

# Investigating Translation as a Key Strategy for Teaching Improvement

Aya Khantomani

The significance of translation for humans is derived from the importance of language itself; for language is the subject matter of translation. Translation can be considered an intellectual effort that serves the purpose of transferring ideas, concepts, and cultures among different languages. It is therefore a practice that requires the mastering of different languages and understanding their culture. In this modern era of globalization, the world is becoming smaller and smaller thanks to the mass media, internet, social media, and the accessibility of information to everyone everywhere. Unfortunately, despite the close interaction between peoples, many communications are being misunderstood. This is no less so in the business of schooling and engagement with parents, when the language of instructions is not the same as the languages spoken at home. This article focuses on the important role that translation plays in enhancing communication between parents and the school. Using a focal school in the United Arab Emirates, with a student population that has Arabic as its mother tongue, the study investigates ways to engage parents authentically in the teaching and learning.

## Introduction (Definition and views of Translation)

Scholars have viewed translation differently. Translation can be defined as the process of transferring meaning, ideas, and concepts from one language, (*Source Language*, henceforth SL) into another language (*Target Language*, henceforth TL) taking into consideration that both languages have their own systems and cultures. The following definitions view translation in different perspectives. The first perspective views translation as an act of exchange between two different systems. This concept was introduced by Darwish (2010) who defined it as “a process in which one language is substituted by another, taking into consideration that changes may take place in terms of lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of the original text for the sake of producing the intended meaning in the target language text” (p.21). Another perspective, which viewed translation as an act of communication, has been provided by Hatim and Mason (1997) in which they defined it as “a means of communication which attempts to spread, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication” (p.15). On the other hand, translation was viewed by Newmark (1995) as an act of creating dynamic equivalence, which was defined as “a craft consisting in the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated” (p.7). Hatim and Mason (1997) believed that “the main purpose of translation is to enable people from different linguistic backgrounds to exchange ideas and concepts, and, ultimately, establish communication between cultures” (p.22). On reflection, we can conclude, that all definitions share the fact that translation is a mean of communication in which we use to understand each other regardless of the different languages, different cultures, and different academic backgrounds. In the school in which I

work and which has focused my article, we believe translation involves rendering ideas, thoughts, and concepts, bridging by doing so the gaps between different cultures and enabling people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate.

### **The Significance of Translation**

The significance of translation for humans is derived from the importance of language itself; for language is the subject matter of translation. Translation can be considered an intellectual effort that serves the purpose of transferring ideas, concepts, and cultures among different languages. It is therefore a practice that requires the mastering of different languages and understanding their culture. In this modern era of globalization, the world is becoming smaller and smaller thanks to the mass media, internet, social media, and the accessibility of information to everyone everywhere. Unfortunately, despite the close interaction between peoples, many are being misunderstood. As mentioned previously, there cannot be full correspondence between languages. Thus, differences between languages create difficulties for the translator, and since each language has its own unique linguistic characteristics, these problems are unavoidable. In her book, *In Other Words*, Mona Baker (2011) believes that equivalence is always relative; since there is no exact equivalence exist between languages. It is generally maintained, that there can be no absolute one to one correspondence between the SL and the TL

Translation can be considered an intellectual effort that serves the purpose of transferring ideas, concepts, and cultures among different languages (Dickens et al, 2002). It is therefore a practice that requires the mastering of different languages and understanding their culture.

### **Methods of Translation Used in Both Written and Oral Translations**

Using one translation method may work for some parts of the text, but not all of it. Thus, the combination of the following methods is for the sake of producing an acceptable, natural, and comprehensible translation. Therefore, the translator/researcher will apply the below mentioned procedures in order to give a precise, natural and comprehensible translation.

The translation method employed in the translations from English into Arabic or vice versa will be a combination of these methods:

- *Communicative translation*: This method attempts to provide readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original language. The translator must produce a translation that is reader friendly. In order for the translator to create such a translation, he/she must try to achieve what Newmark (1995) calls " Dynamic Equivalence". According to Newmark, a dynamic equivalence can be defined as "a craft consisting in the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated" (p.7).
- *Using the search engine Google*: In order to search for the frequency of the TL translated words and terms, there are a number of apps and online programs to assist. Most translators use the international corpus of Arabic that includes more than 100 million words, however; the search engine "Google" is used more by all people and is up to date. Therefore, this technique will allow and help the translator to choose the

most frequent words used in daily life by ordinary people and can be easily understood by the different educational backgrounds of the parents.

Applying these strategies especially in written translations is significant to produce natural text that can be understood easily by the different educational backgrounds of parents.

### Procedures of Translation

According to Robinson (2003), a good translator is the one who translates "carefully, consciously, analytically ... lifelong learners, always looking for more cultural knowledge, more words and phrases, more experience of different text types, more transfer patterns, more solutions to complex problems" (p.221). Thus, before translating any text, the translator should understand the source text and have a broad wealth of knowledge and a rich linguistic competence in both languages in order to be able to produce a good translation. A translator is a reader in the first place and he/she is the one who analyzes and decodes the SL and re-encodes it in the TL. Therefore, misreading leads to mistranslation. According to Trendslator (2001), Figure 1 demonstrates the steps the translator use before, and after the translation process, The six steps are: Investigate, Research, Select, Translate, Create, Implement.

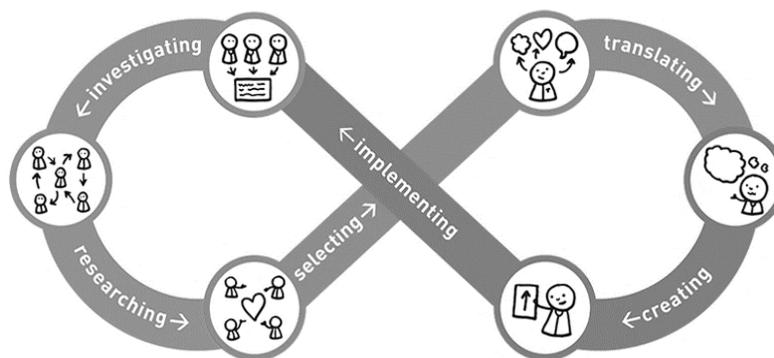


Figure 1: Trendslator's Translation Steps

Let's briefly define each of these steps:

- *Investigate*: Reading the text before translating it. This allows the translator to have a complete understanding and investigate the difficulty level of the text.
- *Research*: Specifying the concepts and words that might pose difficulty or those that are new to the TL culture, and research the new concepts if needed.
- *Select*: In this stage, the difficulties will be highlighted as well as selecting the appropriate translation method to use.
- *Translate*: It should be considered that the translator should possess certain qualities including high proficiency in both the source language (SL) and target language (TL), sufficient knowledge of source and target cultures, strategic competencies in translation as well as adequate knowledge of the characteristic features of the educational register; to be able to produce a natural piece of translation.

- *Create*: after translating the first draft, translator should read his/her own translations once or twice to assess his own translation in order to produce and create more appropriate translations to the text if necessary.
- *Implement*: reading the final draft is important to ensure accuracy. The translator may need to add some new translations or correct some syntactic and spellings mistakes. This would be the finalized product of translation. At this final stage, the translator will need to review the translation to ensure that it is perfect.

## School Context

The focal school for this study is an inspirational, leading-edge international school dedicated to nurturing outstanding role models, responsible global citizens and informed leaders of the future. The vision and philosophy of the school as outlined in the school's strategic plan focuses on developing our learning environment to ensure educational excellence in all aspects. The school follows the American curriculum and 90% of our school students speak Arabic as their mother tongue language. Most parents do not speak English or have limited English skills. Consequently, communication between the school and home is fragmented and often nonexistent. When the new principal was appointed he initiated a plan to improve the way we communicate with parents. As part of the overall plan was to increase the translation of information from English to Arabic in both written and oral forms with parents.

The implementation strategy included two key elements:

a. *Oral Translation Service*: Due to the differences that each language has, we needed translation to fill the cultural gap. In appointing a dedicated staff member to translate we are giving priority to the students and the parents. Importantly, we need parents to feel free to discuss anything that has to do with their children whether it is on the academic or on the behavior levels with the relevant staff members. A translation service has made things easier since not all parents know how to express what they would like to say in English. Vice versa, the oral translation service enables the English native speakers to have more meaningful discussions with parents.

b. *Written Communication*: When translating a text (ie newsletter, parent information sheets, handbooks, forms, etc) we do not only translate the language of the text but we also translate the culture of that language as well. Since all the cultures are different and each culture has their own traditions, language and expressions we encounter some expressions and concepts that only exist in the source language (English) and doesn't have an equivalent in the target language (Arabic). When we encounter these expressions we usually give the most accurate meaning that would help the reader understand that concept if doesn't exist in his/her culture.

## Feedback on the Translation Approach

Returning to the approach taken in the focal school, our goal is to ensure parent and teacher communications are smooth and meaningful. Translation is the best way to let parents, teacher, and staff meet in one point that each part is understanding the other by using their own mother tongue language. By employing translation in the school especially in parents' meetings and

written conversation, teachers were able to help their students more than before because of the easy-going communication with parents, as well as discussing with the parents the weaknesses of their children and how to overcome, enforce and strengthen them. Besides, focal school staff are becoming more comfortable with the idea of implementing a translation service, as they were struggling with some parents in communicating information. Now, communication between staff and parents is becoming more efficient and effective. Parents are more involved in the school activities, meetings, and other actions that have to do with their children (as long as a translation is offered).

Following the implementation of the translation service at Focal school we conducted spot interviews with random parents to collect information about our success in improving school/home communication. Analysis of the collected data led to the following points:

- Parents showed a deeper understanding of the content of the meetings they were involved in.
- Increase in parent/teacher meetings were seen.
- Parents became active in discussion and were appreciative of the opportunity to share their views.
- Parent's confidence in speaking with school staff increased when they could express their points in their mother tongue.
- The focus on student's needs were more highlighted, as parents were engaged more at teacher/parent meetings.
- Translation became a tool that improved and developed the communication between parents and school in general.
- The school staff is showing a quick turnaround response to parents' complains and requests.
- The relationship between parents and staff members is strengthened due to the parents' active role in the communications.

The staff at Focal school are trying to do what is the best for both parents and students. As stated, we have begun to translate a number of school texts so parents can be more informed and understand school issues more fully. They are becoming more familiar with school regulations and are feeling more comfortable when signing school documents. A recent example is the translation of the school and bus regulations better inform parents of the school rules to ensure that their children will follow the expectations. Another is the establishment of a bilingual newsletter to help parents understand school events, activities, or even notification that either they are involved in or their children.

Ultimately it is felt that our parents are more familiar and comfortable when asking questions (or even questioning the school on some points); due to our translation action plan. However, this is only the beginning of improving the communication between the school and the home. As we continue to review our practices, new considerations will arise to support this initiative.

One of the next priorities identified by the school is to extend the translation projects to cover elements of our American curriculum. While these services include the academic material, our aim is also to have some of the student (English) work translated into Arabic (ie student creative writing projects) for parents to peruse.

## Conclusion

Translation has played a vital role in human communication throughout history. It has helped to spread various kinds of information in many fields such as academic, political, economic, social, scientific and technological. Translation was also the only means for scientific exchange and communication across borders and thus bridging cultural gaps worldwide. Translation is a challenging task. Conveying the exact meaning between two different languages that represent two different cultures is not easy, however; being faithful to the meaning in the source language text being transferred to the target language text is essential. The results of employing a translator at Focal school are encouraging and offers insight to other schools in similar contexts. As we continue to strive to be the outstanding school, we all desire, the role of a translation service is helping to bridge the home/school divide.

## References

- Darwish, A. (2010). *Elements of translation: A practical guide for translation*. Melbourne: Writescope Pty Ltd.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (2001). *Translator as a communicator*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (1995). *Approaches to Translation*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall.
- Newmark, P. (1991). *About translation. Multilingual matters*. Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Robinson, D. (2003), *Becoming a translator becoming a translator: An introduction to the theory and practice of translation*, New York: Routledge.
- Trendslator, *Research Methods and Translation Tools: Futuring Model*, Retrieved June 8. 2017, from: <http://trendslator.nl/en/method/>