

XXVI. The "Problems" of Translation Theory

Every year in teaching fourth year students of translation, I face the problem of the low score of success. Needless to say I exert every possible effort to explain the concepts, terms and figures of translation. I never once left the teaching hall without giving my students the chance to raise questions about ambiguous matters, and mostly leave the classroom with mouths shut. When I discuss the bad performance of my students with them, they blame everything and everybody except themselves. They, for instance, make reference to the difficulty of the text, the difficulty of the questions, the insufficiency of exam time, and implicitly me.

On my part, and as a teacher of translation theory for a relatively long time now, I know the problem very well. Knowing the problem, however, is something and applying solutions is something else because applying solutions is always not in the hands of the teachers. I usually start with my students by drawing their attention to the fact that theoretical matters are difficult by their own very nature. Courses which emphasize theory, over practice, consequently demand more and more focus and study time. The problems one face with practical translation are different from processing texts overabundant with abstract terminology.

The students of translation, in private and government institution, are admitted with minimum scores in the source language (English) and target language (Arabic). The

problem is aggravated by the 'generous' ministerial orders to help students pass to new stages in the departments. As such, they reach fourth years without a good command of their language of study, English. The students have problems of constructing good and acceptable sentences, and do not have a sentence sense to correct their awkward sentences or fragments. Such students will definitely find problems understanding and memorizing long texts.

The solutions must be independently applied by the teaching staff itself. In the first place teachers in the formative years must put in practice every possible effort to help the students, and must not be lenient with any lazy and inconsiderate students. Successful students must be encouraged and rewarded while failures must be given the red tickets. Students in between should be diagnosed and their problems very well identified so as to push them forward.

Feedback is very precious for the teacher of translation and the translation lesson and makes a step forward. That step simply means knowing the views of the learners. Most importantly, teachers of translation should never divorce theory from practice at any stage. And practice must not be given priority over theory simply because the students in question are not vocational students but rather academic students. The worlds of academia and vocation are completely different. While the first group of students are given materials and subjects which are proportionately

divided between theory and practice, the focus with the second group essentially lies with practice. The overindulgence of students in practice makes it very difficult for them to read, grasp and memorize abstract texts. Without students mastering fully the language skills and being equally trained in practical and theoretical sides of translation, teaching "theories" becomes beyond realization.

Text by Kadhim Al-Ali

Reading Guidelines:

Being informed about problems and difficulties should help in getting over them and not be an excuse for self-defeatism and escape. Difficult texts must be taken by the horns!

Q.I Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: score, exert, figures, ambiguous, blame, insufficiency, applying, demand, overabundant, abstract, minimum, aggravated, awkward, fragments, lenient, inconsiderate, diagnosed, identified, feedback, divorce, proportionately.

Q.II Derive as many words as you can from the following words: effort, performance, insufficiency, relatively, applying, abstract, admitted, aggravated, definitely, lenient, lazy, diagnosed, identify, accompanied.

Q.III Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: needless, overabundant, abstract, minimum, aggravated, awkward, independently, lenient, inconsiderate, proportionately, divided.

Q.IV Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What do the students blame for their unacceptable performance?
2. Do you agree with the writer that theoretical courses are more demanding than practical courses?
3. Why is the problem similar in private and government institutions? How is it aggravated?
4. Do you agree with the writer's viewpoint of following strictly the strategy of reward and punishment?
5. Why should not we divorce theory from practice? Why should not we give priority to practice over theory?

Q.V Read, discuss and translate into plain Arabic the last paragraph.

Research Activities:

Can you think of other problems facing students of translation? What are the reasons? What suggestions can you make?

Quote of the Day:

Translators have to prove to themselves as to others that they are in control of what they do; that they do not just translate well because they have a “flair” for translation, but rather because, like other professionals, they have made a conscious effort to understand various aspects of their work

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