

A Step Forward to Using Translation to Teach a Foreign/Second Language

Sayuki Machida

(sayuki@unimelb.edu.au)

University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

The article presents a progress report on research into using translation as an effective teaching method in a foreign/second language class. The report includes a) research into the use of translation in the past; b) first approach: adaptation of approaches used in translation courses; c) feedback from the trial; and d) further investigation into using translation as a second language teaching methodology. A student survey about the initial application of translation found their range of expectations for the subject and revealed diversity in their first and second language abilities. The students' work showed the common errors they would make even after consulting dictionaries and 'translation aids'. As a result, 'translation' could be understood from a wider perspective. Finally, possible further development of the *act of translating* as a teaching methodology in the advanced level second/foreign language class is discussed.

1 Introduction

This article reports and discusses the introduction of translation as a teaching methodology into advanced second/foreign language (L2). The author was assigned to teach one subject of an advanced Japanese foreign language course consisting of language subjects which each focussed on a particular area of Japanese development/learning. Some had an emphasis on spoken and colloquial use of the language, some on the grammar or system of the language, etc. The subject of this study had a focus on the following development: a) advancement of students' Japanese language skills in reading and writing, and learning skills; b) inquiry into the language systems (learning basic differences between English and Japanese); and c) in-class experiences working between two languages (and cultures), i.e. having an experience of what translation involves.

This study reports the early findings from an on-going action research project into how 'translation as a methodology' can be integrated into an advanced Japanese language course. The present study was limited to the first three stages: a) inquiry into potentially effective use of *act of translating* as a teaching methodology in the advanced level second/foreign language class, b) subject syllabus development, and, c) reflection on and evaluation of the introduction of the methodology into the actual class.

The aims of the present study were 1) to understand learners' general perception of and attitude toward the new methodology, 2) to evaluate the introductory syllabus, and 3) to seek a better way to integrate translation into teaching. The specific question under investigation was: To what extent can the class incorporate translation activities? The aim was to inform the broader question of whether translation can be a major methodology in today's language teaching.

2 Translation as a teaching method

The following is a brief summary of the translation method in second/foreign language teaching as it has been used in the past. After that, the current paradigm will be presented and the translation method will be viewed from within the new paradigm and its potential strengths identified.

2.1 Translation as an old method

Translation is a long-standing method in teaching foreign or second languages. Long before Grammar-Translation (GT) methods arose in the 19th Century, there had been an emphasis on grammar in language teaching using translation techniques which had been developed in the 16th Century (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985, p. 15). During the reign of the GT paradigm, translation was used to *understand* and *learn* grammatical use of the L2 better by providing *meaning* (mother tongue translation). Rather unnatural L2 sentences, often translated from the learner's first language (L1), were used to introduce the grammatical targets. The methodology, with its focus on learning grammar rules and vocabulary, and deductive L2 learning, did not provide for listening and speaking activities. It also induced a false impression that fixed word to word, or phrase to phrase, translation is possible between L1 and L2.

In response to new thinking about learning, and the rising need for learners to be able to speak, the Natural Method movement towards the end of the 19th Century “challenged the value of translation (i.e. *pivotal use of L1 in teaching L2*) and the efficiency of formal grammar study” (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985, p. 20). The Direct Method, *teach L2 in L2*, became popular with the increase of modern foreign language teaching. The method disfavoured use of L1 (translation) to facilitate learning in foreign language classes. Instead, class hours were devoted to teacher-student interactions in L2 to increase L2 use. As well, the approach favoured “*input before output*” and so placed listening prior to speaking, emphasising an oral-aural approach in the early stage of L2 learning.

By mid-20th Century, the Audiolingual Method (ALM), based on the Army Specialised Training Program developed during the Second World War, had swept into second language teaching. It exemplified the shift of emphasis in foreign language teaching from written to spoken. Very shortly, ALM's habit-forming approach to learning, based on behaviourism and analysis of the surface structure of the language, were under challenge from the *cognitive, generative approach* of Chomsky (e.g. 1959, 1965). Chomsky argued that children cannot learn a language simply from exposure to language input naturally available around them. In order to generate and create words and sentences, he proposed, they must be born with an innate language acquisition device (LAD). This theory has influenced the field of second language acquisition ever since. Krashen, for example, extended Chomsky's view and in his *Affective Filter Hypothesis* and *Input Hypothesis*, incorporates the notion of a LAD (1985, pp. 3–4).

The same post-war period saw development of a number of approaches based on or diverging from Chomsky's theories. One of the most significant and enduring was the Communicative approach, which placed emphasis on *meaningful input in L2* (exposure to L2 in realistic situations) and a *naturalistic approach* (like children's L1 learning). As a result, teaching explicit linguistic forms and using the mother tongue were avoided, although Curran's (1976) *Community Language Learning* did make use of L1. From its inception, the Communicative Approach also received criticism, notably for example, Swain (1985), who claimed exposure to meaningful input alone (i.e. natural language leaning) cannot develop the competence essential for learners to communicate successfully. More latterly, the limitations of using a Communicative approach alone have been raised with respect to the teaching or learning of academic or professional language use, and it is also charged with not providing opportunities to develop some language knowledge and skills, such as accuracy in language use (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002).

Another approach from that time was the notional/functional syllabus, which organised the language to be taught under notional and functional categories and emphasised *language as a tool of communication*. In place of the word to word or linguistic equivalents of other approaches, it

promoted teaching a new language through presenting functional equations between the first and second language usage. A key criticism of this approach was that it could give learners the basis from which they could generate their own expressions (e.g. Brumfit, 1981; Ellis, 2002).

2.2 *Current post-communicative, cognitive paradigm*

In recent years, the necessity for *integration of explicit instruction into communicative approaches* has become obvious. Ellis (1996) suggested that grammar teaching can enhance learner proficiency and accuracy and assist learners to acquire the syntactic system of the language. Brown (1994) and Larsen-Freeman (1991) discuss the need for grammar teaching along with communicative tasks. Doughty & Williams (1998) propose that ‘focus on form’ instruction should be integrated in language teaching. The *Focus on Form* approach incorporates traditional synthetic grammar teaching (form without context or discourse: *formS-focused*) with an analytic approach requiring a context where the learners are engaged in communication. This involves negotiating meaning in certain linguistic and non-linguistic contexts (*FonF instruction*), including a rather overt focus on some grammatical/linguistic units (e.g. gender distinction: Harley, 1998), generating metalinguistic discussion (metatalk) using *dictogloss* tasks (Swain, 1998), and more implicit attention shifting to forms during communication, i.e. *learner-initiated shifts*, resulting in *noticing* (Long & Robinson, 1998). At the same time as these analytic developments, language use is being seen as more of a *holistic activity*. In this view, language is not only understood as a communication instrument, but also as a reflection of the context in which it is used, such as the speakers’ L1 culture, and the sociolinguistic features of the situation (e.g. Niemeir, 2004). Constructivism, the concept currently pervasive in the educational field, sees that individual learners construct knowledge for themselves, using their prior experience and the range of contextual elements they perceive. Such learning is also seen as a personal process (Allen, 2004).

A Constructivist approach to learning emphasizes providing authentic, challenging projects for the learners. Projects which are meaningful to the learners, i.e. ones in which they can incorporate their experience outside of the classroom, set in problem solving contexts, involving peers and teacher (expert) in the learning community, appear to promote effective learning. Through interaction and negotiation in the learning community, learners construct knowledge, while the problem-solving nature of the projects demands use of higher cognitive processes (Newell & Simon, 1972), such as reflecting on the problem and/or on their own learning, and searching for solutions (e.g. Cunningham, Duffy, & Knuth, 1993).

One dramatic change in recent years has been the re-evaluation of L1 use in L2 instruction. In a turnaround from Direct Method, ALM and Natural Approaches, it is now seen as potentially beneficial rather than erroneous. According to our current understanding of vocabulary storage in the brain (e.g. the connectionist model of Macaro, 2003), bilinguals access one common storage system containing both L1 and L2 vocabulary. L1 is thus considered to assist learners’ comprehension of L2 by creating more networks between nodes (ideational representation and words) in their long term memory.

2.3 *L1 use in L2 instruction and translation*

This study reports and discusses the results of introducing translation as a teaching methodology into an advanced L2 program. The ultimate goal of the study is to explore effective ways of using the ‘*act of translating*’ to promote these learners’ better comprehension of L2 texts, spoken or written. Teaching translation as an end goal in itself, therefore, has been excluded from the study, and translation as product and the study of translation processes both fall outside its scope. Thus, in the intervention reported here, the learner’s text – a translation into L1 – was evaluated as to whether or not it clearly showed the learner had understood the original L2 text, rather than as an end product in its own right. The reverse sentence translation, from L1 to L2, was used to raise

awareness of how not only sentence structure, but also parts of a sentence, carries the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Using the '*act of translating*' process approach to promote advanced learners' comprehension of L2, had the further advantage of eliminating issues surrounding 'translation', such as choosing between different methods (literal or oblique translation: e.g. Vinay & Darbelnet, 2000), interlingual decision making (e.g. shifting cohesion: Blum-Kulka, 2000), matters beyond written text (political, cultural decision making), and translator related issues (translator motivation and intension: e.g. Hatim & Mason, 1990).

To be successful, the *act of translating* requires understanding of the original text, and linguistic and non-linguistic abilities and skills to recreate the original text meaning in another language. Thus, in the current post-communicative, cognitive paradigm, translation as a teaching method in the second/foreign language class has the following potential strengths:

- 1) It naturally creates more opportunities for the learners to focus not only on meaning, but also on the form of the text;
- 2) working back and forth between L1 and L2 can naturally bring not only explicit attention to the form and meaning of the text, but also discussion on linguistic and non-linguistic forms;
- 3) the *act of translating* can provide the learners with holistic challenging projects, involving problem-solving, and integrate linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic knowledge beyond communicating using language.

Taking into consideration 1) the built-in strength of the act of translating as a methodology as set out here; 2) the rigorous translation and feedback style of vocational/professional courses (e.g. Nida, 1991; Baker, 1992); 3) the benefit of using L1 to learn L2; 4) expected learner variables in the advanced class (levels and constructs of learners' language proficiency, their learning styles, their interest, their motivation, etc); and, 5) the course objectives stated in the introduction, the researcher drafted the course syllabus for introducing the '*act of translating*' as a teaching methodology set out in the following section.

An overview of the course is provided first. Following that, student responses to the survey and the researcher-teacher's reflection on student learning are presented, and the findings from the pilot study are then set out and discussed. Finally, the possibilities for the future development of translation as a second language teaching methodology are suggested.

3 An introduction of *act of translating* as a method into teaching Japanese as a second language

3.1 *Setting*

Translation activities were introduced into a subject taken by advanced learners who had finished a core course of language study. The core course for Japanese has four levels and learners must complete one year of study for each. At entry each student is placed at the appropriate level after taking a placement test. The subject taught in the pilot study was among the 4th level subjects. The advanced class had 26 students, which made it rather large. The duration of the subject was 12 weeks long, taught consecutively over three months. Translation was introduced at the beginning of the course and translation activities were used intensively for the first half of the course. The goals of the subject were firstly a) further development of students' Japanese language skills, b) learning basic differences between English and Japanese (inquiry into the language systems), and, c) in-class experiences working between two languages and cultures. The following section presents discussion of only the use of translation as a teaching methodology.

3.2 *Introduction and use of act of translating for teaching*

The first half of the course included Part A) teacher-led in-class activities (translating mostly in pairs and groups) and Part B) semi-independent project work consulting with the teacher (outside of the class, semester long project).

Rationale for each type of learning:

- Teacher led in-class activities were intended to serve to introduce translation as a learning method, explore the two languages involved, provide some training in translation, and create opportunities to provide feedback on students' translation work.
- Teacher assisted semi-independent learning should train students to be more independent learners, i.e. able to set their own learning goals, to plan, and to carry out the plan.

Thus Part A aimed to assist the learners to develop their understanding of Japanese text at a deeper level than hitherto, including how the text is bound, i.e. how cohesion of text is achieved, and how coherence is maintained in the language. Part B aimed to assist them to build closer semantic networking for vocabulary in different contexts.

Part A) In-class activities (Text comprehension/translation):

Translation activities in class during the first six week period consisted mainly of two kinds:

1) Sentence level translation, with focus on one particular linguistic target at one time, and 2) short article translation integrated into reading exercises involving various genres, such as newspaper, magazine, essays, and internet media.

Content of the activities:

- 1) Sentence translation: focus on one form at a time covering general topics.
- 2) Reading + translation
 - i) newspaper (current topic) with background information provided
 - ii) social article with skimming, scanning practice + summarising practice.

Integration stages of translation:

- Introduction: explicit talk and discussion on translation;
- Translation activities with focus on linguistic (grammatical) structures;
- Translation activities with focus on non-linguistic (background knowledge) structures;
- Translation activities with focus on cultural aspects.

Delivery of activities:

- In-class translation activities were introduced explicitly at the beginning and included discussion on the definition of translation, and what the translator needs to translate from one language to another.
- Translation was integrated into reading activities.
- Translation was conducted at both sentence (English to Japanese) and passage (Japanese to English) levels.
- Several short Japanese text translations (around 400 characters) were integrated progressively into class activities.
- Feedback was provided in the following week by 1) correcting individual translation work and, 2) presenting common mistakes/errors in class.

Part A learning was assessed twice, once at the end of the first six weeks, and once at the end of the semester, both times in the form of translation tests. The first test task comprised translating one from a choice of two short essays (approximately 350 words: L2 to L1 translation), for which 30 minutes was allowed. The essays were based on the topics covered during the six week teaching period, and assessment criteria were provided prior to the start. Learners were allowed to use bilingual dictionaries but no other references. The second test included both sentence level (L1 to L2) translation, and essay translation (L2 to L1: two out of three choices: 300–350 characters each), for which the time allowed was two hours.

Part B) Outside class (semi-independent work with the teacher):

Semi-independent vocabulary project work was explained with handouts at the beginning of the course.

After teacher-guided individual project planning, project work was left to the learners. The learners were encouraged to approach the teacher with any questions or concerns.

Procedures:

- 1) Introduction in class: aims, procedures and assessment criteria
- 2) Teacher-guided planning stage
- 3) Submission of individual project plan
- 4) Undertaking of independent work
- 5) Submission of work and reflection on their independent learning
- 6) Written feedback to individuals.

3.3 Learner feedback and Teacher observation

After the subject started, the researcher recorded anything she noticed in class or later, any reflections she had on the class, while the learners were asked to fill out a questionnaire at the end of the semester. The questionnaire aimed 1) to understand learners' reception of the new subject using translation as a teaching methodology and, 2) to improve the balance and fit between what the advanced learners would like to do and what teachers believe could help the learners' Japanese. The questionnaire covered a) learner information, b) feedback on general aspects of the subject (on Likert scale), c) learners' expectations of the subject prior to the class, d) feedback on actual activities/exercises in class (open questions), and, e) preference for types of activities. The following section presents summaries of the learner feedback. Twenty-one students (80%) returned the questionnaire.

Learners' information:

The learners' previous contact with Japanese language varied from 3.08 to 13.5 years with average 6.84 years. More than a half of the learners chose this subject from their interest in learning Japanese.

What motivated you to choose this subject?	No	Percentage
For degree, major	5	23.8%
For job, future	3	14.3%
Being interested in Japanese	12	57.1%
As continuity	3	14.3%
Total	23*	

Table 1: Learners' background information (1), N=21

Feedback on general aspects of the subject:

Learners were asked to evaluate on a 1~5 scale the subject content regarding five listed aspects. They generally agreed that the subject was interesting, difficult but manageable, and that the pace of the class was just right. However, their perception of the amount and frequency of the assessment, usefulness of the assessment to assist in developing their Japanese further, and types and kind of materials used in class varied.

Aspect of content to be evaluated	Average	Descriptive judgment	Range
Interesting	3.81	interesting	3–5
Difficulty	3.67	difficult but manageable	3–4.5
Pace	3.17	just right	3–4
Amount/frequency of assessment	2.99	just right	1–4
Types of assessment	3.29	neutral	1–4.5
Materials used in class	3.33	rather liked	2–5

Table 2: Learners' background information (2), N = 21

Learner expectations of the subject:

Learners' accounts of their prior expectations were divided into five categories and the totals for each tallied:

What did you expect from this subject?	No	Percentage
Translation activities and learning	10	59%
Structure/grammar related learning	6	35%
Learning related to the four language skills	6	35%
Cultural/social learning	4	24%
Meta-linguistic, cognitive learning	2	12%

Table 3: Learner expectations of the subject

More than the half of the learners (59%: 10 out of the 17 who had come with some expectations for the subject) had expected the subject to provide some basic training in translation between L1 and L2, in this case, English and Japanese. About one third (35%) expected more four skills development (language use in class), and another one third expected to develop their language knowledge (structure and grammar) so as to become fluent in L2. Some thought the subject would have had more emphasis on culture and social contexts of language, and a few expected metalinguistic, cognitive learning.

Activities the learners liked and disliked:

The students were asked what factors they did or did not like in the in-class activity list provided. The following is a summary of their responses.

The learners in class :					
liked	All materials (4)	All but summarization (1)	Translation (3)	Summarizing (2)	Sentence translation (1)
didn't like	Summarizing (1)				

Table 4: Activities favoured by the learners

Overall the learners appeared happy with the translation activities. One learner preferred fewer sentence translation exercises, while summarization practice provoked different reactions among the learners.

Activities the learners considered useful for their language learning:

The learners were further asked what they did or did not find useful, what other activities they would like to do in class, and any other comments they had on the subject.

The learners in class :					
found useful	All activities (6)	Most of them (1)	Reading (1)	Translation exercise (3)	Summarizing (1)
wasn't useful or helpful	none				
Wanted	Slang expressions to learn (1)	More business & formal language use (1)	More contemporary Japanese (1)	More spot translation (1)	

Table 5: Activities the learners thought useful

Teacher/researcher observation on each activity:

1) In-class sentence level (English to Japanese) translation: teacher-led, pair and group work

Even though each lesson had a particular linguistic target (such as omission of sentence subject, how to translate/not translate pronouns, etc), and students worked in a group or pairs, they quickly got bored with translating sentences.

2) In-class article (Japanese to English) translation: integrated into reading exercises, covering various genres such as newspaper (front page, editorial), magazine, essay, and internet media.

Three different types of articles were sampled for the class; a) a current topic (related short passages); b) a social topic (a long article); and, c) advertisements in different genres (food, traveling, etc).

The current topic: Student response to translation work ranged widely. Aids were provided by the teacher: i) equivalent newspaper articles in English (which at least, described the same incident and event) were available; and ii) the information in the content could be understood easily from an internet search.

The long article for skimming and scanning and summary translation practice: This went well even though the text was probably too long for the some of the students. Students summarized in Japanese first, then were asked to translate their summary into English.

Advertisements for restaurants and travel agencies in L1 and L2 of similar content: These were compared to find differences and similarities in order to reflect on the culture of each language. Their reception by students was fine overall. They compared i) Japanese advertisements for Japanese in Japan, ii) Japanese advertisements for Japanese in Australia, and iii) English advertisements for Australians. After that, students discussed how to present the same items to each group in Japanese and English.

There were no optional comments on the activities in their feedback.

3) Outside of class (vocabulary building): semi-independent work with the teacher

Good responses were received from students on this project work.

At the introduction stage: many students were still not sure about what the project required after the initial explanation, the handout of objectives of the project and detailed marking criteria presented at the beginning of the semester. After a few inquiries to clarify the objectives, most of them appeared to manage the work fine.

Planning stage: by the time they had been through the planning stage, the students were clear about what they were doing for their project. The teacher was involved in the planning stage, and discussed with them their plans to ensure a) a match between their aims and their action plans, b) the appropriateness to their current L2 level, and c) the manageability of the project within the given time.

Independent work period: some students were very organized, and proceeded week by week, receiving feedback from the teacher from time to time. Some continued to toss about different ideas on how to put their plans into action for a while, even after they submitted their plans. Some had to rush through all the work toward the end of the semester. All of them managed to submit by the due date. Written feedback was provided on individual project work.

3.4 Test Results

The students were tested twice 1) immediately after the initial 6 week translation practice and 2) after another 6 weeks' interval¹. To have more insight into their translation processes, the first test was examined to see what types of errors were commonly made.

In the test, the students chose one of two passages, each based on one of the two topics they had had translation practice with. Seven students chose the current topic (shown as 1 in the choice column in Table 6) and 19 students did the social topic. The test was marked on a) overall quality of translation and b) numbers of errors found in the translation. Students had been allowed to use bilingual dictionaries in the test.

Table 6 below shows the quality of their translation (overall scores: out of ten) and location of their errors. The errors were divided into the following categories (see Table 6): 1) extra meaning added by the reader (example: 市民 was translated as 'innocent people' instead of 'civilians' in a war article); 2) missing words; 3) loan words (example ニーズ was understood as 'news', not as 'needs'); 4) Voc-synonym (example; AFP 通信 was understood as AFP communication, instead of AFP correspondence); 5) voc-antonym (they chose an opposite word), 6) voc-wrong (word choice completely out of context); 7) expression-wrong (collocation wasn't understood properly such as in 腰をすえる); and 8) syntactic misunderstanding (e.g. subjects of clauses were changed due to not understanding the sentence structure).

	Over All scores	Total No of errors	extra	miss	vocab				express	syntac	Choice
					loan	Synonym	anto	wrong mean	wrong		
1	9	1						1			1
2	9	4	1			1		1		1	1
3	9	1			1						
4	8.5	6			1	3		2			
5	8.5	6	3					3			1
6	8.5	5	2		1			1		1	
7	8.5	3			1		1			1	
8	8.5	2			1					1	
9	8.5	1								1	
10	8	2						2			
11	8	4			1		1		1	1	
12	8	4				1		3			
13	7.5	4			1			1		2	1
14	7.5	3			1	2					
15	7.5	6		2	1	1		1		1	
16	7.5	4				1		1		2	
17	7.5	2				1				1	
18	7.5	5		1		4					1
19	7	6		2	1	2		1			1
20	7	6	1		1		1	1	1	1	
21	6.5	4	2		1	1					
22	6.5	5		2		2	1				1
23	6.5	5			2					3	
24	6.5	3			1					2	
25	6.5	3				1			1	1	
26	5.5	10			1	2		1		6	
	Total	105	9	7	16	22	4	19	3	25	7
		100%	8.6	6.7	15.2	21.0	3.8	18.1	2.9	23.8	

Table 6: Error types found in translation test immediately after six week translation practice

As Chart 1 below shows, the large proportion of the errors stemmed from vocabulary problems (61% in total) and more or less every student's work included some vocabulary errors despite their being allowed to use dictionaries. However, syntactic errors appear to be more detrimental to their translation quality. Students who performed better in their translation work tended to interpret further, whereas the translation of lower performing students contained missing parts or misunderstanding of some expressions.

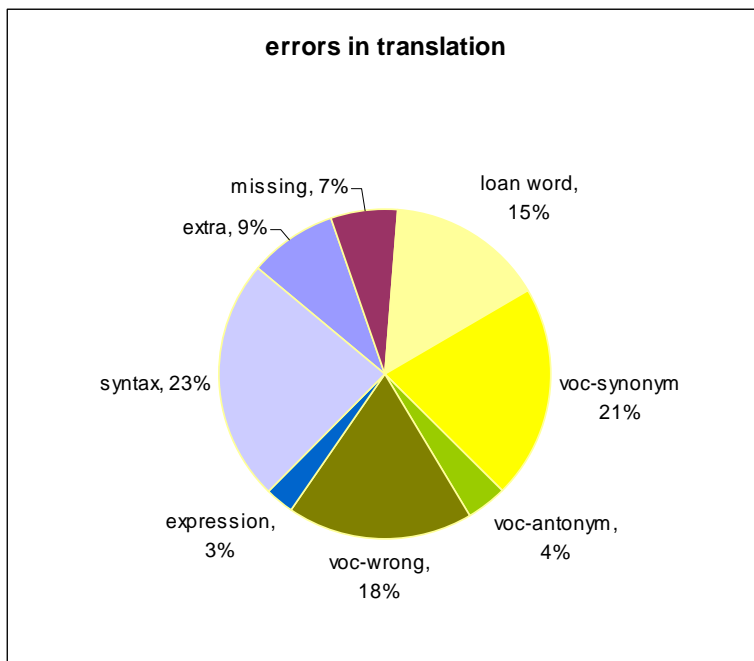


Chart 1: Errors in translation test immediately after six weeks translation practice

The students performed better with the essay translation (7.5/10 average) than sentence level translation (6.6/10 average).

4 Discussion

The above results from the questionnaire survey and tests, and observation by the researcher will be discussed to explore the learners' general attitudes/perceptions toward the new methodology, assess the introduction of the methodology into the class, and improve the use of translation as a teaching method in L2 class.

4.1 Assessment of the first introduction

Understanding learners' general attitudes/perceptions toward the new methodology:

The students in the subject were more driven by their interest in Japanese (57.1%) than by qualification (23.8%) and job prospects (14.3%): see Table 1. Their expectations included structure-grammar related learning (35%), 'four skills' development (35%), some basic training in translation between L1 & L2, in this case, English and Japanese (59%), cultural-social learning (24%), and meta-linguistic, cognitive learning (12%).

From the questionnaire results, the cohort can be said to be typical of general advanced language classes, with a variety of expectations, language background, and L2 abilities. The learners expected some kind of general advanced Japanese language class involving substantial amount of translation activities.

With even the above general orientation to and expectation for the subject, the students generally liked using translation as a teaching methodology for the large part of the subject (i.e. to use translation as a tool to advance their Japanese: average 3.81: range 3-5 in Table 2). However their perceptions toward the amount, frequency and types of assessment were varied (see Table 2). Since assessment is a crucial factor for most tertiary students in deciding how to approach a sub-

ject and how much effort to put into it, how to assess the students' learning assisted by *act of translating* to be acceptable to both teacher and students needs further study.

About half of the learners (48%) found the materials challenging but manageable, and a few (10%) found them too easy. The rest felt they were just fine. This is to be expected, in particular for translation, where multiple abilities such as L1 and L2 proficiency, reading comprehension skills, and writing skills are demanded. Therefore, continuing inquiry into teaching and assessment materials for the subject is required.

Evaluating the introductory teaching

A) Teaching materials & tests

Sentence level translation:

The sentence level L1 to L2 translation exercise had two goals: to learn basic differences between the two languages at grammar and vocabulary levels, and thus to provide basic translation skills. A group of sentences with a particular grammatical target was given each time.

The majority of students were bored with the exercise, even while recognizing that it was helpful for learning Japanese. It appears that to be accepted, such an exercise would need to create a better learning situation. The exercise in this study was form-focused (*formS-focused*), so group learning was used to do the exercise to approximate to 'focus on form' (*FonF instruction*, e.g. Doughty & Williams, 1998). Students were expected to discuss a Japanese target point for each class, generating *metatalk* (like Swain, 1998), and to translate those sentences into English in group. The translation was intended to assist them to articulate how the target item is used in Japanese. However, meanings of sentences in the exercises were probably too distant from their day to day life, and they couldn't relate what they did in class to their actual life. As a result, the students were neither interested nor able to internalise and integrate target expressions into their L2 system.

An alternative explanation for the lack of popularity and effectiveness of the exercises is that they did not contain any *learner-initiation* (e.g. Long & Robinson, 1998). The exercises might have worked better if the goals had been negotiated with the students more at the beginning of the course, instead of leaving them to work out some of the goals through doing the exercise. Another possible cause might have been the direction of translation. Even though students were asked to translate very simple sentences (e.g. *this bus will take you to Central station*), the L1 into L2 translation prevented them from utilising a large part of their knowledge, enabling them to access only ideation available in both L1 and L2, but not that only available in L1.

Sentence level translation L2 to L1 also needs to be employed in the syllabus to determine whether the main cause of the not-so-enthusiastic reception from the students was either a) the way the exercises were implemented or b) the direction of translation.

Passage level translation:

Newspaper articles on a current topic and a long internet text on social issues were better received by the cohort than sentence level exercises. Students' interest in the current topic varied widely, but interest in the social issues varied less widely. The former provided an easier access to vocabulary and there were similar articles in English available. However, unfamiliarity with Japanese newspaper articles caused difficulty for some students. In the small test, they had a choice between two passages based on the content they had learnt on the two topics. Only seven out of 26 chose the passage on a current topic.

The test analysis revealed that syntactic errors caused more damage to their translation than vocabulary errors. All had some background and vocabulary knowledge on the passage topics, and they were also familiar with the styles of both passages, and could prepare for the test to some extent. Background knowledge, dictionary use and familiarity with the written styles definitely helped them to translate the test passages well. However, differences in syntactic skills contributed

to the range of marks. Possibly their previous translation practice in class minimised differences in background knowledge of the topics and familiarity with the written styles, and the availability of dictionaries helped them all with the vocabulary. Therefore, differences in syntactic skills had more impact on translation outcomes.

It would be very interesting to see how learner translation outcomes are affected when they are tested on passages which are syntactically controlled but about different topics to those they had practised on.

Test:

The test taken after six week class learning was examined to explore the nature of students' translation. Their translation indicated that almost every student's work included some vocabulary errors even though they were allowed to use dictionaries. Indeed, a large proportion of the errors stemmed from vocabulary problems. However, the translation quality was affected more by syntactic errors. Thus students with less grammatical skills did not perform as well as those who possessed good grammatical skills. Better performers demonstrated a tendency to interpret further (over-interpretation) and poor performers had parts missing.

Semi-independent vocabulary learning:

The projects of those students who were successful in this section were perceived to be authentic and meaningful, and the task presented a good challenge. Through the vocabulary building project, they managed to connect classroom learning to the outside world (Allen, 2004). Consequently, they found themselves motivated and that doing the project had 'meaning'. Those who were not successful in the independent learning failed to set their own goals and independent work did not extend beyond the classroom. As a result, they could not incorporate higher cognitive processes (Newell & Simon, 1972) such as reflecting on the problem or searching for solutions (Cunningham et al 1993). Students with lower Japanese proficiency tended to achieve less from the experience.

The researcher received very positive individual verbal comments after the subject was over. Students all said it had been interesting and very different from other subjects in the language course. Some said that they would continue their vocabulary learning beyond the subject. Those who were able to connect vocabulary to area knowledge appeared to enjoy the activities.

B) Approach

The goals of the Japanese L2 class in this study had been: a) further development of students' Japanese language skills, b) learning of basic differences in English and Japanese (inquiry into the language systems), and c) in-class experiences working between two languages.

The '*act of translating*' was used in the classroom to promote L2 comprehension by these advanced learners'. The students' translation work was treated as follows:

- Translation as a 'final product' (i.e. teaching translation as its end goal) was not evaluated;
- Learner's translation (L2 to L1) was evaluated as to whether or not it demonstrated comprehension of the original L2 text;
- Learner's translation (L2 to L1) was treated as evidence of resulting comprehension and indicator of the comprehension process; and
- Reverse sentence translation (L1 to L2) was used to raise awareness of how sentence structure and parts of sentences carry meaning.

The fundamental premise of the approach was that positive inclusion of L1 in classroom instruction creates a potentially powerful learning environment for already advanced L2 learners to further their reading and writing skills in L2.

The students translated essays and sentences in class and as homework, and were tested on their essay and sentence comprehension. Analysis shows the following points need to be taken into

account and certain aspects explored further in order to advance the effectiveness of using translation as a method in such classes:

- 1) Translation between L2 and L1 includes not only L2 language skills but also L1 literacy and background knowledge on the topics to a large extent. Therefore, materials which can absorb a range of learner variables need to be developed. Alternatively, class activities should be structured so that learners can adjust their translation task to their level.
- 2) Students demonstrated insufficient interest towards the exercises using sentence level translation. Before including sentence level translation in future, the possible causes of the negative response need investigation to discover whether the problem is due to: a) irrelevant topics and content of the sentences used; b) direction of the translation; and c) formats for the exercises.
- 3) Students showed very different knowledge and interest in the current topic, whereas they more commonly were interested in the social topics. It is not certain whether the difference in current or social topics, or their familiarity with the contents or sentence style, resulted in the different reception of the two areas. Further research into how to grade the difficulty of translation tasks on articles should be undertaken.
- 4) Semi-independent project work also demonstrated substantial variation in students' vocabulary learning. The spread between successful and unsuccessful learners was wider in this task than in the other two types of in-class translation practice. This suggests that semi-independent work can assist good learners better. However, it can also result in leaving weaker learners further behind, so the optimal amount of semi-independent work in the course needs further investigation.
- 5) The test analysis showed that every student had some sort of vocabulary problem even when using dictionaries and a reasonable amount of background knowledge. It also showed syntactic errors had more impact on the quality of their translation. In an L2 class where 'act of translating' is used as a teaching method, vocabulary, syntax and their relation could be learned effectively by focusing on where the learners have demonstrated insufficient understanding by failing to translate appropriately.

4.2 Next step to improve the use of translation as a teaching method for L2 class

This study was conducted in the form of a pilot run of a subject using translation as a main teaching method. The objectives were to obtain 1) information regarding students' perceptions of translation as a teaching method and, 2) feedback from the teaching so as to provide further direction on how to develop the methodology so as to realise its potential effectiveness. The particular question was, to what extent can the class incorporate translation activities (i.e. can it be a major methodology?). Feedback from the students and teacher observation show a definitely positive attitude towards developing *act of translating* as a major method. The results of the study suggest that the following are the potential strengths of the method for raising students' Japanese text comprehension:

- a) developing information networking in the brain;
- b) developing learner self-assessment of appropriateness of their L2 tagged information;
- c) encouraging utilisation of available resources (e.g. Færch & Kasper, 1983: interlanguage based achievement strategy use);
- d) providing opportunities to focus on form;
- e) making available input likely to become intake through interaction between L1 and L2;
- f) widening the scope of language learning: inclusion of own cultural context and the sociolinguistic nature of the original text; and
- g) providing a hands-on approach which expands L2 learning,

The findings from this pilot study suggest that some syntactic structures/expressions can be more proactively focused on, to provide more opportunities in terms of focus on form (d above), in order to develop information networking in the brain (a). By doing so, the students utilise available resources (c), and have opportunity to assess the appropriateness of their L2 tagged information (b),

as well as include the cultural and sociolinguistic nature of L1 and L2 into learning. This is a hands-on approach to expand L2 learning (g), resulting in making available input likely to become intake (e).

To conclude, considering the theoretical potential, positive reception from the students, the actual outcomes and findings from this first implementation, translation as a main teaching methodology is feasible, and appears potentially an effective method for teaching L2. At the same time, the introduction has revealed issues which need to be studied to further understand the dynamics of integrating translating in second/foreign language teaching.

Notes

¹ The results for passage translation for each test were (mean 76.5; standard deviation 9.5) for Test 1 and for Test 2 (mean 73.7; standard deviation 8.03). The averages were similar and the Pearson's correction for the two tests was ($r = .714$) and thus not so strong. Overall Test 2 was thus more difficult for the cohort, and some students did better with the topic in Test 1 and others with topics in Test 2.

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