both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), in understanding the text.

The task-based approach here involves the students to practice the translation, so the study has commenced when the students finished the theoretical part of the translation course in the 5th week, and are expected to start the practical translation for the remaining 9 weeks.

Li (2013) affirms that selecting a particular text is significant in securing the intended learning outcomes. An important factor for selecting this text is to secure that the ground for intended learning outcomes (i.e. developing translation competence including bilingual competence) is available in this text. Therefore, the students were given texts in English in different fields of knowledge containing a variety linguistic features and that require good bilingual competence to understand and translate them into the TL. The texts are selected to challenge students’ skills and knowledge and improve students’ bilingual competence along with other components of translation competence. The students were distributed in 8 groups, each group consists of 5 students except for one group consisting of 4 students due to lack of 1 more students, to translate the texts from English into Arabic taking into account the different linguistic features of each language.

Li (2013) also recommends using authentic text for the task-based approach especially for students in advanced levels, but the text adopted here is not authentic for several reasons. Firstly, this is the first course in translation for students in their programme and inevitably they are not expected to achieve authentic translation work for a client. Secondly, having selected texts gives the space to the teacher to tailor the text to focus on the translation competence which her or she wishes to focus on. Nevertheless, using authentic texts for students who are at an advanced level creates an authentic atmosphere for students to experience the challenges of the translation

profession which positively results in enhancing their competences.

At the beginning of each class, the participants were given an overview of the text, what they are expected to do and what resources they can use (dictionaries, encyclopaedia, terminologies database, search engines, word assisting tools, documentary resources etc.) to assist them in the tasks. A review on the translation methods and techniques, which were discussed at the early classes of this course, was also given to students to prepare them for the task. I was present with the students to act as a facilitator whenever a group needed help to some extent such as giving feedback on a suggested translation or on the process of translating or how to use the resources. I was also observing the participants performance and recording any progress they make in every stage. During the translation, students were given the chance to discuss the way they process translation and the problems they encountered and what solutions did they use. In every class, the groups were re-organized to ensure that students work with different classmates, so that they do not repeat the same experience and share various techniques in dealing with the issues they face while translating.

After all groups completed their translations in every class, we analyse every text and discuss the difficulties they faced, the most challenging part, the strategies and solution they opted for and the experience they have been through. During the 9 weeks, the translations of the 8 groups were collected and analysed to find out the progress of students' translation competence in general and their bilingual competence in particular.

5. Results and Discussion

The observed findings of the study will be discussed along with selected examples of students' translations. In the assessment of students' translation problems, Mathieu's (2003) theory of translation problems being five, namely, Grammatical, lexical-semantic, pragmatic, Rhetorical and cultural problems, has been used in the analysis. If the same mistake found in the translation of two or more groups, it will be counted as 1 mistake.

Table 1. Frequency of Translation Mistakes Committed by Participants

Problems	Grammatical	Lexical-semantic	Pragmatic	Rhetorical	Cultural
<i>Week 1</i>	31	56	19	9	5
<i>Week 2</i>	19	46	11	5	2
<i>Week 3</i>	17	41	8	5	2
<i>Week 4</i>	15	39	6	7	1
<i>Week 5</i>	13	33	6	4	0
<i>Week 6</i>	10	27	3	2	0
<i>Week 7</i>	11	25	2	1	0
<i>Week 8</i>	8	22	0	1	0
<i>Week 9</i>	6	19	2	1	0

Firstly, the results of analyzing the translations in table 1 shows a general progress of students' translation competence. This is attributed to the task-based approach in translation which gives the students the opportunity to develop their competences and provides the teacher with the means to work on this development. It was found that the way the teacher approaches the students when applying this approach is a key component in the success of this approach. During the discussions, it was deliberate to provide students with particular hints, explanations, examples and key solutions that drive them to develop their competence rather than do a one-task. Instructor's intervention plays a crucial role in the task-based approach as it can have significant effect on students. However, at the same time, it can result in a failure of this approach if not dealt with adequately. The teacher's intervention should stimulate students to develop their competences in which he or she should not be giving direct answers to students' questions rather answers that drive students to seek further knowledge and solutions to problems. In other words, the answer should not be a fulfillment to their need but rather motivates them to seek further knowledge (i.e. developing their translation competence).

The following is a discussion of results in the five areas provided with examples of translation mistakes in every area committed by the groups along with strategies and solutions.

5.1 Grammatical Issues

It is clearly noticed that the number of grammatical mistakes has sharply decreased among students by the 9th week though it was significantly high at the beginning of the 1st week. They were faced with a number of different tenses, word orders, word forms plurality and even different type of sentences across the two languages. An example of dealing with students' mistakes in this area is the following:

ST: The stocks have sharply fallen because the UK government took economic reforms.

TT: الأسهم انخفضت نظراً لأن الحكومة البريطانية اتخذت إصلاحات اقتصادية

The ordinary word order of a sentence in English is subject followed by a verb and then an object or complement, but, unlike English verbal sentences, the sentences in Arabic language can be either verbal or nominal. A verbal sentence normally starts with a verb followed by a doer then an object while a nominal sentence starts with a subject then a predicate. The students asked the facilitator how to deal with the above issue, they were not given straightforward answers that curb their critical thinking and development of their bilingual competence, instead, they were given answers that stimulate their thinking. They were answered with an explanation that English sentences are verbal and Arabic language followed by an emphasis that the translation must adhere to the target language features and rules. They were also given rules such as “Do not translate the grammar, focus on the meaning, use TL grammar when you translate from English” in response to their question about translating different tenses, which was effective to curb students’ questions to the facilitator and discuss it with each other to reach a solution. The above example of translating one sentence was discussed with them showing how to deal with present perfect tense in English when translated into Arabic by adding a word “قد” (meaning already) before the verb, which needs accuracy in delivering the appropriate tense. They were also informed that they can start the sentence with a verb or a noun as they are both acceptable in Arabic grammar.

It can be said that students’ translation knowledge competence gradually develops in accordance with the development of their bilingual competence. The increase in their knowledge of grammatical differences between the two languages adds up to their translation knowledge competence by finding solutions to grammatical issues (development of strategic competence too).

5.2 Lexical and Semantic Issues

It can be seen the progress students made by week 9 with regards to the number of lexical and semantic mistakes they made during the period of the study. This is an indicator of the development of extra-linguistic competence among participants which reflects on to the development of their translation competence. An example of dealing with mistakes in this area is the following:

ST: People save their money for a rainy day

TT: يحافظ الأشخاص على أموالهم في الأيام الممطرة

One group of participants committed a mistake by translating the idiom “rainy day” as literal as “rainy day”. They were not aware of the hidden meaning of this idiom and was translated inaccurately. While analyzing the text with the students, they were advised to search for the meaning and the usage of this idiom in the dictionary or other resources, which motivates to develop their instrumental competence in finding out the meaning of new terminologies or expressions.

5.3 Cultural Issues

The students’ first text contained the highest number of cultural issues and it is clear that their translations did not consider the culture of the TL. However, the following texts contained few numbers of cultural issues and it can be seen that the participants became more aware of this issue. The development of students’ translation competence with regards to cultural differences is considered to be significant in comparison with the results in other factors as the students achieved no mistakes in the later weeks.

ST: Michael’s girlfriend won the race.

TT: صديقة مايكل فازت بالسباق

A group of students translated the above example as it is into Arabic language without considering the culture of target audience, where the term “girlfriend” does not exist and is considered a taboo in the target culture. The first cultural problem the students face gave the facilitator the floor to explain the issue of target audience and domesticating the text (see Nida, 1993) to suit the culture of the target audience (developing their strategic competence). They were also advised to read about the domestication and foreignization theories in translation (developing their translation knowledge competence).

5.4 Rhetorical Issues

Although the rhetorical expressions in the texts were not high in comparison with other issues, it is clear that the progress of students in this area is notable by week 9. The rate of mistakes committed by students increased in week 4 reaching to 7 mistakes and this can be due to the text given to them in that week which contained a large number of rhetorical expressions than other texts. The following is an example of group’s mistakes:

ST: A passenger flies from London to Paris in 1 and half hour.

TT: يطير المسافر من لندن إلى باريس خلال ساعة ونصف

A group gave the above translation which is inaccurate as it literally indicates, in Arabic language, that the passenger physically flies by himself or herself, which is not the case. Although they understood the meaning, they did not produce an acceptable translation in the TL that delivers the intended meaning. Therefore, an explanation of how to interpret pragmatic expressions into the target language and avoid literal translation was given. This example was discussed while analysing the texts with all groups and all groups proposed a good translation “تستغرق الرحلة من لندن إلى باريس ساعة ونصف”.

5.5 Pragmatic Issues

Participants' pragmatic mistakes have gradually decreased after the first week as they became more aware to avoid translating word for word or literal translation which does not deliver the meaning in many cases. The following is an example of a pragmatic issue in one of the texts:

ST: The pedestrians sometimes break the law when they walked on cars lanes.

TT: يكسر المشاة القانون بعض الأحيان عندما يسيرون على المسارات الخاصة بالسيارات.

One group translated the expression “break the law” literally into the TL which left the sentence in the TT unidiomatic. This issue was brought into discussion by all groups and it was explained how it is important to consider the pragmatic aspect when translating. An agreement on the word “يخالف” meaning ‘go against’ instead of “يكسر” was reached. This contributes to the development of students' bilingual competence in identifying linguistic features of the texts and transferring their meanings accurately into the TL.

It was also found that the number of questions facilitator about linguistic issues such as tenses, word order, sentence structure, terminologies, etc. in the ST and translation was high at the first 5 weeks, but as students progress in translation, they started to rely on themselves and use available resources (development of instrumental competence).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of few studies that examined using task-based approach in teaching translation and it focused mainly on teaching translation to students, who are at the very early stages of learning translation. The study has shown tangible development of students' translation competence including bilingual competence. Translation knowledge competence, instrumental competence, bilingual competence, extra-linguistic competence and strategic competence all contribute to the development of the translation competence of students who are significantly needed to be taken into consideration when designing and selecting translation tasks. The selection of tasks that stimulate students to develop their own translation competences. The task given to students gave them a responsibility to translate using available resources and not relying on the instructor every time they face a problem. It also introduced them to a number of tools and strategies that can assist them in their translation. It was also seen that the teacher plays a key role in the validity of this approach and how they run the class has immense effect on the outcomes of the task-based approach in translation. Overall, it can be said that this approach of teaching was valuable to the students and have helped to enhance their translation competence when applied appropriately.

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