Translation methods in teaching translation to university-level students

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Abstract

The primary goal of this paper is to examine the translation methods selected by students in their translation training. In the theoretical part, basic information concerning translation methods is introduced and the difference between translation methods and procedures is elucidated. The dichotomy between the literal and free translation approach and the opinions on the mentioned methods by such scholars as Newmark, Vinay, Darbelnet, Hatim and Munday are presented. The empirical part presents the results of a small-scale study exploring the translation methods selected by students of a translation class at the University of Zielona Góra, Poland. The analysis revealed the motivations behind the choice of specific translation methods and the consequences of using them.

Keywords: translation methods; translation training; literal vs. free translation

1. Introduction

When working upon a text to be translated, the dilemma the translator often faces is which translation method he or she should choose. As an academic teacher of translation class I have been frequently asked by means of which translation method a given text should be rendered. Students expect a clear, straightforward answer and might be quite disappointed when they find out that the solution is not that simple. The difficulty lies not so much in the selection of the

specific translation method but in the fact that the process of translation, more often than not, requires flexibility from the translator to deploy multifarious translation methods to render one piece of text. The decision, and consequently the responsibility, is on the part of the translator. Students' attitude to this kind of responsibility depends on individual features of character. There are students who gladly take risks and do not hesitate to experiment with a multitude of translation methods. There are also students who prefer certainty and are quite cautious not to make a mistake. In this paper, the results of a small-scale study concerning the selection of translation methods carried out among students of the University of Zielona Góra will be presented and thoroughly discussed. First of all, however, the definition of a translation method as opposed to a translation strategy and procedure will be provided.

2. Translation method vs. translation procedure

According to Newmark (1995), "(...) translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language" (p. 81). Thus, one may presume that translation methods are useful when deciding on the whole translator's approach to rendering a specific text. As it seems, translation procedures as well as strategies and techniques are applied by a translator in order to find a solution to a potential translation problem which may concern just a fragment of the text to be rendered.

Having stated the above, one needs to add that scholars' opinions are divided as to how a translation strategy should be defined. Palumbo (2009) explains that "the term *strategy* is used by scholars to refer either to a general mode of text transfer or to the transfer operation performed on a particular structure, item or idea found in the source text" (p. 131). Apparently, if one follows the reasoning presented in this quote, one may notice that the definitions of a strategy and method seem to overlap. Another scholar, Jääskeläinen perceives strategies as "a set of (loosely formulated) rules or principles which a translator uses to reach the goals determined by the translating situation in the most effective way" (as cited in Palumbo, 2009, p. 132). Therefore, one may understand a strategy as a procedure or method that the translator applies in order to find a remedy to a particular translation problem or task.

In his book *A Textbook of Translation* Newmark (1995, pp. 45-48) thoroughly describes eight basic translation methods (1995, p. 45-48), including the *literal* and *free* method, which are the subject matter of this article. For the purposes of this paper the literal and free approaches to translation are to be referred to as methods, although the definitions of a method, strategy, and even procedure may overlap. Such a phenomenon is noticeable in the way Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet describe translation procedures, including literal translation

and adaptation, which Newmark called methods (as cited in Balcerzan, 1998, p. 29). The debate among scholars about the literal and free methods of translation is ongoing. The dichotomy between the literal and free approaches to translation from both historical and contemporary perspectives is briefly presented below.

3. Literal vs. free approach to translation

The split between literal and free approaches to translation has a very long history. As Hatim and Munday (2004) explain, "the origin of this separation is to be found in two of the most-quoted names in translation theory, the Roman lawyer and writer Cicero and St Jerome, who translated the Greek Septuagint gospels into Latin in the fourth century" (p. 11). In fairness the debate about the so-called "word-for-word and sense-for-sense" (Munday, 2009, p. 3) translation has continued up to the twenty first century. When discussing the literal and free approaches to translation, the name of another prominent scholar, George Steiner, should also be mentioned. Steiner calls the debate "sterile" (1998, p. 32) and distinguishes between *literal*, *free* and *faithful* translation. The same reference can be found in Jeremy Munday (2006, p. 19). Pisarska and Tomaszkiewicz (1998, p. 191) add that the debate about literal and free translation will continue as long as those concepts are applied to texts in a global way. They argue that indeed each translation contains literal and free elements and the evidence for this statement is the fact that there are different translations of the same text and all of them may be evaluated as correct. Hejwowski (2007, p. 88) presents his point of view, shared also by Nabokov, that in reality the the difference between the literal and free approach boils down to the distinction between literal translation and paraphrase. Hatim (2001) believes that "the distinction between 'literal' and 'free' translation has always been central in translation studies" (p. 88). One may even risk the statement that the debate is bound to continue as long as translators translate.

4. The study

The empirical part of this article reports a small-scale study conducted among students of translation class at the University of Zielona Góra, Poland. The students were requested to anonymously fill out a questionnaire in which they answered eight questions concerning the the literal and free approaches to translation.

4.1. Aims

The study aimed at examining the students' attitude and decision-making process in reference to the two translation methods, literal and free, when dealing

with the task of translating a text. The idea is to determine which of the two translation methods students tend to choose most willingly and frequently when performing a translation assignment. On the basis of the collated data, preliminary insights into the methodology of selecting translation methods can be provided. The specific aims of the study were as follows:

1) to investigate the students' attitude to the literal vs. free translation approaches;
2) to examine which translation method students tend to choose most frequently;
3) to determine which translation method students find most useful;
4) to tap into students' opinions about which method might be potentially more successful in the translation process;
5) to find out what consequences might result from applying a specific translation method.

4.2. Design

The research project took place in June 2017 at the University of Zielona Góra. The data were collected by means of an anonymous questionnaire which included both closed and open-ended items. The questionnaire was administered to 35 MA and 12 BA translation class students at that university (47 participants in total). The assignment was intended to achieve the following: (1) to find out whether students are capable of recognizing the literal and free method in a short sample of a translated text, (2) to establish which of the two methods is used more often, (3) to determine what motivates students in their choice of a specific translation method, and (4) to find out which texts, those rendered literary or freely students enjoy reading the most.

4.3. Results

The results of the study will be presented in the sections according to the following issues: (1) students' capacity to recognize the literal and free method in a translated text, (2) the frequency of occurrence of the translation methods selected by the participants, (3) the motivation behind the students' choice of a relevant translation method, (4) the use of a potentially most successful method in translation, (5) the consequences of using a given translation method, (6) the types of texts which require a specific translation method, (7) the types of translations, literal or free, which students enjoy reading the most.

4.3.1. Students' capacity to recognize the literal vs. free method

In the questionnaire the students were asked to recognize which method, literal or free, has been applied in the translated bold sample by putting a correct answer in a circle:

Original	Translation (literal / free)
(...) I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house (...) (Bunyan 1994, p. 7).	*(...) i usnąwszy widziałem we śnie człowieka (*) Szatą splugawioną i odartą odzianego, który stał mając obrócony tył ku własnemu Domowi swemu (...) (Bunyan 1764, p. 1).*

Original	Translation (literal / free)
Leisure is time for doing something useful; this leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy man never; so that, as Poor Richard says, a life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things (Franklin 1898, p. 47-48).	*Spoczynek może bydź obrócony na coś pożytecznego. Człowiek tylko pracowity może w takim rodzaju spoczynku smakować, ale leniwiec go nie zazna. Życie spokojne, jak powiada Ryszard, a życie próżniackie są dwie rzeczy wcale różne od siebie (Franklin 1793, p. 14-15).*

On the basis of the collected data, it was found that in the sample taken from Bunyan (1994) 12 students out of 35 MA correctly recognized the method used by the translator as the literal translation method. This means that 34% of the MA students were capable of recognizing the translation method applied in this text. By contrast, 23 students erroneously pointed to the free translation method, which constitutes 66% of all the participants in the MA group. The situation was similar in the case of the Franklin's translated excerpt.

It is interesting to observe that among the BA students, only 1 person chose the correct answer by pointing to the use of the literal method in both Bunyan's and Franklin's excerpts. One student did not choose any answer and 10 students selected the free method for Bunyan's sample and the literal method for Franklin's piece of translation. As a result, 8% of BA students correctly recognized the translation methods in Bunyan's and Franklin's samples whereas 92% experienced difficulty with this task.

4.3.2. The most frequently used translation methods

Figure 1 shows which translation methods the MA students were inclined to choose most often in their translation assignments. As can be seen from this graphical representation, the majority of the participants, 20 or 57%, opted for the free method while only 11 students, or 31%, chose the literal method. Four MA students (11%) answered that their choice of the translation method

depends on a variety of factors, such as the type of text, naturalness, the way the idea should be represented in the translation and a specific translation problem.
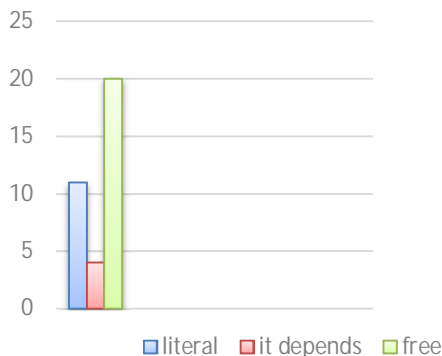

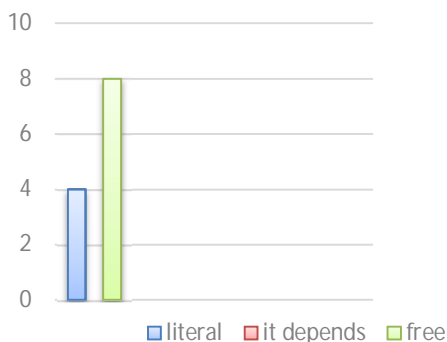Figure 1 Frequency of occurrence of translation methods selected by MA students

Figure 2 Frequency of occurrence of translation methods selected by BA students

As illustrated in Figure 2, in the case of the BA students, only 4 participants (33%) chose the literal method while 8 students (67%) opted for the free method. The option *it depends* was not selected by any of the BA students.

4.3.3. Motivation behind the students' choice

As regards the motivation behind choosing the literal method, within the group of 35 MA students, 8 participants (23%) admitted that they consider this method to be the easiest. Thirteen students (37%) stated that the application of the literal method brings their translation closer to the original. Nine students (26%) confirmed that their choice of the literal method is determined by their fear not to exceed the boundaries of the source text. The remaining 5 students (14%) did not tick any of the options provided. In the case of 1 BA student (8%), the

motivation behind choosing the literal method was the fact that this method was again regarded as the easiest. At the same time the student explained that it is much less problematic to select the literal method than to invent something entirely new. Nine students (75%) believed the literal method brings them closer to the original. One student (8%) admitted the choice is determined by the fear not to exceed the boundaries of the source text. Also one student (8%) did not tick any of the provided answers.

When it comes to the motivation behind selecting the free translation method, 15 MA students (43%) decided to apply it because they perceived it as more creative. Eleven students (31%) admitted that their motivation is based on the assumption that meaning is more important than form. Three students (9%) chose the method as they wanted to be original. Six students (17%) failed to select any of the answers. As regards the motivation of the BA students for choosing the free method, five students (42%) were of the opinion that it was more creative. Four students (33%) admitted that meaning was more important than form for them. One student (8%) wanted to be original. Finally, two students (17%) did not circle any of the answers provided.

4.3.4. Potentially most successful translation method

The results demonstrate that, according to MA students, the free method may be more likely to guarantee success in the process of translation, because 24 participants in this group (68%) selected the method as potentially the most effective. Seven students (20%) admitted that the success of translation depends on various factors, such as the type of test being translated. Two students (6%) decided that both translation methods (i.e., literal and free) when incorporated in one text may potentially be most effective in the process of translation. Finally, two students (6%) selected the literal method as the most successful in the translator's workshop.

It is interesting to note that the BA students' answers differed from those provided by the MA participants. Contrary to the MA students, half of the BA students (6 or 50%) were of the opinion that the literal method may be potentially more successful in the process of translation. Two students (17%) viewed success in translation as a function of multifarious factors, such as, for example, the type of text. Another two students (17%) selected the free approach as potentially most effective when translating texts. One student (8%) was of the opinion that both translation methods (i.e., literal and free) may bring success. Finally, one student (8%) did not provide any answer.

4.3.5. Consequences of using a given translation method

When analyzing the responses provided by the MA students, one may observe that they listed both positive and negative consequences of using the literal or free method. Table 1 presents the students' answers categorized as positive and negative. It is clear that according to the MA participants, the consequences of the application of literal translation are largely negative. This is because the majority of students (19 or 54%) enumerated the drawbacks of this method while only the minority (12 or 34%) suggested the potential benefits.

Table 1 Positive and negative consequences of using the literal method in translation according to the MA students

Consequences of using the literal method (MA students)	
Positive	Negative
1. The translation is very close to the source text (3 students).	The translation may be too stiff and dull.
2. The target text is closer to the original (2 students).	We forget about the context.
3. The translation recreates the style of the original.	It can be too literal sometimes.
4. Grammatical correctness is necessary.	The translator cannot change anything.
5. Specific knowledge is required.	Too much attention to the correctness.
6. The target text is the same as the source text.	The translation would not be understandable and boring (2 students).
7. The translation is faithful to the form of the original text.	The translator may be forced to omit information.
8. The translator conveys the meaning better.	It may not be fully correct.
9. The translator is less probable to make a mistake.	Calque.
10.	The reader may not understand cultural nuances or hidden jokes.
11.	Sometimes the sentences may sound strange in the target language.
12.	The text may not sound natural in the target language.
13.	Lack of aesthetic values of a text.
14.	You do not learn anything by using the easiest way.
15.	Sometimes the translation does not cover the original text.

By way of analogy, Table 2 presents the answers provided by the MA students regarding the positive and negative consequences of using the free translation method. Yet again, it turned out that the negative consequences of applying the free method outweigh the positive ones. To be more precise, 18 students (51%)

provided reasons why the application of this method by the translator may be ineffective and only 14 participants (40%) supplied arguments to the contrary.

Table 2 Positive and negative consequences of using the free method in translation according to MA students

Consequences of using the free method (MA students)	
Positive	Negative
1. The translation is rich in creativity.	The message may be missing.
2. The translation is natural (2 students).	The sense and form may be lost.
3. Translations are more interesting, cultural equivalences are preserved.	We may disturb the message.
4. The translator can modify the original message (3 students).	You can lose the meaning (4 students).
5. Originality.	The translation can be misunderstood (2 students).
6. The meaning can be transferred with the use of words that sound more appropriate in the target language (2 students).	The translation may differ from the original.
7. The translation can be more interesting for the reader.	The translation may be too far from the original.
8. The translation reads well.	Distortion, adding elements which were absent in the source text.
9. The translation is more pleasant to read probably (2 students).	Sometimes losing the main idea in the source text.
10.	The translation differs from the original.
11.	Mistranslations.
12.	Sometimes it can spoil the message.
13.	The translation becomes more an interpretation of the source text.
14.	The target version is completely different from the original.

Table 3 Positive and negative consequences of using the literal method in translation according to BA students

Consequences of using the literal method (BA students)	
Positive	Negative
1. The translation preserves almost the same form and meaning as in the source text.	The sense or the original meaning can be lost.
2. The translation is closer to the source text.	The translation may be harder to understand.
3. The translation which takes context into consideration.	The lexical words are translated singly.
4. The translation that is very close to the original text.	Losing the meaning by translating singular words.
5.	Focusing on grammatical structures rather than on the real effect of the translation.

Similarly to the MA students, the BA participants enumerated both positive and negative consequences of using the literal and free methods in translation. As can be seen from Table 3, however, in the case of the literal method, the answers were more balanced than for the MA students. While five BA participants (42%) focused upon the negative consequences of using this method, four students (33%) pointed to the potential benefits stemming from its application.

The positive and negative consequences of using the free method mentioned by the BA students are included in Table 4. In this case, three students (25%) listed the pluses of the application of this method, as opposed to six participants (50%) who anticipated a negative impact of reliance on free translation.

Table 4 Positive and negative consequences of using the free method in translation according to BA students

Consequences of using the free method (BA students)	
Positive	Negative
1. Flexibility of translation, it does not have to be strictly transferred.	Presenting a different way from the source text.
2. The translation that differs from the original form but has the same meaning.	The translation is much longer than the original.
3. The translator creates the text, can add something to the translation.	Some information may be lost in translation
4.	Translations can no longer be translations
5.	The translator creates a text that does not stick to the original.
6.	The translation that is not proper.

4.3.6. Types of text requiring the application of a specific translation method

The MA students were precise in mentioning the types of texts requiring the application of either literal or free translation. As can be seen from Table 5, the literal method was regarded as the most suitable in the case of scientific texts (mentioned 12 times), closely followed by legal texts (mentioned 9 times) while the free method was perceived as more appropriate for literary texts (mentioned 12 times), such as poetry or prose (12 mentions in each case).

The opinions of the BA students concerning the types of texts requiring the application of the literal or free translation method are included Table 6. On the whole, the results are similar to those obtained for the MA students, as the literal method was regarded as more suitable for scientific, academic and legal texts (mentioned 4, 3, and 3 times, respectively), whereas the free method was seen as more appropriate in the case of literary texts (mentioned 2 times) such as poetry (mentioned 2 times).

Table 5 Transition methods suitable for different types of texts according to MA students

Types of texts (MA students)	
Literal	Free
1. Banking text	Literary texts (mentioned 12 times)
2. Legal texts (mentioned 9 times)	Poetry (mentioned 12 times)
3. Scientific texts (mentioned 12 times)	Prose (novels, stories) (mentioned 12 times)
4. Specialized texts (mentioned 5 times)	Drama
5. Official documents (mentioned 5 times)	Advertisements
6. Technical texts (mentioned 3 times)	Journalistic texts
7. Business texts (mentioned 4 times)	
8. Medical texts (mentioned 4 times)	
9. Old and academic texts	
10. Brochures and flyers	
11. Manuals	
12. Sworn documents	
13. Institutional texts	

Table 6 Transition methods suitable for different types of texts according to BA students

Types of texts (the BA students)	
Literal	Free
1. Formal documents	Literary texts (mentioned 2 times)
2. Legal texts (mentioned 3 times)	Poetry (mentioned 2 times)
3. Scientific texts (mentioned 4 times)	Prose (novels, stories)
4. Academic texts (mentioned 3 times)	Tourist brochures
5. Instruction manuals	Advertisements
6. Technical texts (mentioned 3 times)	Cultural texts
7. Poetry	Films and cartoons
8. Novels	Music

4.3.7. Types of translations (literal or free) students enjoy reading most

The findings of the study seem to confirm that the majority of the MA students (28 or 80%) enjoy reading the translations rendered by means of the free method. The main advantage of the free method they frequently mentioned is creativity. Three students (8%) hesitated between the literal and free method admitting that the choice depends on different factors, such as the type of text. Two students (6%) answered that they enjoy reading texts which incorporate elements of both literal and free methods. One student (3%) opted for the literal method and another one (3%) did not answer the question at all. The results were by and large mirrored in the case of the BA participants, the majority of whom also showed preference for reading texts translated by means of the free method (7 or 58%). The main reason for this was creativity that the students appreciated the most. Three students (25%) opted for the literal method, one

(8.5%) was of the opinion that the type of text was the decisive factor, and one (8.5%) did not provide an answer at all.

5. Conclusions

The main goal of the paper was to examine the translation methods (i.e., literal or free) selected by students in their translation training. The small-scale study was designed to determine which of the two methods students tended to select most willingly in their translator's workshop. On the basis of the results, it can be stated that both the MA and BA participants had problems with recognizing the relevant translation method in the examined samples. The analysis showed that only 34% of the MA students and 8% of the BA students were able to recognize the translation method used. This finding may lead to the conclusion that students need more practice in identifying different translation methods and thus perhaps more time during translation classes should be devoted to such activities. At the same time, it should be stressed that the MA students who have more translation classes within their specialization were able to cope with this task better than their BA counterparts.

As far as the use of the literal and free method is concerned, 57% of the MA students and 67% of the BA students are inclined to choose free translation more frequently. By contrast, 31% of the MA participants and 33% of the BA participants tended to choose the literal translation method. In addition, 11% of the MA students answered that the decision depends on various factors such as the type of text. The analysis showed that 37% of the MA respondents and 75% of the BA students admitted that the application of the literal method brings their translation closer to the original, which motivates them to opt for this method. When tapping the motivation behind selecting the free method, it turned out that 43% of the MA students and 42% of the BA students decided to rely on this method because of the creativity that it allows. Based on the collated data, one may infer that the MA students are more willing to experiment with the free method in their translation training. At the same time, the BA students are more cautious and uncertain, which leads to the preference for the safer, though perhaps less creative, literal approach to translation. It was found that 68% of the MA participants and 17% of the BA students viewed the free method as potentially more successful. By contrast, 50% of the BA students and 6% of the MA participants believed that literal translation was more effective. The findings seem to confirm the assumption that the MA students are more open to freedom in the process of translating, as opposed to the BA students who tend to cling to the source text by selecting the literal method.

The most frequently mentioned positive consequence of using the literal method was the assumption that the resulting translation is very close to the source text. In the case of the free method, the most important advantages in the eyes of the participants included creativity and naturalness along with the belief that the translator can adjust the original message. Among the negative consequences of reliance on the literal method, the danger of producing a translation that is not understandable or boring was mentioned. With respect to the use of the free method, the students most often pointed to the possible loss or distortion of the original meaning. It was also found that the students perceive scientific and legal texts as requiring the application of the literal method and believe that the free method is more suited to literary and poetic texts. Finally, 80% of the MA students and 58% of the BA students admitted they enjoy reading texts rendered by means of the free method.

To sum up, the results of this small-scale study seem to indicate that MA students are more willing to choose the free method in their translation training, as opposed to BA students who tend to rely on the literal method more frequently, a finding that can perhaps be attributed to considerable differences in training. It is to be hoped that the findings will provide an impulse for further research on the use of different translation methods by university-level students and encourage further interest in this important area.

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