

The Role of Translation in Foreign Language Teaching – Time for Reassessment?

Melita Koletnik Korošec

University of Maribor/Maribor, Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

Translation as a method of foreign language teaching (FLT) has been out of favour with the language teaching community for much of the 20th century. In addition to economic and ethno-centric forces, which have played a major role in the banishing of translation foreign language classroom - namely the spread of international language schools and uniform course materials classroom - objections to its use seem to be a reaction provoked by a number of disparate motives and reasons. Some of them seem to have been pedagogic, such as the belief that translation was dull and frustrating; others cognitive, namely the idea that translation creates interferences and causes negative transfer. Further objections pertain to practicality and the argument that translation is only suitable for future translators.

In recent decades, however, an increasing number of counter-arguments have been voiced for the use of translation in FLT, and pleas have multiplied for a more balanced and holistic examination of its role. In line with above observations this article attempts to contribute to this debate and presents, first, an overview of common objections to using translation contrasted with counter-objections and, second, preliminary findings of an experimental study on the role of translation in linguistic competence acquisition that is currently underway at the University of Maribor's Department of Translation Studies. The research investigates the effect of translation exercises on the acquisition of grammatical competence in L2 in 1st year students and is predicated on carefully selected and/or prepared texts and exercises targeting particular aspects of grammar under instruction. The preliminary evidence seems to point to the belief that translation exercises contribute to explicit language learning, and are in this context particularly suited to advanced students at colleges and universities.