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TRANSLATION AS A PEDAGOGY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE IN A RURAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. English proficiency among black South African learners and students has been found to be generally difficult to attain despite English being used as the sole medium of instruction in schools and at universities. To mitigate the issue, this paper explores the use of translation pedagogy as an approach in enabling bilingual students to utilise their linguistic repertoire as a tool not only to enhance their English Second Language development but to also give recognition to their first language. The contribution of the study is made significant by the fact that available related research has largely been conducted at kindergarten and school level leaving a gap in the higher education environment. An observational qualitative data collection methodology was conducted in which a university lecturer presented a lesson prepared by the researcher. The participants were bilingual in a predominantly African language speaking university community in a rural area of South Africa. The use of students' African language (IsiZulu) was observed to enhance their English vocabulary which in the process saw them participating freely in both languages throughout the lesson. The main finding of the study is that English competency can be enhanced with the learners' home language in a carefully prepared lesson that draws from translation pedagogy.

Keywords: *multilingual; proficiency; medium of instruction; higher education; vocabulary.*

Rezumat. Cunoașterea limbii engleze în rândul studenților și studenților din Africa de Sud este în general dificil de atins, în ciuda faptului că engleza este folosită ca unic mijloc de predare în școli și universități. Pentru a atenua problema, această lucrare explorează utilizarea pedagogiei traducerii ca abordare care le permite studenților bilingvi să-și utilizeze repertoriul lingvistic ca instrument nu numai pentru a-și îmbunătăți dezvoltarea limbii engleze, ci și pentru a recunoaște prima lor limbă. Contribuția studiului este semnificativă prin faptul că cercetările conexe disponibile au fost efectuate în mare măsură la nivel de grădiniță și școală, lăsând un gol în mediul învățământului superior. A fost realizată o metodologie de colectare a datelor calitative observaționale în care un lector universitar a prezentat o lecție pregătită de cercetător. Participanții erau bilingvi într-o comunitate universitară predominant vorbitoare de limbi africane dintr-o zonă rurală din Africa de Sud. S-a observat că utilizarea limbii africane a elevilor (IsiZulu) le îmbunătățește vocabularul în

limba engleză, ceea ce ia făcut să participe liber în ambele limbi pe parcursul lecției. Principala constatare a studiului este că competența engleză poate fi îmbunătățită cu limba de acasă a cursanților într-o lecție pregătită cu atenție, care se bazează pe pedagogia traducerii.

Cuvinte cheie: *multilingv; experiență; mediu de instruire; educație înaltă; vocabular*.

1. Introduction

English Second Language (ESL) or English First Additional Language (EFAL) is the main language of instruction for many black South African students whose mother tongue or first language (L1) is an African language [1]. To tackle different subjects as part of their studies, students need to acquire a certain level of English competence. This entrenchment of English and other ex-colonial languages in African countries is due to that the knowledge systems used in education were transplanted from Europe and based on Eurocentric models [2]. Africans now find themselves under pressure to disregard their languages to acquire colonial languages like English to access major domains of education, economy, media and labour markets. Yet, many of them struggle to meet this challenge leading to severe stress which puts them at a serious academic and professional disadvantage compared to their white counterparts for whom English or Afrikaans is their mother-tongue [3-5]. This linguistically unsupportive teaching and learning environment has resulted in low academic success and high drop-out rates among African students across all school and post-secondary education fields [6,7]. As a result, the entire South African education system has been described as in crisis [8-10].

This unacceptable situation in schools has been documented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) who reported that the 2011 Annual National Assessment (ANA) results had been deteriorating since testing began in 2008. For example, in 2008, 36% of Grade 3s scored under 35% in literacy while in 2011 the figure increased to 45%. A comparison between the 2008 Grade 3 results and the 2011 Grade 6 results also revealed a worsening performance. For instance, while 36% of 2008 Grade 3s scored under 35% in literacy, in 2011 57% of the Grade 6s scored under 35% [11]. International comparisons are even more concerning when one looks at the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) for Grade 4 learners from different countries in which South Africa's literacy levels were at the bottom of the list. These low literacy levels impact on other subjects, as shown in the results of a study called Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in which Grades 5 and 9 learners performed poorly in mathematics and science [12,13].

Not surprisingly, the students' poor academic performance in South African universities is no better due to many factors but especially the language of instruction that is foreign to the masses with a disadvantaged educational background [14-17]. For example, the 2030 Reading Panel study revealed that future maths teachers registered at three universities performed unsatisfactorily on a mathematics test designed at the level of primary school children [10]. The overall concern is lack of equity in the democratic South Africa as evident in the completion rate for white students that is on average 50% higher than that for African students [18]. The situation is severe among students from historically disadvantaged universities and schools where the environment and educational quality lacks supportive resources and English proficient lecturers and educators [5, 19-22]. All this goes against the supreme policy of the country, the Republic of South Africa Constitution (1997) and other policies informed by it in education, that accords equal status to nine African languages

together with English and Afrikaans. These policies are meant to promote multilingualism in society and in education. In education there is the Language in Education Policy (Department of Education) [23] for schools and the Language Policy in Higher Education [24] for tertiary institutions that require the maintenance of home languages in the process of developing the acquisition of additional languages such as English.

Translation, as an activity that contains a bilingual approach between the source language and the target language presents opportunities for interaction between two languages. Such an approach has the potential to support competency development in English and literacy skills that can be transferred across languages [25]. In this instance, the Cummins' Interdependency Hypothesis [26] is useful in noting that the First Language and Second Language literacy skills are interdependent, with high levels of First Language proficiency helpful for Second Language acquisition. In the South African context, this assertion may provide the basis for the evaluation of the role of an approach that focuses on using the students' African language (L1) as a teaching approach to the development of ESL.

There is a gap in research that interrogates barriers experienced by students in accessing and succeeding in higher education due to the rurality of their environment [19]. Moreover, available research on translation pedagogy has largely been conducted at kindergarten and school level leaving a gap in the higher education environment [27]. The situation is further complicated by the history of language pedagogy in which the use of the mother tongue to learn a second language had been strongly discouraged [28,29]. It is a concerning sign of monoglossic ideologies on language instruction that complaints are often levelled against the use of L2 by students but ignored when teachers mix languages (code-switching) to facilitate learning [30]. Language learning and translating should not be divorced because they can be mutually enriching forms of translingual and transcultural practice in education [31]. The approach allows a shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred focus in language education by allowing learners to transfer knowledge from their L1 to develop L2 competencies [32].

The aim of this paper was to investigate the development and implementation of translation as a teaching pedagogy in a rural and historically disadvantaged university in South Africa where students experience challenges with English competence. In addition, the study sought to observe the strategic role of L1 on L2 development among students.

The following are the research questions on which the study focuses:

(i) How would a translation pedagogy be structured?
(ii) How would a translation pedagogy be implemented in an English first year class?
(iii) What would be the key elements of translation as a pedagogic strategy?

2. Materials and Methods

For this study, data collection was through an empirical study which had observation of a prepared lesson as its focus in 2021. The observation was that of a lesson presented by a lecturer using translation as a pedagogy. The researcher observed a lesson of 60 minutes during which notes were taken. There were 50 students in total, with 21 being male and 29 being female. All 50 students were of African origin and IsiZulu speakers. The participants were purposefully sampled because they were at the time registered as first-year students in the selected rural university of South Africa considered to be representative of African rural

linguistic communities. The participants and the university were convenient to the researcher.

Data analysis for this study were in a form of description of what was observed. So, the lesson as observed was described and conclusions made from what was observed. In other words, the researcher reviewed what was witnessed and synthesized it with the observations and words of the participants themselves, in this case the students and the lecturer.

In conducting the study, one of the foremost ethical considerations was not to do any harm to the participants. In this regard, the study had no possible harmful consequences to the participants. Further, the privacy and anonymity of the participants was assured as the sample that participated in the study was just a small group out of the population of around 950 students that were registered for the module. It would not be possible for anyone to know which students participated in the study. Furthermore, confidentiality was always maintained as the students' identity was not sought and could therefore logically not be divulged. Prior permission had been sought from the English Department of the university for the study to be conducted. Lastly, the informed consent was obtained from all the study participants who signed such a document. This was indeed after the purpose of the study and risks involved and eliminated were explained to them in their language.

3. Results and Discussion

The data are in the form of a series of lessons that took place in an English first year class at a rural university. The students at the university almost exclusively have an English Second Language background. This is the same for the lecturer. Since both the students and the lecturer share a mother tongue (IsiZulu), the environment was ripe for exploring the central research question of how translation can be a pedagogic strategy in an English class.

This is significant in that it shows that the existence of two or more languages in most South African schools and universities provides grounds for using translation as a pedagogy in an English Second Language class. Moreover, the fact that the students shared both languages with the lecturer means that there were no barriers to using the approach.

3.1 Presenting the Lesson

The lesson outlines that translation as a pedagogy would be structured in the following manner in an English Second Language class:

- A topic is given to students in one language and a discussion takes place on an issue relating to the topic.
- An article is then given to students in one language, and they are asked to find translations of words from the article that are flashed on the board.
- Next, students are asked to translate, in writing, parts of the article from one language to the other. A bilingual dictionary is provided as a resource.
- What follows is students being asked to exchange their translations and then provide comments on how good the translations are.

This part of the lesson answers the research question of how translation as a pedagogy would be structured in an English Second Language class. Having shown how translation as a pedagogy would be structured in an English class, it is necessary to proceed to the next research question of how it would be implemented in a classroom.

This is the beginning of the lesson. The topic "Teenage Pregnancy" is flashed on the board and students are asked to mention challenges that are associated with teenage pregnancy.

At the beginning of the lesson, the lecturer introduces the lesson. The lecturer then flashes the topic "Teenage Pregnancy" on the board using an overheard board linked to a laptop and asks students in English what they think are the challenges of teenage pregnancy. The answers are provided by turn-taking in the classroom. Sometimes, the lecturer requires students to raise their hands. Other times the lecturer nominates a student to provide the answer. This strategy seems to work in eliciting enough responses.

Students answer in both English and IsiZulu:

- The mother may experience financial difficulties in raising the child as she might not be working.
- The mother may have to drop-out of school to take care of the baby.
- There might be a threat of HIV-AIDS to both the mother and the baby.
- The father is likely to lose interest in the girl once she is a mother.
- The father is likely to have pressure to marry the girl.
- In some instances, the teenager might be forced by circumstances to abort the child, which may lead to stigma in some communities.

The class is lively as the students take turns to provide the challenges they think might present themselves. The researcher can see that the class is lively as almost all the students have their hands raised to attempt to provide an answer. Students also provide answers off the cuff without being asked, prompting the lecturer to comment: "It looks like you know a lot about teenage pregnancy! Is it from experience"? The students find this comment amusing and they all laugh. The fact that students found this activity enjoyable is in line with the idea that a "low-anxiety" environment is best for teaching and learning a second language [33].

Translation as a pedagogy, as implemented in the lesson, provides exactly that environment. Moreover, this part of the lesson seems to provide empirical support to the idea that translation as a pedagogy can be based on the communicative approach with reading, listening, speaking and writing being focussed on in the same lesson sequence in an environment the students find relaxed.

3.2 Class Discussion

A class discussion takes place on the identified challenges that are associated with teenage pregnancy. The responses that are given by students generate a lot of discussions, which take place in English:

Student A (Girl): "It is wrong that girls have to stay at home while the boys go on with their lives. I find it unfair".

Student B (Boy): "What do you want boys to do? Do you want us to come and breastfeed the baby?"

Student C: "You see, that's why you have to use contraceptives".

The discussions go on until the lecturer signals to the students to stop. At this point, the lecturer indicates that maybe it might be a good idea to have a formal debate on the challenges that teenage pregnancy causes. Such a debate may also involve the roles of boys and girls in raising a baby that is a result of teenage pregnancy.

3.3 Translating Words

In this part of the lesson, students try to find English translations for IsiZulu words. Next, students are given an English article and they are asked to find English translations from the text for IsiZulu words that are flashed on the board. The use of two languages

simultaneously as a deliberate teaching strategy is different from existing pedagogies such as code-switching which are not prefaced by an article. This lends support to the idea that translation as a pedagogy in this context is not used as "a pragmatic response to the local classroom context". It is a deliberate pedagogical approach.

The words that are given are:

"Ukubhekana", "Incindezi", "Izinkalo", "Ukopha", "Ukuphoxeka", "Ukubalisa", "Encupheni".

As the words get flashed, students' excitement is evident. Students read the article and attempt to find English translations for the IsiZulu words. The conversations among students are mainly in IsiZulu.

Student A says: "Mina ngiyawazi la magama ngesiZulu kepha anzima nge-English". This can be translated as "I know the meaning of these words in IsiZulu, but they are difficult in English".

Student B says: "Kumele ukhumbule leli li-class le-English". This can be translated as "You should remember this is an English class".

Student C says: "Unamanga awuzazi ukuthi izinkalo yini, ngisho ngesiZulu. Ucabanga ukuthi uzakuzazi njani ngesiNgesi"? This can be translated as "You are lying. You don't know what 'izinkalo' means, even in IsiZulu. How do you expect to know it in English"?

Student D says: "Mina ngizokuwabuka kwi-dictionary la magama". This can be translated as "I will look the words up in the dictionary".

Students seem to struggle with this activity. The main reason for students struggling with the activity is because the Lecturer expressly disallowed the use of a dictionary at the beginning. However, it is important to note that because students are forced to think about the translations for the words they have been given, they are forced to read the article with more intensity than they would otherwise do. These fosters reading with comprehension, a key skill in language development.

Nevertheless, it appears that students' vocabulary is limited as they come up with more or less the same answers, failing to find some of the correct answers from the article as shown in the answers they give:

- Ukubhekana- best.
- Incindezi- burdens.
- Izinkalo- crisis.
- Ukopha- soaring.
- Ukuphoxeka- disappointed.
- Ukubalisa- lamented.
- Encupheni- risk.

Students only get "ukuphoxeka- disappointed" and "ukubalisa- lamented right and "encupheni- risk". The rest of the answers are wrong. As evidenced in the earlier conversations between the students, it would seem that, although students know the IsiZulu words, they find it difficult to locate the English equivalents in the text. This would suggest that the English article has been read without understanding. If it were, students would know that the English words they have chosen are far removed from the IsiZulu words whose meaning they sought to understand. It also reveals that the article has not been read in context, as the context would have likely suggested the answers to the translations that were sought.

At this point, some students seem to realise that the answers they have provided may not be correct. Various students start to chat, in IsiZulu, about the possibility of these answers not being correct:

Student A: "Angicabangi ukuthi 'izinkalo' yi-'crisis'! Wena uthini"? This can be translated as "I don't think that 'izinkalo' means 'crisis'! What do you think?

Student B: "Mina angazi. Sesiyakubona ma sesifumana iimpendulo". This can be translated as "I do not know. Let us see when the answers are given.

Student C: "Buka nje 'incindezi'. Cha! Angekhe lisho lokho". This can be translated as "Just have a look at 'incindezi'. It cannot possible mean that (meaning the word 'burdens')".

Student D: "Ngekungcono uma bebesivumele siwabuke kwi-dictionary la magama". This can be translated as "It would have been better if we could look these words up in the dictionary".

These discussions by students, conducted in English, are valuable in an English Second Language class as they provide students with an opportunity to practice their speaking skills. This part of the lesson proves that translation as pedagogy in an English Second Language class does not have to be a teacher-centred approach.

After a period of time, the lecturer allows the students to look the words up in the English- IsiZulu dictionary. The students then come up with similar answers to the ones provided when the Lecturer ultimately writes them on the chalkboard:

- Ukubhekana- contend.
- Incindezi- beleaguered.
- Izinkalo- pelvises.
- Ukopha- haemorrhaging.
- Ukuphoxeka- disappointed.
- Ukubalisa- lamented.
- Encupheni- delicate (positions).

The lecturer then asks the students if they will remember the actual English meanings of the words whose translations they had given. One of the students answers in English:

Student A: "Sir, I think this activity has helped me to understand the English words better since I know exactly what they mean in IsiZulu".

The Lecturer follows this up with a more pointed question:

Lecturer: "So, would you say that this activity has improved your competence in English"?

Student B: "I would say so, Sir".

Lecturer: "I guess I will have to test to what extent you have improved".

This exchange seems to answer the research question whether translation can help improve the competence of South African students in English Second Language. However, as the Lecturer rightly points out, this can only be measured through another testing. Measuring whether translation does improve competence in English Second Language was not the main focus of this study. It is a topic for further research.

3.4 Translating an Extract

The lesson proceeds with students being given extracts to translate from IsiZulu into English. In the next activity, the lecturer divides the students into several groups and asks them to translate three small articles.

The class is lively as students discuss the various translations. The groups on the left of the class translate article A, the groups in the middle article B and the groups on the right article C. The use of an article as a basis for translation is a major point of difference from existing pedagogies that are used in English Second Language. It is what distinguishes the approach from any other that is currently used in South Africa. It contextualises translation as a pedagogy that would use the translation of a text, music, dance or any other intersemiotic, interlingual or intralingual activity as the basis for teaching English Second Language.

It can be noted that students are forced to think in English as they seek to translate the articles. Although students are engaged actively, they seem to find the activity challenging.

3.5 Comparing Translated Texts

In this part of the lesson, students are asked to exchange and compare their translations. The next step in the lesson involves students being asked to exchange their translations and to compare them. They are asked to rate the translations as "Good", "Not too good" and "Not Good". The class is lively as students read out each other's translations and find areas of improvement. Students comment loudly, in their groups, about translations they find hilarious. This happens in almost all the groups, thus contributing to the class being lively.

The lecturer asks three groups to read out the exchanged translations, say what rating they gave and the reasons for the rating. This provides an interesting point of debate as the original groups try to defend their translations when they are said to be "Not too good".

Lastly, groups are given back their translations that have been rated and are asked to make improvements to them. Some groups are not happy with the ratings that have been given to their translations and asks for the opinion of the Lecturer. The Lecturer offers his opinion on the translations, stating which ones he believes are "good", "not too good" and "good" as it may be the case. Students seem to accept the affirmation by the lecturer.

The lecturer then asks the students whose translations have been found to be "not too good" to try and improve their translations at their leisure.

The lesson ends at this point. The Lecturer thanks the researcher and dismisses the class.

4. Conclusions

This study investigated the role of translation as a pedagogy in an English class in a historically disadvantaged university located in a rural area of South Africa. The main finding from the study is that translation can be used as a pedagogy in an English class that has predominantly English Second Language students.

Furthermore, this approach can be used in a bilingual English Second Language class but may encounter challenges in a multilingual class. This may be due more to the design of the lesson as it would be easier to plan and implement for two languages but more challenging for more than two languages. This means that deliberate use of a pedagogy that has translation as its core teaching methodology can be successful in an English Second Language class when the multilingual factor has been accounted for. Whilst the observed classroom activities indicated success in this regard, there were however some gaps. The study came short in that it did not empirically measure the impact of the approach on individual students improved English.

So, to summarise, the study has found that translation as a pedagogy can be used in an English Second Language class, within the context of a communicative approach. There is empirical support for this conclusion as demonstrated in the lesson that was observed.

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