Teaching translation at Gaza universities: Problems and solutions

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Abstract

It is obvious that translation plays an important role in the human communications. From ancient
time up to now there has been debates about methods of translation. Some scholars preferred
word for word and some others preferred sense for sense. Translators have a very important task to
bring the sense of the text from one language to another language and alike. This study discusses
the learning/teaching outcomes of teaching translation in the English departments at Gaza local
universities. It is believed that courses of translation are taught simply because they have been part
of the English BA curriculum. Therefore such courses do not train students to pursue a
professional career in translation. This paper clarifies that the Translation class in these
universities only has academic rather than professional goals. To improve the level of these
translation classes the paper attempts a new road map for improving teaching translation at
university level.
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1. Introduction

Translation is the gateway for understanding others and their civilizations, therefore; universities are interested a lot in the courses of translation just to train and graduate competent and efficient translators, since, mistakes in this field may be disastrous. That is, translation errors on the job may very well lead to disasters. In chemical texts they can cause fatal poisoning or terrible explosion. In legal translation they can unlawfully make a defendant lose a crazily expensive law-suit. In aeronautics they may bring a plane down from the sky on people's heads. The poor performance of an interpreter can spoil the proceedings of a whole international conference. The universities in Gaza have never dealt with such nasty realities, but they are very real!

Despite the importance of the translation courses in the English BA programs at Gaza universities, the objectives of these courses have either been misunderstood or difficult to achieve. Virtually all English departments course descriptions state that the aim of each course is to introduce students to translation theory and train them to translate from Arabic into English and vice versa. There is a wide consensus among teachers of translation that the training falls short of its expectations.

This study aims at outlining new, more realistic and explicit roadmap for the courses of translation at the Palestinian universities in Gaza.

The thesis of this paper is that the Translation courses at the university are and should be academic rather than professional (Colina 2002). Hence they ought to be geared to improving students language skills. Here I propose a new methodology for teaching/learning translation that may return the process of translation to its right track. The topics in this paper are distributed as follows:

1 This fact was reflected through departmental discussions I always run with the teaching stuff members particularly those who teach translation.

2 Two translation courses are currently taught at Gaza universities except Al-Azhar and the Islamic university which introduced a third module of translation for students at the faculty of arts as an elective module.
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Section 1 is an introduction. Section 2 diagnoses the present pedagogical status that characterizes the teaching/learning of translation at Gaza universities. Section 3 presents a proposed roadmap that is expected to improve the level of learning/teaching translation in Gaza universities. Section 4 is restricted to summary remarks.

2. Description of the present status of teaching translation at Gaza universities.

2.1. Tutors of translation.

The current situation of translation teaching at the undergraduate level in Gaza national universities is characterized by a number of features:

- All departments of English offer translation courses at the undergraduate level as obligatory courses, but what is actually offered is quite arbitrary and depends almost entirely on personal initiatives on the part of tutors.
- Most of tutors who teach translation at Gaza universities are not qualified enough to teach this module. Lots of them are holders of post graduate degrees in English literature or linguistics from the local or external universities. Therefore, any tutor in the departments of English who shows interest in teaching Translation may be assigned the course. There are no requirements whatsoever. Hence, the trainers are at best merely interested rather than specialized in translation.
- Arbitrary approaches cannot serve as reliable, sound bases for translation teaching, which should follow a systematic approach to achieve its goals. These arbitrary approaches adopted in the English departments frustrate all educational efforts and keep Gaza universities from achieving one of its main goals (preparing competent graduates who can translate efficiently if being offered a translation job.
- Most translation teachers have not received any kind of training in teaching translation.
- The spirit of teamwork among translation teachers is virtually non-existent.
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- The absence of continuous training programs for university translation tutors has contributed to the current status quo. Teachers may very well take personal initiatives and train themselves. However, their efforts can hardly come to fruition. This is because they are overloaded and they teach various courses, including a hybrid of language courses and content courses at various levels.

Consequently, not a single department has ever produced a textbook on translation, or even a guide for translation teaching or a manual for translators.

The status of teaching translation shows that most of university tutors of translation are not qualified to teach translation. However, all instructors in English departments are supposed to teach translation in theory and practice as an academic subject.

2.2 Objectives of teaching translation courses:

The least that can be said about the objectives of the translation courses in Gaza universities is that they are not clear enough. As a teacher of translation, I cannot tell whether students are trained

- to become professional translators,
- to be able to translate various texts,
- to understand and apply translation models,
- to become interpreters,
- to have reading comprehension ability in a foreign language.
- to have Sensitivity to language (both mother tongue and foreign language) and competence to write the target language correctly, clearly, economically and resourcefully.

The adequacy of the training content heavily depends on the clarity of the relevant teaching objectives (Delisle, 1981). As long as these learning outcomes are fuzzy, both the teaching material and teaching methodology cannot be systematic or purposeful.
2.3. Present methodology:

As mentioned, translation tutors in Gaza universities select their own materials, individually, with little or no coordination. In as much as there are no clear benchmarks for this training, a lot of tutors would not even bother to motivate the choice of texts they bring to the classroom. The texts that those teachers use are either translated beforehand or mostly taken from sources which offer translated texts, ready for use by the teacher. Hence the interaction in the classroom is believed to be based on the tell-me-what does this mean?. In other words, there is no clear teaching approach to be adopted. Students grapple with a trial and-error task, trying to guess what the teacher has in mind, or on their lecture notes. They end up studying texts and the translation thereof, but learning very little about the craft of translation. Students' performance in translation tests also indicates that they hardly upgrade their language proficiency. As a result, some students get frustrated because they are dissatisfied with the traditional exercise of the course, while others develop the misconception that this is what translation is all about.

2.4. Testing

As a result of the status presented above about the profile of translation tutors, nature of teaching materials, and methodology, testing mostly involves the translation of a text from English into Arabic and/or vice versa. This classical testing approach indicates that students have not been subject to any well-graded skill building. The evaluation of these tests is highly subjective. In my experience, I have realized that there is a widespread consensus among teachers of translation that students' performance is markedly poor. Teachers end up correcting language errors rather than translation drawbacks.

To sum up, it emerges from this short description that the universities in Gaza cannot train students to be efficient translators through the courses of translation because of the following reasons:

- The teachers have not received any formal training in translation.

Note: The researcher has 23 years experience in teaching linguistics and translation courses at university level.
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- The content and teaching methodology are ad hoc because the learning outcomes (objectives) are not clear to the tutor and student alike.

- Evaluation can only be inadequate as long as the content of translation courses and methodology are deficient.

2.5. Students

After discussing the status of the translation courses with a random number of students representing all universities in Gaza, I explored their overall attitude towards the course content, the teaching methods, the efficiency of the translation teacher, and the overall translation program offered for undergraduate students in the departments of English language and literature. These findings along this axis can be summarized as follows:

1. Students are dissatisfied with the content of the course.
2. Students are dissatisfied with the teaching methods used in the course.
3. Students are dissatisfied with the efficiency of the teacher.
4. Students are dissatisfied with the overall translation program offered to undergraduate students in the departments of English language and Literature at Gaza local universities.

Therefore, it is badly needed to reconsider the objectives of the university translation course, and spell out its teaching methods as clearly as possible, on the understanding that translation is taught at English departments for primarily academic rather than professional purposes. Only by doing so we can capitalize on the prospective progress to be achieved in the academic years to come.

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4 Students’ attitudes in (1-4) were collected through having private communications and spontaneous interviews with them along my experience.

5 Teaching translation for academic purposes means training students for mastering the linguistic and communicative competence in translation, i.e. they should have reading comprehension ability in a foreign language, knowledge of the subject, sensitivity to language (both mother tongue and foreign language) and competence to write the target language dexterously, clearly, economically and resourcefully.
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3. A proposed roadmap.

Virtually all definitions of translation clarify that it is taken to be both a science and craft.

Newmark (1988 a, 7) describes translation as "a craft consisting of the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language." Since Gaza students are learners of English as a foreign language, translation tutors should be aware that they are teaching two different things: English language and the craft of translation. They should be fully aware that these are two different types; translation at the university, like any other discipline, is academic rather than professional, therefore most pedagogical energy should be invested in upgrading students' proficiency in the source and target language. Teaching the craft of translation should, at least at this point, be left to specialized establishments⁶, where training is professional rather than academic.

Proposed objectives:

Translation courses in Gaza universities should have the following objectives:

1. Understanding of the cognitive process of translation theory.
2. Expert reading skills of the SL.
3. Expert writing and composition skills in the TL.
4. Knowledge of typographical differences between the SL and the TL and transfer competence.
5. Knowledge of lexical differences between the SL and the TL.
6. Knowledge of syntactic and stylistic differences between the SL and the TL.
7. Familiarity with text types in the SL and the TL.
8. Knowledge of discourse differences between the SL and the TL: textual coherence and textual cohesion.
9. Knowledge of pragmatic and semiotic differences between the SL culture and the TL culture.

To achieve these objectives I propose the following methodology for teaching translation:

3.1. A proposed methodology.

After describing the present status of teaching/learning translation at Gaza universities and proposing new objectives, we turn to describe a proposed methodology consisting of a step-by-step approach.

⁶ Universities should teach translation professionally by having professional a diploma program at least at their continuous education and community service units as the Islamic university of Gaza has recently done.
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step procedures. This has proven quite successful in my classes in terms of students' motivation, productivity and the quality of their work. This methodology can be described along the following lines:

The tutor must select the translation text that meets the objectives mentioned above, the degree of text difficulty (either semantic, stylistic, syntactic, or cultural difficulty), the type of the topic either cultural, political, economic and literary, the problem to be solved, and so on.

Next; The students should read the text twice; the first is for finding out the comprehensive and general conotational meaning. The second reading is for translating and finding out problems i.e. doing pre-editing and assessing the quality of the writing.

Then, the students must underline the difficult terms and deduce their meaning using suitable translation procedures.

After then, The teacher divides the text into as many segments as students in the group. Depending on the degree of difficulty and the length of the text, these segments may be paragraphs, columns, pages or even whole chapters. Then, each student is assigned a fair portion of the text. The segment distribution order should rotate so that a different student begins a translation unit every time.

If the topic is already easy and familiar to the students, they can do a preliminary translation.

( students tend to transfer SL units of translation to TL units of translation ("one-to-one translation," Newmark, 1995a). This first approach can often be made orally and suggested annotations may be written in the margins.

Next, once the "one-to-one" version is completed, the students do a second version of their own translation—this time a written draft—handling the most suitable translation strategies and procedures and being faithful in the transfer of ideas.

Then, with the original text in front of her/him and being careful to follow the same correlative order of the SL text, each student reads out her/his own version of the translated text.

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7 Translation strategies cover; naturalization, Arabacization, cultural approximation, lexical creation and managing. (cf Farghal and Shunnaq (1999) for details).
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The students and the teacher follow the reading of each text attentively. As a monitoring activity, everybody should feel free to stop the reading at the end of a given sentence and to have the reading of the segment repeated, when the situation warrants comments, suggestions, questions, contributions, etc. The students have to "defend" their work against criticism.

During this procedure, the students and the teacher need to set up all necessary conventions with regard to the homogeneity of the terms and the coherence and cohesion of the final version.

As Newmark (1995b) states, "translation is for discussion". Students should then be encouraged to take notes and discuss the (in)convenience of the contributions and comments arising from this analytical reading of each one of the different versions proposed.

As a metacognitive activity, the students, assisted by the teacher, analyze the translation strategies and procedures used, and discuss the reasons taken into account in the choice of each analyzed criterion: "The ability to discuss translations in an objective way is central to a translator's competence", (Kussmaul, 1995).

The students hand in the final version of their revised and post-edited segments, which has already been amended in the light of the whole text. The work must be typed, double-spaced and paged according to the original.

Finally, the teacher makes a final revision (second post-edit), gives formative evaluation and makes comments, emphasizes findings, "happy" solutions and creative acts, on the one hand, and analyzes failures and weaknesses in the process, on the other.

As seen from the methodology above, I assume that the teacher’s role is as a facilitator of the translation task, since the lion's share of the translation process is accomplished by the students, either collectively or individually. To do the process of translation efficiently, students can consult all possible information sources, including the traditional written forms, the "live" sources or informants,
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Students’ role

To have the process of translation run smoothly students should meet the following minimum conditions:

a. They must have sound linguistic training in the two languages, and knowledge covering a wide cultural spectrum. Here, any translation course must be preceded by courses in reading, writing and syntax as prerequisite courses.

b. Students must be highly competent in reading and be familiar with an adequate use of translation procedures and strategies by taking the first translation course, which must be mostly theoretical.

c. They must be familiar with an adequate management of documentation sources.

d. The students should have initiative, creativity, honesty and perseverance, accuracy, truthfulness, patience and dedication.

e. They also should have considerable capacity for analysis and self-criticism, and have ability to maintain constructive interpersonal relationships.

f. Finally, students should be aware of software translation facilities.

All in all, following Orellana, (1994); translators must understand the original text, for which they must have wide general knowledge, handle the vocabulary of the topic in the SL as well as in the TL and, last but not least, produce well written Arabic translation versions of the SL.

Tutor’s role

Shifting to the role of educators, they should be characterized with the following:

Educators must be highly competent communicatively and linguistically. The communicative competence needed is characterised as follows:

Communicative competence according to Bell (1995.42) is defined as: " the knowledge and ability possessed by the translator which permits him / her to create communicative acts-discourse-which are not only (and not necessarily) grammatical but socially appropriate". 
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This alternative consists of four areas of knowledge, and skills:

A. **The grammatical competence**; this skill requires good knowledge of the rules of the code including vocabulary and word formation, pronunciation/ spelling and the structure of sentence.

B. **Sociolinguistic competence**; this knowledge deals with the ability of producing and understanding utterances appropriately in context. This means taking the social factors and their effect on selecting words and utterances, e.g.: the status of the participants, the purposes of the interaction.

C. **Discourse competence**; in this skill the translator should have the ability to combine both the form and the meaning of the text in order to achieve unified spoken or written texts in different genres. This unity requires the cohesion in form, (grammatical and lexical links among words and utterances) and the coherence in meaning (the relationship among the different meaning in a text; literal, scientific or social meaning).

D. **Strategic competence**; this competence is used to improve communication or to compensate for breakdowns which occur as a result of the limiting factors in actual communication or the insufficient competence in one or more of the other components of communicative skills. (ibid)

Educators must have: Efficient knowledge of the structure of SL and the TL, translation theory, causes of negative interference, and methodology

Perfect knowledge of the process of translation and how it runs. (Bell, 1994) ?

Interest in reading all types of texts and having enough capacity of appreciating what is read.

High proficiency in communicating ideas clearly, empathically and openly.

Capacity to foster search and research, accuracy and truthfulness; self-critical and analytical capacity.

Teachers should be aware of Terminological resources: Monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, specialized dictionaries, encyclopedias, glossaries, various texts on translation theory and practice, access to international data processing nets, informants, expert and other sources.
Educators must master all types of equivalence. This means that teachers of translation must be highly aware of the following:

- **Grammatical equivalence**: Each language has its own grammar or structure which differs from the others, this matter may pose some problems in terms of finding a direct correspondence in the TL. According to Baker (1992) such differences may cause remarkable changes in the way the information or the message is carried across. These changes may force the translator either to add or to omit information in the TL because of the lack of particular grammatical devices in the TL itself. Baker focuses on number, tense, voice, person and gender as grammatical devices which, may cause problem in translation.

- **Textual equivalence**: The importance of texture in translation comes from the notion that it works as guidelines for the comprehension and analysis of the ST, the matter that may help the translator with producing a cohesive and coherent translated text. During this type of translation three factors should be taken into account, the target audience, the purpose of the translation and the text type.

- **Pragmatic equivalence**: It refers to the implicatures and strategies of avoidance during the translation process. The role of the translator is to indicate what is behind the words or to work out implied meanings in translation in order to get the ST message across.

Teachers must have high awareness of the teaching activities used in teaching translation.

Teachers must be aware of all types of teaching methods and be competent enough to employ any of these methods appropriately in their translation classes. According to Newmark (1988b)These methods are:

Word-for-word translation; in which the SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) This type is called transliteration and is mainly used for translating linguistic data from other languages to English; e.g; ʕałima zayd-un al-xaber, knew zayd the-news. This is also named according to Newmark (1988b) as transference.
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**Literal translation:** in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context.

**Faithful translation:** it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.

**Semantic translation:** It differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text. This translation type can be defined as the process of using semantic information to aid in the translation of data in one representation or data model to another representation or data mode. Wikipedia.

**Adaptation:** which is the freest form of translation, and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten. Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_translation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_translation)

**Free translation:** it produces the TL text without the style, form, or content of the original.

**Idiomatic translation:** it reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.

**Communicative translation:** it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership (1988b: 45-47).

Finally, teacher must have clear assessment criteria.

In conclusion, if the steps of the above methodologies are followed precisely the learners of translation are expected to be characterised with reading comprehension ability in a foreign language⁹, sensitivity to language (both mother tongue and foreign language), and competence to write the target language correctly, clearly, economically and resourcefully.

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⁹ Students can achieve this if they study the translation courses and their prerequisites.
4. Summary remarks

It can be concluded from the discussion above that undergraduate courses of translation in Gaza universities should make their objectives clearly explicit, so as to enlighten students and teachers alike. The ambiguous standing objectives should by no means be allowed to mislead teachers and students into believing that the training is professional. This would have two negative consequences. On the one hand, it derails the training from its natural academic objective (Bell 1994). On the other hand, if teachers and students buy it, it can only produce poor translators. For these immediate reasons, I have suggested reviewing the objectives and the present methodology of teaching translation at Gaza universities. It is far much better to achieve realistic learning outcomes for the university translation course than to continue hand waving. The paper ended with introducing new objectives and a modest methodology for teaching translation that involves a proper role for both the student and the tutor of translation at Gaza universities.
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