

Translation-aided Approach in Second Language Acquisition

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This paper points out the impracticality of direct methods as a way of making language input comprehensible, and recommends using translation instead. Krashen's idea of comprehensible input (1981) has been considerably prominent in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) theory (Ellis, 1985). The importance of comprehensibility of input, however, should have required us to discuss more carefully how to make input comprehensible. Translation as a way of making input comprehensible seems to have so far been neglected, because of prevailing negative attitudes toward the traditional grammar-translation method. Based on Palmer's argument (1917) that translation is a very important tool for "semanticizing" language, this paper explores new ways of applying translation to SLA classrooms.

本稿は、言語材料を「理解できるインプット」とするためには直接法は非実用的であることを指摘し、翻訳を使うことを薦める。クラシェンによる「理解できるインプット」(Krashen 1981)という概念は、第二言語習得理論の分野ではかなりの影響をもたらした(Ellis 1985)。しかし、インプットが理解できることは重要だとは考えられなかったが、インプットをどのようにして理解できるものにするかは注意深く論じられたことはなかった。これまで、翻訳によってインプットを理解できるものにする方法は、無視されてきたように思える。これは、伝統的な文法訳読法に対するわれわれの否定的な態度のせいだろう。翻訳は言語を「意味あるものにする」ための大切な道具だというパーマーの見解(Palmer 1917)をもとに、本稿では、第二言語習得を目的とする授業に翻訳を応用する新しい方法を模索する。

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), translation has long been criticized as "uncommunicative," "boring," "pointless," "difficult," "irrelevant," and the like" (Maley, 1989). Reacting to the long dominance of the grammar-translation method, communicative language teaching, one of the major reforms in language teaching this century, has been based on monolingual teaching methodology (Howatt, 1984). Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) seems to have made a decisive im-

pact on the importance of direct comprehensible input justifying the relevance of methods such as the Audio-lingual Method, the Direct Method, or Total Physical Response (Krashen, 1987). While others (Sharwood-Smith, 1981; Stevick, 1980; Bialystok, 1982; and Tarone, 1983) take a position against the strict limitations Krashen gives to the role of grammar-learning in SLA (Ellis, 1985), translation alone seems to have been blacklisted in the communicative language movement (Duff, 1989).

Though "translation theory," summarized and developed by Newmark (1988), has rich implications from a purely linguistic viewpoint, it mainly focuses on translation as a professional craft, not as a teaching method for SLA. Malakoff and Hakuta (1991) present an interesting study about the translation ability of bilingual children and open up new possibilities for the study of translation in terms of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. This may give valuable insights into SLA, but again translation is not regarded as a direct contributor in the process of acquisition.

Has the role of translation really ended in SLA? Several people have tried to explain the positive aspects of translation as a teaching method. Recently, Duff (1989) and Sheen (1993) emphasized that translation can contribute to enhancing the accuracy and clarity of students' understanding. Hammerly (1994) reviewed the controversy over the effectiveness of monolingual versus bilingual education, and concluded that bilingual education is more relevant in SLA classrooms. Much earlier, Sweet (1899) and Palmer (1917) explained the necessity of using translation as a way of making input comprehensible.

Taking these discussions as a point of reference, this paper intends to contribute to a reappraisal of the use of translation in communicative language teaching. First, it points out the problem direct methods have in making input comprehensible, and refers to Palmer's argument (1917) in detail to reconsider the value of using translation for that purpose. After analyzing why translation as a way of making input comprehensible has been avoided, it provides some practical suggestions for the use of translation in communicative language teaching.

A Problem of Direct Methods—Impracticality

In spite of the trends which emphasize direct input, these methods have not necessarily formed a mainstream in English education in Japan (Hino, 1988). Some of the factors for this are: the lack of teachers with native-like speaking ability, too much emphasis on reading ability due to the exam-oriented curriculum, and large class sizes. Beyond all such

external problems, however, these methods seem to have even more serious internal problems.

The common ground all the direct methods (i.e. methods emphasizing the importance of direct input) share in trying to make input comprehensible is that they use extra-linguistic contexts to help the learners catch the meaning: in the Direct Method, objects, diagrams, charts, gestures and pantomimes are used (Krashen, 1988, p. 10); the Audio-lingual Method uses dialogue situations and drama (Rivers, 1964, p. 42); Total Physical Response uses body movements and pictures (Asher, Kusudo, and de la Torre, 1983), and the Silent Way uses objects, situations, and some visual aids (Gattegno, 1983). Integrating all the ideas scattered in these methods, the Natural Approach (Krashen, 1988) presents many kinds of activities which try to give context without using the students' first language (L1). Though Krashen's attempts to make input comprehensible may be helpful in themselves, they have inherent limitations. Carefully looked at, most activities presented deal only with the learners' daily life situations, the context all are most familiar with. This means that if teachers depend only on given contexts to make input comprehensible, they cannot go beyond daily life topics. How can teachers effectively give the meanings of abstract concepts using only extra-linguistic contexts? Can teachers give the meaning of such vocabulary as *truth* or *property*, only through the presentation of contexts, without danger of misinterpretation by learners or too much effort required from teachers? In the section titled "Teaching Vocabulary" (pp. 155-157), Krashen (1988) addresses this concern:

It may be argued that a Natural Approach to vocabulary acquisition is impractical, in that classroom time is limited and that only a small range of topics can be discussed. (p.156)

However, he only mentions the superiority of the Natural Approach in terms of memory retention, leaving the problem of impracticality itself as it is. Asher et al. (1983) also address the question unsatisfactorily. As an example of teaching nonphysical vocabulary and nonphysical structural features, they present a command such as "Marie, pick up the picture of the ugly old man and put it next to the picture of the government building," suggesting that "in a step by step progression through hundreds of picture sets, the student is fine-tuned for phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic features in a target language" (p. 70). This suggestion should cast doubts because pictures obviously cannot illustrate certain human ideas without ambiguity, however elaborated and sophisticated they may be.

Palmer's Theory of How to "Semanticize"

Palmer (1917) suggests there are four different modes of conveying the meaning of a given unit in foreign language teaching. To quote,

- (A) By material association, i.e. associating the unit with that which is designated by it.
- (B) By translation, i.e. associating the unit with the equivalent native unit.
- (C) By definition, i.e. associating the unit with its definition or paraphrase.
- (D) By context, i.e. giving examples of its use. (p. 49)

It seems that modern approaches to comprehensible input have excluded (B), translation, for no clear reason. Palmer (1917), on the other hand, carefully criticizes the simple assumption that (A), (C), and (D) are better for making input comprehensible.

First, comparing material association and translation, he attributes the advantage of this form of association to the fact that it is accompanied by "spatialization." Spatialization is a law of mnemonic psychology, which states that if two or more new terms are learnt in different places they will tend not to be confused in memory work (Palmer, 1917, p. 54). For example, when objects or pictures are used, the eyes of the students successively go to different ones in different places, and this strengthens the association of the objects and the language. However, when the two concepts are completely dissociated or when a concept is particularly striking, Palmer (1917) writes there will be very little difference between (A) and (B): "London = Londres (mode B) may be more direct than London = [the place to which I am pointing on this map] (modification of mode A)" (p.55). Even though we assume that generally (A) is more direct than (B), (A) is limited to concrete objects, objective qualities and actions. So in other cases we must choose from among (B), (C), and (D).

As for the use of definition (mode C), Palmer (1917) states that definitions come from our long educative process; the concept of such words as *subjective* or *integrate* can only be developed gradually. We cannot afford to force learners to repeat the process they have already gone through to teach such words. Technical terms in science and mathematics also are understood in a complicated context, sometimes over a long period of time (Palmer, 1917, p. 56). Why study them anew when they are clearly understood with native equivalents?

Finally, giving examples (mode D) may be valuable as an exercise for successful guessing, but is always in danger of causing misunder-

standings. To illustrate this, Palmer (1917) gives an example.

Suppose the teacher gave *Je prends le livre; je le prends; prenez le livre; je prends un livre quand je veux lire; je prends le train quand je veux voyager*, etc., to teach the meaning of *prendre*. The student may think to himself, *Prendre* means take, and might say, *Prenez cette lettre a la poste, or Mon pere m'a pris a Londres.* (Palmer, 1917, p. 64)

After considering these points, Palmer (1917) suggests:

When the foreign language word to be demonstrated is known to be for all practical purposes the equivalent of a native word, translation is a better mode than definition; when the word to be demonstrated is known to be a doubtful equivalent or when the value of the equivalence is unknown, it is more prudent to confirm the translation by definition or by context; when the word to be demonstrated is known to have no equivalent whatever in the native language, then we must have recourse to definition or to context. (p. 58)

Thus in Palmer's argument, definition and context should play the secondary role in giving meanings; they should only complement translation.

Reasons for the Unpopularity of Translation for Semanticizing

With these clear advantages in terms of efficiency and accuracy in the use of translation, why have association, definition, and context (modes A, C, and D) been exclusively advocated in communicative language teaching methodologies? First, there has been confusion in the discussion of how to make input comprehensible and how to increase the amount of input. As these modes use the L2 to teach meaning, their use can comparatively increase the amount of input, though they are problematic as a tool for making input comprehensible. Krashen (1987) reviews several traditional and modern methods, including the grammar-translation method, in terms of comprehensibility of input. He says that grammar-translation provides only "scraps of input" (p. 128), and that in this method "the model sentences are usually understandable, but the focus is entirely on form, and not meaning" (p. 128). Here "scraps of input" refers to the small quantity of input, not the quality or comprehensibility.

The process of making input comprehensible in grammar-translation certainly takes time and decreases the amount of input. As Newmark (1988) says, however, translation is "a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language" (p. 7); it is so devoted to keeping the original meaning that at least the quality of input

it gives cannot so easily be denied. Krashen's confusion of the argument about quality and quantity of input in this section of his book (Krashen, 1987, pp. 126-146) seems to be an example of an overreaction to the negative aspects of grammar-translation.

The Quiz Structure of a Lesson

Another reason why the other three modes have been dominant may be that they suit the typical classroom teaching structure: all require students to think and guess to find the answer. This quiz structure engages students in some activity and keeps the teachers in the position of leading and guiding. In the case of translation, if learners are given the equivalent translation to semanticize the word, they don't have to think or guess—in other words, the translation is the answer. Not surprisingly teachers want to avoid the time-consuming, potentially dead-end elements of conjecture or speculation in order to keep a lesson as a lesson. Shavelson and Stern (1981) suggest that teachers tend to focus on classroom activities rather than needs analysis, task design, or evaluation, because they are faced first and foremost with deciding how to entertain and engage students. Barnes (1976) also says that most teachers use the question-answer routine as a way of controlling learners' attention.

This quiz structure can also be seen in textbooks which first present the L2, and then translations or explanations in the L1. The assumption is that learners first will decipher the meaning from the unknown texts. So-called composition (*sakubun*) textbooks present the L1 first and then give the L2, but again learners are expected to construct sentences with unknown lexical items. Thus in the conventional use of translation, a quiz-like task is set between the L2 and its L1 translation. This quiz structure is, however, very different from the natural acquisition process children go through; in this process, we use whatever means we can to give the meaning of the target language to the child directly.

Recent studies about "motherese" point out that mothers use a number of adjustments, such as simplifications and redundancy, in order to make input comprehensible (Ellis, 1985). Besides, when a child knows beforehand through the help of contexts the meaning of what is about to be said (i.e. when input is already comprehensible), mothers simply say the language to them immediately: they never ask them "what am I going to say now?" and wait for the answer. In both cases, mothers try to eliminate the gap between language and meaning. Thus in children's natural acquisition process, language and meaning come in simultaneously, or meaning comes first and language follows immediately. On

the other hand, translation in the grammar-translation method always follows input. Who can give a translation before the presentation of a target sentence when the translation is considered the answer? Likewise, in English "composition," who can immediately give the target sentence when the sentence itself is considered the answer?

Using translation not as an answer but as a helper, we can take in both the target language and the translation, or meaning, at the same time; or translation first, and target language after. Examples of both are presented in the activity of watching movies. Obari (1995) and Iwasaki (1995) recommend watching English movies with L1 subtitles, either listening to the L2 and looking at the subtitles simultaneously, or after watching with the subtitles and understanding the scenes, watching without the subtitles. Watching with subtitles is based on the idea that our L1 is so familiar that written letters, at least when as rather short sentences, can be considered as pictures to convey meaning. Looking at the written letters "I love you" transfers the meaning they carry to native speakers of English at a glance, in the same way a picture of an orange is easily recognized as an orange. Halliday (1985) states that language is at the same time a part of reality, an account of reality, and an image of reality.

Written language exists; it is like the machine itself, the stone and the surface of the water, the male and female persons in the environment. (Halliday, 1985, p. 99)

Thus written, not oral, translation can be considered a visual medium expressing a wide range of concepts. In classrooms, which are so remote from the real world and so difficult to establish realistic contexts in, the native language can be an extremely convenient visual aid for making input comprehensible. In order to keep the quiz structure, translation can be used not as a means of getting input but one of strengthening input.

Bad Habits / Negative Interference

Foreign language teachers tend to think that using the learners' L1 leads to the habit of always associating a foreign word with its native equivalent (Palmer, 1917, p. 62). There is also concern that the L1 interferes with L2 learning (Ellis, 1985, p. 19)

How might the habit of associating an L2 word with its L1 equivalent work negatively in SLA? The main problem is time efficiency; replacing a language with another to understand what it means takes time. Clearly, if learners continue to attach L1 equivalents to L2 words they will be extremely inefficient language-users; they cannot afford to carry a com-

plete set of two languages juxtaposed in real communication. However, in learning through translation this is not necessarily the case. Translation gradually falls off as we meet the same word repeatedly in different texts. The explanation for this can be seen in Stevick's argument (1982, pp. 45-49) that our memory of a word consists of a stack of images. When learners first meet a new L2 word and are given a L1 equivalent, the L1 translation becomes part of the new image in their brains, along with the context in which the L2 word occurred. The neurochemical record, according to Stevick (1982), remains available for a while, but fades as time passes. When they meet the same word in a different context, the word brings with it something of the image taken in before. Then again, following the same process, a new image is stored which includes the second occurrence together with that context. The important concept here is that the L1 equivalent works as part of the image of the word, and may fade with the passing of time. This means that the bad habit of associating the L1 with the L2 can be interrupted by enriching the image through encounters with the word in many different contexts, thereby eventually stopping reference to the L1. The L1 is necessary only as long as it helps to narrow down the range of images learners can project to the new words.

It may still be argued that when the L2 and its L1 equivalent are not exactly the same in meaning, misunderstandings might become fossilized (interference). However, Krashen (1981) claims that negative language transfer should not be seen as mistakes, but as falling back on the L1 because the target L2 has not been fully acquired. Ellis (1985) summarises the recent reappraisal of the role that the L1 plays and points out that it "can serve as one of the inputs into the process of hypothesis generation" (p. 37).

Newmark (1988) states that every translation involves some loss of meaning, and that basically the loss is on the continuum between overtranslation, with increased detail, and undertranslation, with increased generalization (p.7). Interestingly, the same continuum is found in theories of children's L1 acquisition of word meaning. Ingram (1989) summarizes "the semantic feature hypothesis" and the "functional core concept theory" are two important theories of a child's development of word meaning (pp. 398-401), and points out that according to these theories, a child starts to develop word meaning by either overextension or underextension. If L1 learners start with these, why not allow L2 learners to use overtranslation or undertranslation as a starting point?

On the other hand, at the earliest stage in direct methods a hypothesis made only with the help of extra-linguistic context can be rough

and ambiguous. Such uncertainty in understanding may lead students to frequently return to their L1, asking their peers or teachers for the meaning. Thus while direct methods are intended to expose students only to L2, the outcome can be contrary to this expectation.

The crucial point here is not to avoid using L1, but, after the use of initial stage translation, to raise the quantity and quality of input which can be implemented by giving different examples or reading materials or exercises. Ellis (1985) claims "if SLA is viewed as a developmental process, . . . , then the L1 can be viewed as a contributing factor to this development, which in the course of time, as the learner's proficiency grows, will be less powerful" (p. 40).

Implications for Classroom Teaching

If we want to apply the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) to classroom teaching, we need the efficiency and comprehensiveness translation to help make input comprehensible. However, this does not imply a return to grammar-translation. In the grammar-translation method, grammar was used as a guide to translation, activating students' analytic skills. In the new frame of thinking, translation is a means to give meanings. Namely, students are not expected to undertake the process of translation, but to examine and understand the product of translation.

As for the empirical research on this use of translation, Sheen (1993) mentions Seibert (1930), Cohen & Aphek (1980), Tucker, Lambert & Rigaut (1969) as showing the superiority of the use of translation equivalents to an inductive approach in vocabulary learning. What other things can we do with this concept of translation, especially for communicative teaching classrooms?

Simultaneous Input—Language and Meaning Given Simultaneously: One possible exercise of this type is reading L1 subtitles while watching a movie and listening to the L2. This is advantageous in that the pictures and the story can give meaningful contexts, complementing what subtitles give, and it can also be impressive and fun (Iwasaki, 1995; Obari, 1995; Takahashi, 1995). We may, however, have to face limitations in application, such as: 1) the language in movies is limited (in terms of difficulty, style, grammar points, etc.), so teachers may find it difficult to control teaching points; 2) inflexibility in the curriculum, or lack of the audiovisual equipment; and 3) the mix of three sets of information (pictures, L2 speech, and the subtitles) may be overwhelming to some learners. Though this exercise itself is not free from problems in classroom

use, the idea of listening to the L2 while reading the L1 can be applied to any stage of classroom teaching.

For example, Blair's "integrated approach" (1982), which combines techniques from Curran, Lozanov, Gattegno, Terrell, Asher, and others, gives translation in some "preparatory" exercises before using those techniques in the class (pp. 233-239). In one exercise, students are given the bilingual script as well as a cassette recording in the target language. After the preparatory stage of semanticizing, techniques such as mnemonic priming, adding progressively more details, or having background music in the presentation of the language are used to engage students and enhance learning. This use is one realization of the idea of translation as a starting point, not as a goal.

Listening to the target language while looking at a written translation is thus effective as a preparatory procedure which can later be followed by activities intended to make the input part of the learners' permanent knowledge. In this way, the quiz structure is maintained not by having students translate, but by giving activities which use language whose meaning has already been reasonably ascertain through translation.

Delayed Input—Language Given after Meaning: When sentences are longer and more complicated, it is more difficult to take in both the target language and its translation at the same time. In this case, learners can read the translation and understand what is going to be said before they approach the target language text. With movies, learners can first watch with L1 subtitles, and then later without L1 subtitles and either with or without L2 subtitles.

The idea of delayed input can also be seen in the teaching procedure of Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1982):

The translation of the lesson in the mother tongue is given to the students at the beginning of the lesson to look through cursorily, and is then taken away. In this way the instruction is modeled on what is natural for adults—to have a translation of the text in the foreign language. (p. 159)

This description seems to show that Suggestopedia considers the role of giving translation to be lowering the "affective filter" (Krashen, 1988, pp. 37-39) or strengthening "suggestion," by appealing to the learners' old habits. Though this is not made explicit by its description, it is clear that translation is used as the main way of giving the meaning of the text. Why should students look at the text only cursorily? This seems to be another example of minimizing the role of translation for no clear reason. In this procedure translation should be referred to again and

again until the meaning has been grasped by the learners. Without worrying too much about how to make input comprehensible, we can concentrate on how to help the learners take in the target language.

Finally, one essential problem with this approach is that it requires teachers to be sufficiently bilingual. Also, it assumes the learners in a class to be L1 homogeneous. Junior and senior high school teachers and classrooms in Japan basically meet this condition, so this approach could be incorporated in the Oral Communication Course instituted in 1994 following implementation of the new Ministry of Education, Science and Technology guidelines.

Then, what about other teaching situations? Hammerly (1994), in his presentation of the "Multilingual Model," suggests the possibility of developing a program which deals with even more than two languages in a classroom, urging that multilingual teaching materials with each student's native language be organized using computer hardware and software and the help of authors and consultants (p. 269). I believe that if materials are designed which are user-friendly to teachers, at least they will find it possible to take advantage of this.

Conclusion

Primarily because of the excessive negative-reaction to the traditional grammar-translation method, translation has been underestimated in modern teaching approaches. However, if language teachers adopt an alternative view of translation, one totally different from the conventional view, they can make the most of the potential it has as a semanticizer. Translation can be a starting point in the teaching process. Modern approaches have widened the possibility of helping students to learn language through playing with it. A wise use of translation combined with these approaches can complement what has been crucially lacking. Because there are many kinds of translation (Newmark, 1988), one of our imminent tasks will be to specify what kind of translation is appropriate to best meet specific teaching purposes. Empirical studies about the effectiveness of this new use of translation in classrooms will also be needed.

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