

4 Translation training and language instruction at the academic level

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to make a point in a discussion whether and to what extent it is advisable to incorporate language instruction activities into the translation course. Although translation competence is often perceived as a set of sub-competencies that always includes language skills, regardless of the theoretical framework adopted, it is generally assumed that language proficiency of students taking a translation course at the university is adequate to undertake such tasks. However, as experience shows, novice translators frequently struggle with language problems unexpected at that level. Based on an experiment conducted with students of English philology attending a translation course at the Pedagogical University of Cracow, the author of this paper presents challenges and areas of linguistic problems faced by inexperienced translators, proposing solutions that might be useful for a translation trainer designing such a course. A reference is made to a reversed concept of translation as the fifth skill in learning a foreign language. This controversial idea of using translation in a language class, rejected by the modern language teaching approach as deriving from the traditional grammar-translation method, has been recently gaining popularity among teachers and researchers. The findings in this area may be of practical value for both translation teachers and language instructors.

Keywords: translator training, language instruction, L2 teaching methods, translation.

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1. Introduction

The relation between language teaching and translation has always been very close, though turbulent, and of a ‘love-hate’ type. Those two ideas have been even referred to as ‘strange bedfellows’ (Carreres, 2006). Throughout history, this relation was typically described in terms of the tool and the aim, often taking extreme points of view, which will be presented in the first part of this paper. Although in discussions concerning those two concepts the focus is typically on applying translation methods in foreign language teaching, this paper will assume an entirely different perspective, namely the issue of language instruction in a translation class, based on the author’s experience in teaching undergraduate students in the English department of the Pedagogical University of Cracow.

2. A brief history of the relations between translation and language learning

2.1. Translation as the only L2 teaching method

Translation is considered to be the oldest method of teaching foreign languages, which was widely used for centuries as a classical, unquestionable method of teaching Greek and Latin (Marqués Aguado & Solís-Becerra, 2013, p. 38; Munday, 2001, p. 8). The same approach was later transferred into the way of teaching modern languages, the so-called ‘grammar translation’ method, introduced in secondary schools in Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century to teach numerous groups of students demonstrating different levels in learning abilities (Anderman, 2007, p. 52; Ferreira, 1999, p. 356). The method consisted in studying the grammar of a language and reading texts, typically of religious or literary natures, with the use of a dictionary and the acquired grammar (Malmkjær, 1998, p. 2).

The first grammar-translation course in English was published in 1793 by Johann Christian Fick, following the model of a course in French proposed by

Johann Valentin Meidinger (Curtis, 2017, p. 148; Pym & Ayvazyan, 2016, p. 3; Randaccio, 2012, p. 78). This method used translation, to and from the foreign language, of individual sentences which were usually specifically constructed to exemplify certain grammatical features. The method was centred on learning the grammatical rules and structures of the foreign language by heart, and on practising and testing the rules and structures acquired through the translation of a series of artificially constructed and separate sentences exemplifying the items studied (Munday, 2001, p. 8). The difficulty of examples was typically graded, which made it possible to teach grammar in a systematic manner. The units of the course were based on grammatical constructions, ordered according to the difficulty levels, and presented in the sentences to be translated and studied (Ferreira, 1999, p. 356). This method was popularised in England in the second half of the eighteenth century with the introduction of the Cambridge Assessment system in 1848, offered by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). The idea behind using a grammar-translation method was based on the need to place modern languages on the curriculum along with classical languages. As Randaccio (2012, p. 78) explains, to enjoy the same academic reputability as the classical languages, modern languages had to be taught using the same teaching methods.

2.2. Translation excluded from the L2 classroom

However, the approach towards the grammar translation method and the use of L1 in the classroom was brought into question and consequently condemned along with the development of new language teaching methods known as the natural method, the conversation method, the direct method, and the communicative approach. The changes were introduced along with the reform movement of the nineteenth century based on new assumptions of language learning which included the primacy of speech, the importance of connected texts in teaching and learning and the priority of oral classroom methodology (Ferreira, 1999, p. 356; Laviosa, 2014, p. 8; Randaccio, 2012, p. 78). The reformers postulated that the exercises consisting in translation into the foreign language should be replaced by practising free composition written in the second language related to subjects already known from previous classes (Sweet, 1900,

p. 206 in [Laviosa, 2014](#), p. 8). Translation into the native language was excluded from the classroom, especially in prestigious language courses boasting the fact of applying modern teaching methodology. For instance, in Berlitz's schools, where the natural method was applied on a large scale, translation was ruled out under any circumstances, which was clearly specified in the directions included in all the teaching books, warning the teacher against even minor concessions on this point ([Randaccio, 2012](#), p. 79).

In this new reality of teaching languages, with the communicative approach coming to the fore, based on the idea that learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning, translation exercises were treated as the factor inhibiting language acquisition. Some of the objections raised against the use of translation in the classroom, organised and formulated by [Newson \(1998, pp. 63-64\)](#), were based on the assumptions that translation encourages thinking in one language, which inevitably causes interference and may support a false belief that word-to-word equivalence between languages exists. [Newson \(1998\)](#) emphasised that translation in the classroom does not facilitate achievement of main language teaching aims such as focus on fluency, attention to gradual introduction of controlled and selected lexical items, or communicative language use, and deprives the teacher of the possibility of observing learning effects in the form of, for example, new ranges of vocabulary or structures. As mentioned by [Svěrák \(2013\)](#),

“[t]he latter is not surprising since each translation task provides normally only one (random) example of new language items; there is no repetition and practice as in classic forms of language learning and teaching, no grading and no structuring” (p. 54).

2.3. Translation turn in L2 learning

The relation between translation and language began to improve in the mid 1980's, which was both related to a growth of translation studies as an autonomous discipline and to the observations made by experts in methodology and linguistics based on actual use of L1 in the classroom, its advantages, and

disadvantages. A renewed interest in translation as part of language classroom practice, begun by Duff (1994), was based on a shift from the emphasis from learning translation as an aim in itself to using translation as a means to promote language learning (Laviosa, 2014, p. 26). Duff, a lecturer and a translator himself, formulated clear arguments for using translation in the classroom, as it develops the ability to “search for the most appropriate words in order to convey accurately the meaning of the original text, thus enhancing flexibility, accuracy and clarity” (Laviosa, 2014, p. 26).

Another author contributing to the reconsideration of translation in language teaching, Cook (2010), presented in his book *Translation in Language Teaching*, a view of the translation as an aid not only to language acquisition, pedagogy, and testing, but also a response to student needs, rights, and the tool of empowerment. As Cook (2010) claims, “I shall argue that for most contemporary language learners, translation should be a major aim and means of language learning, and a major measure of success” (p. xv).

This bold statement acted as a spur for modern scholars to address arguments against translation in language teaching methodology and to provide scientific evidence to legitimate its use in the language classroom, from which, despite the prescription of the communicative approach methodology, it has never been entirely eradicated (Carreres, 2014; Gross, 2013; Kelly & Bruen, 2016; Kupske, 2015; Marqués Aguado & Solís-Becerra, 2013; Pym & Ayvazyan, 2016). Also, books have started to emerge with practical examples of translation activities in foreign language teaching, such as *Translation and Own-language Activities* by Kerr (2014), encouraging the use of translation in a methodologically justified manner, following the assumption translation is a mental process naturally occurring in the heads of our students and trying to exploit this fact for methodological purposes.

In the opinion of researchers following this trend (Duff, 1994, p. 7; Kerr, 2014, p. 122; Pym et al., 2013, p. 135; Randaccio, 2012, p. 81; Schäffner, 1998, p. 125), arguments put forward in favour of using translation in L2 teaching and learning can be summarised as follows:

- it encourages conscious learning, helping to control the foreign language and to reduce negative transfer, improving the understanding of differences between languages;
- it helps young learners (teenagers) at the initial stage of learning of new vocabulary and provides an effective approach in solving the problem of false friends;
- translation makes the learning process meaningful, with the learner involved as an active participant in the process;
- it is an activity that might stimulate the cognitive potential of learners;
- it helps to improve verbal performance by reverbalisation and reformulation of the source text;
- translation activities make learners use the structures that otherwise would be avoided by them;
- it helps to address cultural linguistic differences and promotes correct use of idioms;
- it helps in monitoring and improving the comprehension of the foreign language, thus leaving more time and space for actual language practice; and
- it is associated with high involvement and satisfaction of students.

The argument for the use of translation in the language classroom can be also found directly in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages, a document providing a comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculums, guidelines for preparing teaching and learning materials, and for measuring foreign language proficiency, covering the cultural context in which language is used (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1). The

document clearly mentions the skill of mediation, understood as interpreting and translating, providing the specific examples of mediating activities to be used, such as simultaneous interpretation in meetings or formal speeches, consecutive interpretation, e.g. in guided tours or interpretation in social and transactional situations, translation of contracts and scientific texts, or summarising gist, also between L1 and L2 (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 87).

Therefore, since it is explicitly recommended for teachers to introduce such activities in the foreign language classroom, they should not feel ‘guilty’ of using and encouraging the use of the mother tongue to practise such skills.

3. The concept of pedagogical translation

What must be clearly emphasised in the translation revival approach is its use as a didactic means and not as the ultimate aim of the classroom activities. This is reflected in the notion of pedagogical translation, a term typically defined in opposition to the so-called ‘real translation’, with the two concepts differing in the aspect of function, object and addressee. In pedagogical translation, the function of the translated text is to act as a tool for improving language proficiency, consciousness-raising, practising, or testing language knowledge, but also for illumination and memorisation, while in real translation, the translated text is not a tool, but the very goal of the process (Klaudy, 2003, p. 133; Vermes, 2010, p. 83). As regards the object, in pedagogical translation it is information about the language learners’ level of language proficiency, while in real translation, it is information about reality contained in the source text. As for the addressee, in translation for pedagogical purposes, the addressee is the language teacher or the examiner, while in real translation it is the target language reader wanting some information about reality.

In the light of this definition, the question emerges whether translation pedagogy, i.e. translation training, is more like pedagogical translation, therefore somehow entitled to follow the same methodology, or is it teaching ‘real translation’. Interesting conclusions can be drawn when analysing the notion of translation

pedagogy using the same framework. Although in translation training classes, the translated text is the final product of students' work, the function of class translation is also to improve their translation competence, which involves language proficiency and language awareness raising. The object of a translation task is to obtain information about the students' proficiency in writing texts in L1 or L2, with an additional factor of translation accuracy. And the addressee is obviously the teacher – in this case often referred to as the 'translation trainer'. Even on those rare occasions when the product of students' work is intended to be used by general public (e.g. translation of university websites), it is always the teacher or peer students who proofread and evaluate the translation.

It is also worth mentioning that the concept of pedagogical translation vs. real translation corresponds to another dichotomy proposed by Gile (1995) between school translation and professional translation, where school translation is understood as drafting texts based on lexical and syntactic choices prompted by the source-language text, serving “mostly as drills for the acquisition of foreign-language vocabulary and grammar structures and as foreign-language proficiency tests” (p. 26), i.e. serving the students themselves, while professional translation focusses on the reader interested in the contents of the source message, with the purpose of helping people communicate in specific situations. It also reflects the distinction between translation exercises in language teaching and the teaching of translation for a professional career, as introduced by Schäffner (1998, pp. 131-132). In her opinion, the concept of translation in those two situations must be defined in a different way, with translation for foreign language learning aiming being a kind of decoding-encoding translation, i.e. aiming at “reproducing the message of the ST while paying attention to different linguistic structures”, and translation training for professional purposes oriented towards “text production for specific purposes” (Schäffner, 1998, pp. 131-132).

4. Classification of translation students' errors

Therefore, what is the place of language learning in translation teaching? A partial answer to this question was provided by Pym (1992, pp. 4-5), who proposed an

interesting division of errors made by students into binary and non-binary ones. Binary errors are those that elicit the teacher's answer 'it is wrong' (in terms of grammar, spelling, or language rules) and that should be subject to a very quick correction. Non-binary errors, on the other hand, require further discussion, explanation, and elaboration. These are the items provoking the answer 'it does not sound good', which, obviously, need a further analysis, thus leading to acquisition of translation competence, understood as the union of two skills:

- the ability to generate a Target Text (TT) series of more than one viable term (TT1, TT2...TTn) for a Source Text (ST); and
- the ability to select only one TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence, and to propose this TT as a replacement of the ST for a specified purpose and reader (Pym, 1992, p. 3).

It is commonly believed that the 'binary' type errors are to be dealt with in language classes, while the 'non-binary' errors belong to translation training.

To illustrate the issue, some examples of students' errors are provided below. The sentences come from a class translation exercise, consisting in translation of the minutes of the shareholders' meeting into English, as a part of a specialised translation course in the second year of undergraduate studies, discussed in more details in Kodura (2017).

- Dnia dwudziestego ósmego marca dwa tysiące szesnastego roku.
= *Twenty eight of march in the year two thousand and sixteen*
- Nikt z obecnych nie wniósł sprzeciwu.
= *None of the present persons has not raised any objections.*
- Obrady Zwyczajnego Zgromadzenia Wspólników otworzył Pan Adam Nowak, który został wybrany na Przewodniczącego.
= *The session of the Ordinary Shareholders' Meeting opened Mr Adam Nowak, which was voted for the chairman.*

- Obrady Zwyczajnego Zgromadzenia Wspólników.
= *Sessions of the General Assembly of Partners*

As it can be easily seen, most of the above errors have been generated by interference from Polish, as we can observe here problems with spelling (the different use of capital letters in both languages), double negation transferred from Polish, incorrect word order). The second year students of English philology are not expected to make such mistakes, and actually, they are very careful with language and do not commit such mistakes in other language classes, yet in the process of translation they become so engrossed in the translation activity itself, i.e. the process of rendering the message in the target language, that they forget to reflect on grammar correctness and possible negative transfer. In the examples quoted above, both binary and non-binary errors can be observed. The first three examples refer to the language, i.e. can be classified as binary errors, while the fourth translation depends on the context and the proper rendering of the source phrase requires proper decoding of the original message supplemented with specific background subject-matter knowledge concerning different types of commercial companies in Poland.

5. Translation activities in the L2 teaching methodology

The examination of students' errors in class and homework assignments led to the conclusion that translation students indeed need some additional language practice in the sense of traditional development of integrated skills, yet with the focus on possible translation issues and especially negative transfer from the mother tongue. The framework for such an approach could be found in ready-made solutions proposed by language experts supporting the idea of using translation activities in the L2 class. Such a framework, with actual examples of class activities, has been proposed, among others, by [Leonardi \(2010\)](#), who grouped them into pre-translation, translation, and post-translation tasks. Examples of the pre-translation activities involve brainstorming, vocabulary preview, or anticipation guides. The activities carried out during the translation

activity itself may involve reading activities, summary translation, re-translation or 'back-translation', vocabulary building or even improvement of intercultural awareness, which is the aspect currently emphasised in language teaching curricula. Post-translation activities may include writing a summary of the source text or a translation commentary, which is a valuable element in a translator's training (Leonardi, 2010, p. 88).

Therefore, if the framework for translation activities in language learning is already provided and justified, why not use it in translation class to improve language proficiency?

There are several objections to the concept of combining language instruction and translation training. First of them being the claim popular among translation trainers that translation class is not a good place to develop language skills as students already have blocks of integrated skills courses to deal with such problems, while only 30 hours is intended for translation course, so students should spend them for more 'translation-oriented' activities. Secondly, as Klaudy (2003) claims, "translator training starts where foreign language teaching ends" (p. 133), the assumption being that translator training should start after target language acquisition and the translation trainees are already at an appropriate language level to translate. As it could be observed in the analysis of translation students' errors, it is not always the case. Another opinion supports the claim that translation competence is psychologically complex and differs from language skills, and consequently, should be trained separately (Lado, 1964, p. 54 in Marqués Aguado & Solís-Becerra, 2013, p. 39). The last point to be made here is that the very idea to teach translation into a non-mother tongue is strongly criticised and such a practice is considered artificial. It is claimed that translation into the non-native language induces learners to make errors (Randaccio, 2012, p. 82). Translating into a foreign language is often disapproved by translation experts and professional translators, who claim that regardless of the translator's knowledge of a foreign language, the non-native speaker is not able to produce a text matching that of the competent native speaker (Ross, 2014, p. 5). The non-native speaker is more likely to produce a target text that sounds unnatural or to make language mistakes which may lead to problems with proper

interpretation of the source text. Nevertheless, in their future professional work, translation trainees will be expected to translate into their L2, as this is the current translation market situation in Poland, therefore, in spite of strong arguments against practising translation into L2, such activities must be a part of the translator training course, which justifies the need of improving English language competence in translation classes.

6. The study

In order to prove whether development of English language skills is advisable in translation classes, a small-scale study was conducted involving translation students of the Pedagogical University of Cracow. The aim of the study was to answer the question whether introduction of typical language practice exercises is beneficial for students or imposes additional burdens, and to verify the impact of this additional practice on development of overall translation competence. The research tool applied was a comparative analysis of translation performance of two groups of students exposed to alternative translation training methods. Participants were second year undergraduate students attending a course in specialised translation. The study consisted in applying two different teaching methods while carrying out the same block of translation activities related to business texts. The groups were made of 15 and 14 participants, respectively. The block covered five lesson units and corresponded to ten class hours, conducted in a different way for each of the group. Apart from class work, which consisted of translation of the same text for both groups, one of the groups was given an additional short translation task directly related to the class work, while the other group was involved into a typical language development activity using the same text as a base. For example, when the main text to be translated by students was a fragment from a website of a Polish Information Technology (IT) company, the first group was given an additional translation of an English text related to a similar IT company, while the other was exposed to the same text, yet not with the purpose of translating, but filling in the missing words, i.e. completing a reading comprehension type task. Other activities involved finding and using phrasal verbs and collocations in sentences created by students. Tasks

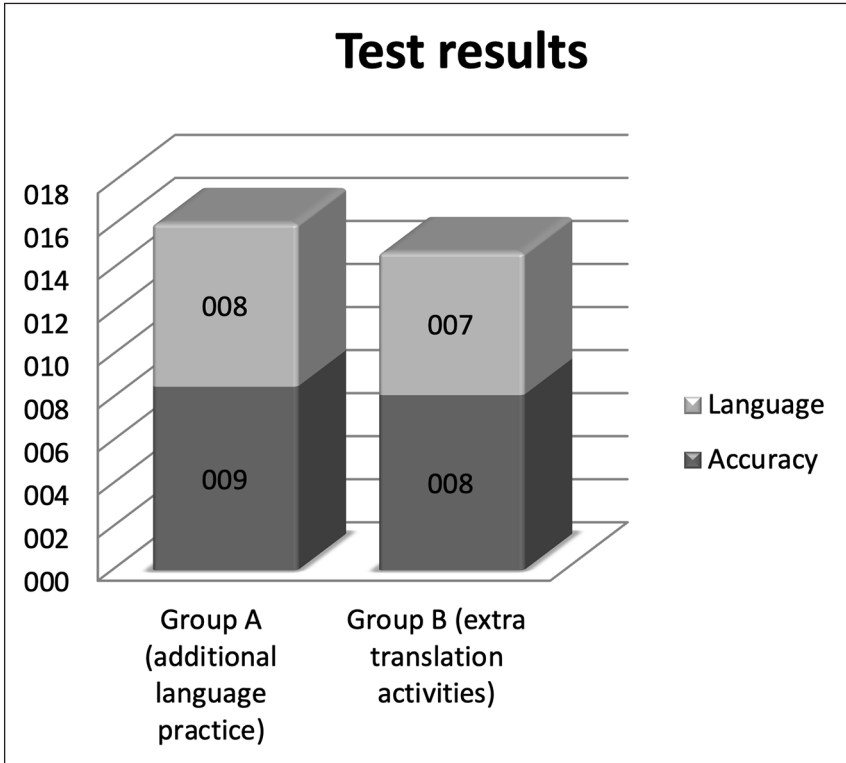
given to students included grammar practice exercises, e.g. providing a correct form of verbs to be used in the text (based on the original text prepared by the teacher) or filling in the missing articles or prepositions. Additionally, the group was asked to spot and correct errors in translated texts – errors of the ‘binary’ type, following classification by Pym (1992). After completing a course unit, the students were given a translation assignment from Polish to English, the same for both groups. Students were asked to translate a 200-word text taken from a website of a Polish IT company (netventure.pl), which closely corresponded to the type of translation and language activities covered during the course (the full source text for the final assignment is provided in the supplementary materials²). The aim of this test was to verify whether the mode of conducting the translation course and additional grammar and vocabulary exercises introduced affected, in any way, students’ overall translation competence. The task was completed in a class setting, with a time limit of 90 minutes. Both groups took the test on the same day. Students worked independently, without the assistance on the part of the teacher, but could use any Internet-based sources and their own notes. Translated texts were saved in the Word format and uploaded on the Moodle platform. Students’ translations were assessed using a scale of 0–20 points, with the maximum score of 20 points, where ten points could be obtained for accuracy and ten for language quality.

7. Study results

After grading translations provided by students of both groups, it was found out that the differences were not very significant, as the average score for group A, who followed the course with additional language exercises, was 16.13, and for group B, 14.79. A difference in the score obtained for the language use in both groups was slightly bigger (7.60 vs. 6.64) than for the translation accuracy (8.53 vs. 8.14). The lowest score obtained in group A was 12 and the highest was 20, while in group B it was 12 and 19, respectively, so individual differences between members of the groups were not that substantial (Figure 1).

2. <https://research-publishing.box.com/s/5hd0zta9zg83kuj1isj0a8kw6jz0mfzz>

Figure 1. Results of the translation assignment



However, the differences are particularly visible in the score obtained for the language use, where the group with additional language practice obtained on average 7.60 points, and the group with extra translation activities only 6.64 points. As regards errors committed by translation trainers, their range was quite varied in both groups under consideration and very frequently they belonged to the binary-type group. This example concerns tenses in English,

- In 2010 newly created Netventure Sp. z o.o. has taken charge of service provision.
- We supported firms in e-marketing when the Internet developed.

this one grammar structures and spelling issues,

- The dynamic development of our services have benefited by implementing necessary shift.
- People with not only specialistic knowledge but also personal involvement in constant development of the firm create Netventure.

as well as having examples of calques from the Polish language,

- (...) www website
- (...) freshly developing Internet Network
- As an interactive agency, we executed website projects (...)

Errors of this type were observed in both groups, with a slightly better language quality found for the group with additional language practice (7.60 vs. 6.64). However, even the small sample of examples presented above shows that the translation trainer faces a special challenge to focus both on development of language accuracy and on translation competence of students.

At this point, certain limitations of this study must be mentioned. First of all, the groups of students who participated in this test were relatively small, and their overall or language score might be the result of their overall language skills, which in such small groups could significantly affect the final results. Secondly, the time devoted to the study (ten class hours) was too short to radically affect the level of students' competence, although the overall aim of the activities was rather to make students aware of potential vocabulary and grammar problems. Finally, assessing students' work by deducting points for specific language errors is always believed to include an element of subjectivity. Although the grading scale applied in this study was based on many years of teaching practice, the results would be even more reliable if the translated texts were checked by two independent trainers. Nevertheless, the main objective of the study was achieved,

i.e. the question whether introduction of extra language exercises is a benefit or a burden for translation students was found, as it turned out that such a form of non-standard translation training was not detrimental to students' acquisition of translation competence, and actually they scored better when exposed to various types of class practice.

There are also some general conclusions that can be derived from the study, and which might be of significant importance to any teacher designing a translation course. Quite interestingly, language activities were well received by students, which might be caused by the fact that they are more used to language development exercises than to translation tasks. It could be also observed that students got more involved in class activities, for instance by taking more notes while doing language exercises, writing down certain collocations or idioms. In their translation assignments, students used the elements they learned through language activities (for example the phrase 'end-to-end solutions'), which is a desirable effect of language practice classes. Students' involvement resulted from an increased attractiveness of the class practice structure, since it was varied and included elements of diversified length (e.g. warm-up activities), as opposed to quite long 'pure' translation tasks, which increased students' motivation to work. By increasing students' motivation based on concepts that are familiar to them (e.g. vocabulary practice), it is easier to encourage them to individually work on the development of their translation competence, which should not be perceived as a set of unrelated sub-competencies, but rather as a post-modern emergent model of translator expertise, or "a holistic bundle" (Király, 2013, p. 201), with a focus on overall development of a novice translator.

However, it should be also added that preparation of class activities is time consuming, since few ready-made exercises are available to match the required context. Language exercises used in translator training must be carefully selected and should particularly focus on differences between languages, e.g. false friends, grammar untranslatability issues, and collocations. However, as the results of this study show, it is certainly worth the effort of the translator trainer. On the other hand, this opens a new demand for L2 learning textbooks

based on the latest approach to pedagogical translation, which have gradually started to appear in the educational market (e.g. Carreres, Noriega-Sánchez, & Calduch, 2017). Experienced translator trainers and foreign language teachers could collaborate in the projects targeted at preparing appropriate teaching materials to the benefit of both language students and translation trainees.

8. Conclusions

The introduction of language practice to the undergraduate translation course improves the motivation of students and helps to comprehensively develop their translator competence. In the context of the overall aim of a course focussed on translation skills, properly selected language activities increase the awareness of translation trainees of the existing problems and difficulties resulting from dissimilarities between languages. Equipped with the knowledge acquired in their obligatory courses of contrastive grammar, skills developed during the practical English classes, and additional awareness built during the language activities in translation classes, the students have the opportunity to become better translators and language specialists. The teacher conducting those classes must bear in mind that although undergraduate students at this stage of their tertiary education do not necessarily plan their future as professional translators, they should be provided with the foundations to build their general language competence, as it is recommended, among others, in the CEFR concerning the skills of mediation.

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Rethinking directions in language learning and teaching at university level

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