European Proceedings of
Social and Behavioural Sciences
EpSBS

www.europeanproceedings.com

e-ISSN: 2357-1330

DOI: 10.15405/epsbs.2020.11.03.5

DCCD 2020

Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

TRANSLATION AS A TOOL IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT POST-GRADUATE LEVEL

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Abstract

Foreign language proficiency is essential for a modern scientist. Teaching academic English to PhD students in Russia is an integral part of a postgraduate stage of education. At this stage the main objective of foreign language classes is to develop language skills and competences that enable young researches to participate in international research projects, to reach scientific and educational goals. Since young scholars have specific linguistic demands for their future academic careers, a course of English for Academic Purposes for postgraduates should focus attention on skills necessary for a successful academic communication. One of the instruments that can facilitate language learning is work with foreign scientific texts which includes translation and analysis of syntactic structures and terminology. The article offers a two-stage approach to the analysis of a foreign scientific text which was realized with the use of a system of exercises developed and implemented at the Department of Foreign Languages of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The approach contributes to the development of foreign language communication skills. The results of the application of this method are as follows: general scientific and terminology vocabulary expansion, development of translation and problem solving skills, text editing skills formation and improvement of the general command of the English language in terms of grammar and lexicon.

Keywords: Teaching English, PhD students, postgraduate education.

https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.11.03.5
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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference
eISSN: 2357-1330

1. Introduction

Foreign Language teaching has always been regarded as an essential element of post-graduate programs (Karpova & Efimova, 2019), though the requirements and structure of language courses have undergone significant changes in recent years. If we look at the history of teaching a foreign language to young scholars, which goes back as far as the 1920s, we can observe a transition in both methodology and attitude to this discipline. Up until the 1960s, learning a foreign language was considered a student's own responsibility with the supervisor's role of checking the amount of foreign scientific literature read during the academic year. Then the situation with formal tuition changed, but the main methods of instruction were still focused on teaching grammar and the development of reproductive reading skills (Popova & Kuznetsova, 2016). Before 2012 postgraduate education was an autonomous system, whose aim was to prepare young scholars for a scientific research and writing and defense of a PhD dissertation. A cardinal change in the status of post-graduate studies was observed in 2012 when, according to the Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation, postgraduate education became the third step in the system of higher education in modern Russia following undergraduate and graduate levels. Defending a dissertation is no longer viewed to be the necessary condition of a successful graduation, postgraduates get a state diploma and a qualification of "Researcher. Researching Teacher" after three years of study and a series of exams. Ideally this three-level system must provide the continuity of disciplines taught at each level, which is not always the case with a foreign language.

2. Problem Statement

Teachers often speak about the discrepancies between the requirements of the syllabus designed for postgraduate students and the results of their previous language experience (Shirokikh, 2017). Young scholars have specific linguistic demands for their future academic careers, and, in this respect, the structure and aims of a foreign language course differ greatly from usual university English Language programs at the graduate level, as well as from English for Academic Purposes programs. The course for post-graduates focuses instruction on skills necessary for a successful academic communication in a particular field of science including taking part in international academic conferences and writing and publishing research papers. A balanced approach requires the development of all language skills such as speaking, reading, writing and listening.

3. Research Questions

The empirical data were obtained during group classes and individual consultations with first and second year postgraduates of the scientific institutes of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The students major in various fields including both Natural Sciences and Humanities. More often than not in one academic group there may be students of Mathematics, Economy, Biology, Archaeology, etc. In this respect group work is restricted to the materials based on general scientific issues witch cover tasks on grammar, listening materials, exercises on communicative skills. Another factor that can reduce group work productivity is the imbalance in the level of language competence of the students coming from different educational establishments of higher learning. Both problems can only be solved by means of an

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individual approach to each learner. Basic teaching and research materials thus include original scientific articles and monographs selected by a particular learner in his or her field of study. These texts serve as language materials for analysis and as the source of terminology input. The whole course is constructed around four examination tasks: written translation of a scientific text from English into Russian, unprepared sight translation of a scientific text from English into Russian, an oral interview on research issues, summary of an English scientific article. Of these tasks translation is a new type of competence not required at undergraduate and graduate levels, where it was employed only as a supplementary teaching tool. In general, translation competence as a complex multidimensional phenomenon is often viewed as a new quality acquired in the process of education integrating knowledge and skills required to translate (Coban, 2015). It is often emphasized that foreign language proficiency or linguistic competence is not the only necessary component of translation competence (Acioly-Régnier et al., 2015; Bazyilev, 2016; Gile, 2005), another important factor of successful translation is extralinguistic competence, by which any kind of thematic knowledge in general and specific areas is understood. That is why it is necessary to acquaint the learners with basic theoretical principles of translation connected both with linguistic and extralinguistic aspects: the notions of adequacy and equivalence, translation transformations, typological characteristics of the languages, their structural peculiarities.

4. Purpose of the Study

At postgraduate level translation becomes a productive kind of language activity requiring special knowledge of translation techniques. Thus, the purpose of the research is to develop a flexible and effective model of teaching translation as an instrument of language proficiency development suitable for all scientific specialties and levels of preparation with a special emphasis on individual scientific demands and interests.

5. Research Methods

In the course of the research the following data collecting tools and assessment technologies were used: the questionnaire method, participant observation, grammar and vocabulary input and output tests as well as a comparative analysis of original and translated texts within the framework of the theory of translation transformations (Alekseeva, 2001; Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002; Latyishev & Semenov, 2003; Petrova, 2002).

The degree of correspondence between two texts is naturally established by means of a comparative analysis of the source and target texts. Assessment criteria also include the requirement to follow the norm of the target language. Though the problem of translation mistakes has received much attention in the area of theoretical and practical studies, it is still a matter of debate both in terms of typology and mistake origin (Wongranu, 2017). The term itself may be defined differently depending on the criteria of “good” or “correct” translation, which leads us to the notion of translation norm and translation aim (Rus & Harpa, 2018). The general requirement to all types of translation is to render the content of the original, and the violation of this requirement is naturally treated as a mistake.

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At our lessons to assess the students' translations we apply the so called logic oriented method developed by Buzadzhi et al. (2009) which helps to detect unreasonable ambiguities, poor wording and grammar. Attention is also drawn to functional characteristics of the scientific style, the notion of term and its properties, contextual use of words, common collocations, structural types of compound terms, translation of derivatives.

6. Findings

The current research was aimed at the development of an instruction model which could meet the individual demands of future scientists and at the same time strengthen their theoretical knowledge, language skills and foster the development of both linguistic and extralinguistic competences. According to Davies (2004) there should be more than one approach to teaching translation. One of the instruments of such instruction is text analysis and its subsequent translation with a special attention to syntactic structures and terminology. We offer a two-stage approach to the analysis of a foreign scientific text. Stage one comprises a number of tasks based on the individual work with original foreign texts collected by the learners with the help of their scientific supervisors.

Task 1: *Read the article, underline and write out words and expressions used to describe processes, name phenomena, materials and equipment in your field of study. Find their Russian equivalents.* The task contributes to the development of reading skills and helps to master the language of a particular area of science, which can only be done by means of extensive reading of foreign literature. In the process the students learn to differentiate terms from general scientific words, compile their personal glossaries with the help of professional dictionaries and reference materials. *Example 1: solid solution – твёрдый раствор, superlattice – сверхрешетка, one dimensional anti-phase domain – одномерный антифазный домен, corrosion resistance – коррозионная стойкость, electrical conductivity – электропроводность* (terms of Material Science). *Example 2: macrophage - макрофаг, inflammatory cell type – тип воспалительных клеток, neutrophil - нейтрофил, neutrophil depletion –истощение нейтрофилов* (terms of Physiology).

Task 2: *Find and underline grammatical structures typical of a scientific style*. Here we deal with different types of passive constructions, complex object and complex subject structures, independent participle constructions, attributive phrases, etc. *Example: the thickness of the precursor was adjusted, the cells were finished, the quality of the absorber layers was examined, the film composition was determined, photocurrent spectra of the devices were recorded* (passive voice structures, used when describing an experiment).

Task 3: *Find elements of the text that might require the application of translation transformations*. Translation transformations or techniques are special devices worked out in the theory of translation to solve problems that arise from language differences (Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002; Petrova, 2002). The most common techniques applied in scientific texts translation include: *replacement* – a change of the part of speech or syntactic structure, *modulation* – a shift in the point of view, *transposition* – a change of the word order, *compensation* of an element which cannot be reproduced directly, *generalization* and *concretization*, etc. Doing this exercise the students learn to be flexible with the use of language structures, understand that the same idea may be expressed lexically in one language and grammatically in the other.

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Example 1: the energy bandgap of this material has been reported to range from … (a complex subject construction which requires the syntactic transformation of replacement – the use of a subordinate clause in the Russian language). *Example 2: the nutrient uptake of fruits and vegetables is higher than that of cereal crops* (*that* is a prop-word requiring concretization when translated into Russian). *Example 3: Greenpeace has examined official statistics to conclude that…* (the infinitive should be transformed into the finite form of a predicate verb).

Task 4: *Translate the text into Russian. Example: Whether the wound macrophage is a key regulatory inflammatory cell type in skin repair has been a matter of debate. A transgenic mouse model mediating inducible macrophage depletion during skin repair has not been used to date to address this question* (Goren et al., 2009). Student translation: *Вопрос о том, является ли раневой макрофаг ключевым регуляторным типом воспалительных клеток при восстановлении кожи, является предметом споров. Модель трансгенных мышей, опосредующая индуцибельное истощение макрофагов во время восстановления кожи, до настоящего времени не использовалась для решения этого вопроса.* The abstract exemplifies the use of a number of translation techniques: addition, replacement, transposition, concretization, but it needs some editing in terms of the style of the Russian language: in the first sentence there are unnecessary repetitions of the word "является", the second sentence would sound better with the change of the word order.

After the initial translation of English texts into Russian an exercise in back translation is offered. Back translation proved to be a very useful type of exercise as it demonstrates the difference between word collocations in the English and Russian languages. It teaches how to use language idiomatically and creates links between lexical and grammatical units of a foreign language and their Russian equivalents. At the second stage the students are asked to analyze translations of their group members. The following scheme of analysis is used:

1. Read the given abstract, underline everything that you find illogical, unclear or incorrect.
2. Compare the abstract with the original.
3. Determine the type of the mistake. Make use of the additional reference material to prove your point. Make the necessary corrections.

This activity helps the students to develop translation and problem solving skills, to become aware of the importance of text revising and editing and can be a valuable educational tool in improving their general English level. It also develops alertness to inadequacies of machine translation (Abu-Ayyash, 2017; Odacıoglu & Kokturk, 2015; Peris & Casacuberta, 2019).

Finally exercises on translation from Russian into English are offered. By that time the learners have acquired a comprehensive amount of knowledge on lexical and grammatical features of the English language and feel quite confident with translation techniques.

At the end of the academic year a survey was conducted to find out the learners' impression about the course. It is interesting to note that before the course most students considered their command of English as average or below average and after the course, according to questionnaire answers, lexical, grammatical and writing skills improved. About 85% of postgraduates estimated their level as average, above average or advanced. The comparison of input and output grammar and vocabulary tests as well as examination results also testified for this fact.

7. Conclusion

Reading and analysis of foreign scientific literature (articles, books, dissertations, conference proceedings) belong to the basic skills of a researcher and a PhD student. It has been calculated that scientists spend 23% of their working time on reading (Phillips & Norris, 2009). It helps to be informed about modern scientific developments and lays a base for productive types of language activity such as giving conference presentations and writing articles in English. Academic literature is characterized by the use of professional vocabulary, laconic and exact use of language units, complex grammatical structures. That is why a course of analytical reading and translation is of primary importance. The aim of the course is to acquaint the learners' with specific features of an English scientific text, to facilitate the development of their general command of English and to foster the improvement of their ability to translate academic literature. This range of exercises introduced during the course provides a balanced coordination of individual and pair/group work, takes into account the students' scientific interests and deals with the main problems they face when translating a foreign text.

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