Initiation of the idea

The idea of the thesis is initiated from a mismatch concerning the status of translation in language teaching detected between theory and practice. Looking at the history of foreign language pedagogy, we can find that since the Grammar Translation Method became outdated, translation has been seen by theorists as a taboo in foreign language learning and is advised to be kept away from classroom instruction. Theorists advocate the ideology of teaching a new language with the language being taught. But in practice, translation has continued to be used in many contexts around the world (Benson, 2000) and remains the norm at university-level language teaching (Malmkjær, 2004). In China, many famous experts experienced in English Language Teaching and many frontline teachers often stress the importance of translation. Besides, the present writer’s own experience also makes her give a second thought on the possible contributions of translation to language learning. Through regular translation exercise over eight years, she found herself better at selecting the right words for an idea and became increasingly aware of the accurate meaning of words and some special features of language.

How such a dislocation between pedagogy theory and practice came into being is worth investigation. And it is necessary for people to reassess the role of translation in language teaching and explore whether a theoretical explanation can be discovered for chances of language learning from the process of translation.
Term clarification

Two terms here need clarification. The first one is ‘translation’. It refers to the act instead of product of translation. The second one is ‘a learning tool’. By it the writer means the use of translation in a language class is not a means aimed at training professional translators but rather a means to help learners develop their linguistic, communicative and intercultural competence in using a foreign language. As a task of language learning, it can be applied as in the teaching paradigm of Grammar Translation Method, but is not confined to it.

Literature review

Before a theoretical discussion is touched upon, a report of relevant literature concerning translation in language teaching will be given under the following three headings: The history of TILT (Translation in Language Teaching), charges against TILT, and voices for TILT.

The history of TILT

Based on the relevant literature (Malmkær 1998; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Cook, 2010; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004), the history of TILT can be segmented into three different phases, in which the use of translation has taken up different positions, as is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Different phases in the history of TILT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>The history</th>
<th>Dominance of Grammar Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>the 1840s - the 1940s</td>
<td>Dominance of Grammar Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>the 1950s - the late 20th Century</td>
<td>The rejection and the long silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>since the 1st decade of the 21st Century</td>
<td>A climate for revival of bilingualism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Richards and Rodgers (2001) have described that “Grammar Translation Method dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s” (p. 4). It put reading and writing ahead of listening and speaking and only consisted in the translation of isolated sentences. In the late 19th century, a group of phoneticians and linguists drew upon the science of phonetics and psychology to describe the importance of the spoken language and claim that information in connected texts is more likely to be retained than that in isolated sentences (Cook, 2010). They advocated a radical shift towards an emphasis on speech, on connected texts, and on learning through the medium of the language being taught. In addition, some social and commercial factors also contributed to a rejection of the Grammar-Translation Method (Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Cook, 2010). Thus, in the 20th century, a series of foreign language teaching approaches and methods use neither translation nor first-language explanation. Those methods include situational teaching, audiolingualism, communicative language teaching, task-based instruction. Due to the attack launched on translation, Cook (2010) has ever noted that “there has been virtually no discussion of translation in the mainstream language-teaching literature in the 20th century” (p. 22). However, directions in the study of language itself gradually changed. And social, commercial and political changes in the world, such as globalization and multilingualism, made scholars view the issue of foreign language teaching in a new light. So Cook (ibid) continues to comment that “the first decade of the 21st century has seen increased interest in and support for the use of students’ own languages” (p. 36). As an instance of own-language use, there are significant and visible signs of a revival of translation in language teaching according to recent literature on applied linguistics (Malmkær, 1998). Some scholars have begun to take a new look at TILT and notice more on its virtuous instead of vicious side. They consider translation not as a harmful tool to hinder learners’ development of linguistic and communicative competence but as an effective
way of facilitating it. But advocacy of TILT is still a more controversial proposal, for people who are
for own-language use might still be against the use of translation (Cook, 2010), which manifests
the necessity of conducting more studies in this area.

**Charges against TILT**

Translation in language teaching has been so out of favor in history because theorists (for example,
Lado 1964; Beardsmore 1982; Færch and Kasper 1983; Brown 2002) consider it unsuitable within
the context of foreign language learning. They see it as an unnatural and not communicative way
of learning a language and mainly hold these following assumptions (cited from Cook, 2010; Tsagari
and Floros, 2013; Leonardi, 2010; Xiao, 2003):

1. Translation is often considered to be detrimental to fluency in communication. The laborious
   process slows down communication.

2. Translation obstructs development of an ability to use the language automatically. That is to
   say learners tend to first think of an idea in their mother tongue and then translate it into the other.

3. Translation hinders learners’ systematization of a new language, for it promotes ‘interference’
   and ‘transfer’ from a student’s own language.

4. Translation presents to students only isolated and invented sentences but no authentic
discourse.

5. Translation is independent of the four skills which define language competence: listening,
speaking, reading and writing.

6. Translation misleads students into thinking that expressions in two languages correspond one-
to-one.

**Voices for TILT**

Nevertheless, an increasing number of scholars have begun to discover translation as a tool useful
for language learning in recent years. For one thing, people find those theorists’ assumptions are
actually untenable; and for another, more and more scholars re-affirm the role of TILT in terms of
both theoretical argument and empirical research.

**Refutation against these assumptions**

As to the flaws of the theorists’ own argument, Guy Cook (2010) used the word assumption to
refer to theorists’ charges against TILT, by which he meant that there was a lack of empirical
evidence of harm that translation does to language learning. And the academic criticism or at least
ignorance of TILT was not based on the use of translation in general, but on a highly limited form
of that use in the Grammar Translation Method. So charges against the role of translation in
language teaching can’t hold water. They are not academically substantiated and are rather
biased.

**Affirmative arguments**

As for the affirmative arguments for the role of TILT, they can be divided into two periods. The first
period started from the late 1970s and ended in the 1990s (Cook, 2010). During this period,
dissenting voices in favor of translation could be heard but they failed to attract main stream
attention (for example, Green, 1970; Di Pietro, 1971; Matthews-Bresky, 1972; Chellapan, 1982;
Baynham, 1983; Edge, 1986; Ulrych, 1986; Atkinson, 1987; Tudor, 1987; Nadstoga, 1988; Urgese,
Cohen and Hawras 1996; Ur 1996; Nord 1997; Eadie 1999). However, there were also some striking
defenses for translation by major thinkers of this period (for example, Widdowson, 1978, 1979; Howatt, 1984; Howatt and Widdowson, 2004; Stern, 1992; Kramsch, 1993).

The second period is from the first decade of the 21st century onwards. During this period, clear and straightforward points have been made for the role of translation in language teaching. More importantly, increasingly more studies have been substantiated with empirical evidence. Representative academic works in this period include Shiyab and Abdullateef (2001); Rolin-Iantizi and Brownlie (2002); Xiao (2003); Petrocchi (2006); Källkvist (2008); Laufer and Girsai (2008); Witte, Harden, and Ramos de Oliveira Harden (2009); Märlein (2009); Cook (2007, 2008, 2010); Leonardi (2010); Tsagari and Floros (2013).

According to these works, translation can contribute to language learning in at least these several aspects:

(1). Translation is supportive of explicit language learning.

(2). Translation can raise learners’ language awareness and consciousness.

(3). Translation can enhance learners’ intercultural as well as communicative competence.

(4). Translation can foster lexical and phraseological competence, which, according to Sinclair (1995: 833), enhances idiomaticity. Especially it helps to discriminate special types of lexis, for example: polysemies, false friends.

(5). Discussion on translation can motivate students to initiate and engage in communication in L2.

(6). Translation can help students to produce utterances that convey the intended message clearly.

(7). The processes learners may engage in when required to translate between languages yield data that shed precious light on the still opaque area of learners’ interlanguage.

(8). Translation can urge students to read thoroughly and apply a kind of textual analysis which is important in reading comprehension.

The list is by no means exhaustive.

Most of these studies address the role of TILT by drawing on translation studies and foreign language teaching theories, which include psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and SLA theories. For example, Beecroft (2010) sees translation as a process of intercultural communication according to the Skopos theory and presents a complex translational task based on the scenes-and-frames model as a practical example to show how to harness the didactic potential of translation to improve intercultural competence.

All these arguments are not made out of an intention to verify that translation is far superior to all other monolingual methods but are actually pleas for a balanced and justified examination on the use of translation in foreign language teaching. For one thing, people should be aware that translation tasks are not confined to the Grammar Translation Method. Teachers should design creative ways of performing a translation task. For another, a great deal remains to be done in the future, particularly about what kinds of translation tasks should be assigned to what kinds of learners, when and when not to perform it, how and, most importantly, why. After having a review on the relevant literature about TILT, the writer finds that most of the studies have been concerned with the effect that translation may exert but less has been discussed on real-time processing during translation. And Guy Cook (2010) has proposed that it is necessary and worthwhile to investigate whether translating during online processing is necessarily bad.
The design of a translation task

In light of these ideas, the writer designs a translation task aimed at enhancing the communicative, intercultural as well as linguistic competence of English learners at the intermediate and advanced level. Here is a brief introduction to the specific procedures of the task followed by a theoretical explanation to its pedagogical advantage.

Specific procedures of the task

Based on a three-stage experiment of Chinese-English translation, reading a model and re-translation (Geng, Wang, and Lu, 2015), the writer designs a five-stage translation task: The first stage is to elicit students’ output. They are asked to translate an authentic piece of Chinese writing into English. The second stage is to expose students to relevant input and they will be given a model translation of the source text and take notes. The third stage is what we call consciousness-raising activities. They refer to a group or/and class discussion as well as teacher instruction on the difficulties encountered during translation. The fourth stage is to re-elicit students’ output and they will be asked to re-translate the same source text. The fifth stage is to test whether the learner has indeed acquired any new language forms. They will be given another similar Chinese text to translate which is an excerpt from the same source essay as the previous passage.

Following is a flowchart of the procedures.

Table 2. Procedures of the translation task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Output: Translate a Chinese passage into English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Input: Read a model and take notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Consciousness-raising activities: Group or/and class discussion plus teacher instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Re-output: Retranslate the same passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Output anew: Translate another similar Chinese passage into English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation for its pedagogical advantage


Rationale for its improvement of communicative and intercultural competence

It is necessary to note at first that the translation exercise of the task is work on a piece of Chinese writing. It is not composed of isolated sentences but an authentic discourse conveying an idea or delivering a communicative intention. It is actually about language in real use.
A language user, while conceptualizing a situation, will make his or her choice from different parameters or dimensions to describe the mental imagery which represents the structure of the situation. This is what people refer to as “construal” (Langacker 1987: 487-488; Langacker 1999: 206; Croft & Cruse 2004/2006: 40-73). According to cognitive semantics, meaning is not the intrinsic nature of linguistic expression, but is obtained through online construal within a context or an actual situation (Langacker, 1987, 1991). Comprehension of meaning derives from the interaction and sustaining negotiation between a communicator and the context or other communicators.

Eugene A. Nida once said that translation is translating meaning (Waard and Nida, 1986:60). It involves comprehension and delivery of meaning. So translation is not about delivering meaning as objective being from the source language to the target language but should be taken as a process of meaning construction (for comprehension of the source text) and reconstruction in the new context (for delivery of the message meant by the original writer). Linguistic components of discourse are important input elements for meaning construal but not adequate for it. Expression of meaning is shaped and constrained by people’s embodied experience, not only including the physical and physiological experience but also the social and cultural experience perceived through the body and the language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, pp. 198-233). It involves complicated cognitive operations in cognitive context, from which meaning comprehension and expression is inseparable. Meaning construction and reconstruction is always accompanied with cognitive construction of the context. This is what the writer means by double construction in the process of translation.

Cognitive context takes into account various external factors (including the surrounding text or co-text as well as any socio-cultural, historical, situational or other kinds of information assumed to be available), yet it places emphasis on the information they provide and the mental availability or accessibility for the interpretation process (Tan, 2009, p31). Context is not “given”, but is selected and the “selection of a particular context is determined by the search for relevance” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, pp. 132-142; Gutt, 1996). Relevance theory (Sperber &Wilson, 1995) holds that a successful communication is guaranteed if and only if the communicative act is consistent with the Relevance principle, suggested by presumption of optimal relevance: it should give the audience an adequate amount of contextual effects, without causing it to spend unnecessary effort. Creation of a closest cognitive environment is then a great challenge for a translator, for Relevance theory helps people to realize that “mismatches in contextual knowledge can prove just as serious problems as mismatches in linguistic resources” (Gutt, 1991, 1996).

If a translator aims to successfully deliver the intended message of the original writer, he or she has to be quite familiar with the similarity as well as differences in terms of cognitive operations and socio-cultural or historical knowledge between the source and target culture.

In this sense, translation is by nature a communicative activity full of meaning negotiations either between the source writer and the translator over the source text or between the translator and target readers over the translated text. Learning a new language through translation between it and the mother tongue can help learners with their communicative and intercultural competence. Since the objective is to enhance students’ English competence, the writer assigns Chinese-to-English translation exercises, with the focus put on second language production and development.

**Rationale for its improvement of linguistic competence**

As is mentioned above by Gutt, mismatch in linguistic resources is a serious problem. So to deliver a message which has adequate contextual effects in the cognitive environment of the target text audience, the language in the translated version should be grammatically correct and pragmatically appropriate.
According to Swain's (1995, 1998) Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, the most important function of comprehensible output is that it is able to trigger learners' noticing to inadequacy of interlanguage and thus helps them detect the gap between the message they intend to convey and the message they actually produce. Learners' attention is consequently drawn to the form of language, which creates opportunities for acquisition of target language forms.

In the task the writer designs, when students are doing Chinese-to-English translation for the first draft, they initially focus on delivery of meaning in English but will encounter difficulties in second language production. So in the second stage when they are presented with a model, they will consciously attend to some forms of the target language. The design of the two steps can meet the requirement of embedding focus on form into communicative activities proposed by Long (1991).

Yet, noticing a gap cannot guarantee definite occurrence of language acquisition. It must be followed by provision of relevant input and in-depth processing on it. The second stage exposes the students to relevant input but the depth of processing varies with students, which, however, is the crucial factor to determine how much a learner could actually take in. Only through in-depth processing can learners understand form-meaning connections and finally integrate the target forms after long-term practice. That is why consciousness-raising activities are performed in between. As is argued by Schmidt and Frota (1986:311), learners must attain awareness at the level of understanding. Their subjective experience of drawing form-meaning connections should be involved, for such mapping can engage learners in a more advanced level of cognitive processing and increases the likelihood of input being converted to comprehended intake.

A case study

The present writer once gave two courses, namely, Comprehensive English and Grammar and Writing, to a class of sophomores majoring in Journalism and Communication in Shanghai International Studies University for a whole semester. She knew very well about the linguistic competence of each student in the class. Once she assigned such a translation task as was described above to the whole class and collected altogether 40 samples from 20 students. Among them, half were their first drafts of translation for a Chinese passage and the other were their second drafts of translation for the same source text. She selected two samples from one student (hereinafter referred to as Student A), who was among the students with comparatively better linguistic competence, and presented them here with a detailed comparative analysis into the changes she had made between the two drafts, so as to investigate the effect of such a task on the performance of this student.

The source text and the model

The source text:

像很多人一样，我也认为我现在的工作，并非是我读大学时计划要做的事情。我绝不是个宿命论者，但我深信人的工作有时是自己挑的，有时是他人代选的。我要是早知道会在预想不到的场合受邀发表演讲，谈论最不熟悉的话题，我就该在读大学的时候作一些训练。我觉得一个人若想当口若悬河的演说者，这是必然之路。我还发现，每一位智者，或早或晚总会在公开场合表达自己的思想。除非他训练有素并持之以恒，否则，不管他的思想可能有多么丰富，都会因言不逮意而痛苦不堪，难以赢得听众。

(a translation exercise picked from Tao and He, 2011)
The model:

Like a great many people, I suppose I am not now doing the work that as a college student I planned to do. I am in no sense a fatalist, but I am convinced that men have their work chosen for them quite as often as they themselves choose it. If I had supposed that I should be called upon to speak on the most unforeseen occasions and upon the most unfamiliar topics, I should have given myself while in college the practice which I believe is the method everyone must employ if he is to become a ready speaker. I have learned that, sooner or later, every intelligent man is called upon publicly to express his ideas, and no matter how abundant these thoughts may be, he will suffer much pain and have little success unless he has had pretty regular and persistent practice.

(a translation exercise picked from Tao and He, 2011)

The two drafts of Student A

The first draft:

Like many people, I think the job that I am doing is not what I planned to do when I was an undergraduate. (Segment 1a) I’m definitely not a person who believed fate, but I believe that sometimes we choose our own job, sometimes others do it instead. (Segment 2a) If I had knew that I would receive speech invitation in an unexpected situation and talking about unfamiliar topics, I would receive some training when I was in college. I think if one want to be a excellent speaker, this is the effort he must pay. (Segment 3a) What’s more, I find that each smart man will express his own thoughts in the public places sooner or later. Unless he was trained consistently, he will suffer from the failure of making himself clear and lose the audience, however plantiful his thoughts are. (Segment 4a)

The second draft:

Like a great many people, I suppose that what I am doing is not what as a college student I planned to do. (Segment 1b) I am in no sense a fatalist, but I am convinced that sometimes we choose our own jobs, sometimes others do it instead. (Segment 2b) If I had known that I should be called upon to speak on an unexpected occasion and upon the most unfamiliar topics, I had given myself when in college some practice which I suppose everyone who want to be a ready speaker should take. (Segment 3b) I also find that every intelligent man will be called upon publicly to express his ideas sooner or later. Unless he had perfect, persistent and proper practice, he will suffer from the pain and have difficulty in success, however abundant his thoughts are. (Segment 4b)

A comparison between the two drafts

For the sake of convenience, the writer has divided each draft into four segments and separately labelled them. All segments in the second draft are corresponding to those of the first one. And the two corresponding segments make up a pair. For example, Segment 1a and Segment 1b form Pair 1. Following is a detailed comparison between each pair.

For Pair 1

Improvements:

many  →  a great many
think  →  suppose
when I was an undergraduate  →  as a college student
No improvements:

subject+ link verb+predicative -> subject+ link verb+predicative
(The job … is not …. )                      (what I am doing is not …. )

For Pair 2

Improvements:

definitely not -> in no sense

a person who believed fate -> a fatalist

believe -> am convinced

Errors that may fail to be detected:

the incorrect tense of believed in Segment 2a
the incorrect expression of believe fate(believe in fate) in Segment 2a

For Pair 3

Improvements:

would -> should

receive speech invitation -> be called upon to speak

in an unexpected situation -> on an unexpected occasion

about unfamiliar topics -> upon the most unfamiliar topics

when I was in college -> when in college

excellent speaker -> ready speaker

two separate sentences -> a main clause + a subordinate clause

No improvements:

the subjunctive mood in would receive -> the subjunctive mood in had given myself
the inflection of want in one want to be -> the inflection of want in every one want to be

Errors that may fail to be detected:

the indefinite article of a excellent speaker

For Pair 4

Improvements:

each smart man -> every intelligent man

express his own thoughts -> express his own ideas

in public places -> publicly

addition of be called upon to

the failure of making himself clear -> the pain
Discussion

Based on the previous comparison between the two drafts, the writer has found that:

(1) Judging on the whole, Student A’s second draft was better than her first one.

(2) It was much easier for Student A to improve her translation in terms of words and phrases than syntactic features, such as sentence structure, tense, subjunctive mood.

(3) Because the same idea might be expressed with quite different words in the model, some errors in Student A’s first draft failed to be detected due to a lack of reference.

(4) New errors appeared in the second draft.

From these results, the writer continues to draw the following conclusions:

(1) As to the reason why the degree of improvement for words and phrases is much greater than that for syntactic features, Student A’s analytical ability of grammar and existing linguistic competence may contribute to such a difference. Memory may be sufficient for a change of words or phrases, but mastery of syntactic features rely on a learner’s existing grammatical knowledge and his ability to understand these features. This has two implications: firstly, teachers should pay more attention to syntactic or even textual knowledge of students; secondly, it is advisable to ask students to write reflective journals or conduct Think-Aloud-Protocol with students after completing these tasks, so as to know about their thinking process and investigate the reasons for no improvements or errors.

(2) It is necessary for teachers to review in person their students’ two drafts so as to detect the errors in the first draft that may be ignored by students as well as those newly appearing ones in the second draft.

(3) There exists the risk of these tasks interfering with students’ acquisition of a foreign language, which implies that, firstly, these kind of tasks only cater to learners at the intermediate or advanced linguistic level; secondly, these tasks should be teacher-led so as to decrease the risk of negative interference.

Conclusion

The theoretical argument presented in the paper per se only demonstrates one of the possible ways that translation can be creatively applied in the process of language teaching and learning. And the following case study is far from enough to fully investigate the role of TILT. It is only an exploratory study. Much more work needs to be done in the future, for only with adequate theoretical argument and particularly empirical evidence can the role of translation be clearly recognized and solidly substantiated. The entire academic world is just embarking on the survey of
TILT, which still leaves much room for new ideas of applying translation in language teaching and new perspectives of interdisciplinary study to explain its uses, especially for Chinese scholars and teachers, who work in an English-as-a foreign language setting. In such a setting, a communicative community in English is seldom available outside the classroom. That is why conscious learning of English and language analytical ability are important. And translation in language teaching may seem a way out in that respect and its role should, at least, not be ignored; it deserves academic investigation in a new light.

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