Supporting Intercultural Competence Using Tanslation in English Department : Master Students - Mascara University as a Case Study.

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Abstract

The present study attempts to explore the role that the translation course plays in shaping and enhancing the intercultural (IC) competence of foreign language students in the department of English at the University of Mascara. A questionnaire and an observation were adopted. Excerpts of texts dealing with English and American cultural particularities were provided to the students. The paper sketches out the main approaches that handled the concept of intercultural competence (IC), the models that have been suggested, as well as the place of IC in translation studies. The result showed that intercultural competence is best invested and explored during translation courses. For this, teachers need to be aware its importance. Thus, the texts to be translated have to be tactfully selected to meet the course objective.

Key-words: teaching, translation, intercultural competence, cosmopolitanism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence represents an essential component in teaching a new language. In fact, the ubiquity of cultural diversity puts to the fore a set of attitudes that may be negative vis-à-vis the language to be taught. Hence, teaching a foreign language implies inculcating the attitudes of openness and acceptance of the *different* Other. Starting from the premise that translation course is one of the modules in which learners discover best the cultural differences between their mother culture and the foreign one, the present paper fills in the gap the possible ways and methods of making translation course an exercise for intercultural competence enhancement. It sheds light on the approaches to this issue in foreign language learning and translation teaching. Then, the questionnaire and observation results are sketched and discussed.

1.1. Research problem

This study tends to answer the following central question: how can translation courses enhance the intercultural competence of English language students?

1.2. Research objectives

The present paper aims to explore to what extent translation courses in foreign language departments are helpful in developing students' intercultural competence.

1.3. Research questions

The present research addresses the following questions:
- – How is translation course in the English department (Mascara University) invested in developing learners' intercultural competence?

- How do students' perceive intercultural competence in translation courses?

1.4. Research Limitations

The research is based upon an experiment at the University of Mascara, department of The English language. The findings are strictly related to the mentioned sample. The researcher's main difficulty in this study was that the translation course was presented online due to Coronavirus restrictions. Hence, the researcher was obligated to make a simulation of a translation course with Master students instead of 2nd-year students.

2. Literature review

As a concept, intercultural competence knew different appellations: *cross-cultural competence, global competence, multicultural competence, cross-cultural relations, etc*. (Hammer 2015: P.483). However, the most adopted one is "intercultural competence". It refers to inculcating the principles of openness and acceptance of cultural diversity. Guilherme (2013) puts to the fore the following: *"what is needed is the development, through formal education, of certain principles and capabilities that provide individuals and groups with the knowledge and predispositions for effective critical intercultural dialogue. This involves an endless journey where overcoming, more or less successfully, each intercultural situation brings more knowledge and simultaneously more questions*." (P.346-347).

It is patent that developing intercultural competence is asking more questions about our differences and not taking all for granted. Critical thinking is of paramount importance in this mindset. From the

same perspective, Hammer (2015: P.483) reckons that intercultural competence involves deep-cultural self-awareness and deep cultural other-understanding. Thus, self-awareness and self-acknowledgement are also to be taken into account. Intercultural competence entails the concepts of communication, globalisation and cosmopolitanism in the sense that the challenge now is to be able to communicate through our cultural and ethnic differences.

Among the main approaches to intercultural competence are the compositional and developmental approaches. The former refers to a set of approaches that emphasise listing the components of IC, such as Deardorff, who focuses on cultural self-awareness, openness, curiosity as components of IC; the latter refers to approaches that gave importance to the development of learner's IC during their learning process. These approaches reckon that learners apprehend IC through a set of steps or continuum. A famous model of developmental approach is the DMIS, suggested by Milton Bennet. The model suggests a process of mindsets ranging from denial to defence/reversal, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation to integration. The three first orientations are ethnocentric; the last ones are ethno-relatives. Hammer (2015: P. 484-485). Here is a figure that sums it up nicely:
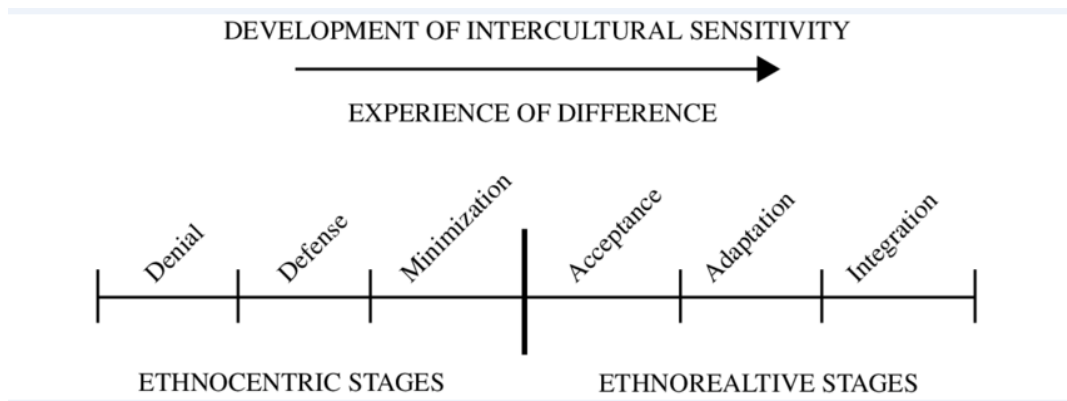
Figure 1. Bennet's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
(Taken from Hammer 2013: P.485)

In translation studies, considerable interest was given to the importance of developing the intercultural competence of future translators and interpreters. In 2016 the journal of "The Interpreter and Translator Trainer" devoted a whole issue to *Teaching Intercultural Competence in Translator Training*; the fact that reveals the importance of such phenomenon. Scholars and researchers of translation studies have tackled the issue from a different perspective, mainly:

- How to make a translation course a tool for the acquisition/ development of intercultural competence?
- How to assess the intercultural competence of learners?
- How to implement and integrate intercultural competence within translation curricula?

- What are the possible tools and methods that may help teachers develop learners' intercultural competence?

Needless to say, that cultural competence is an integral part of translation competence. Thus, all training in translation must tackle the cultural challenges of the translational process. In this perspective, the PACTE group* (2003: p.18) designed a holistic translation competence model that pays special attention to the importance of cultural skills and knowledge. PACTE's model suggests four types of sub-competence that constitute translation competence; *bilingual sub-competence* (knowledge and mastery of the source and the target language), *extralinguistic sub-competence* (knowledge of the cultural differences), *instrumental sub-competence* (mastery of technological tools used in translation), and *knowledge about translation sub-competence* (mastery of translation techniques, strategies, and theoretical considerations). In addition to these competencies, the group reckons the importance of psycho-physiological components, which comprise the cognitive aspects (intuition, memory, perception, emotions, etc.), attitudinal (perseverance, hardworking, etc.) and abilities (critical thinking, creativity).

Concerning extralinguistic sub-competence, Hurtado Alberta (2014: p.170) perceives it as: *"essentially declarative knowledge which relates to the world in general and to specific areas: bicultural, thematic and encyclopaedic knowledge.*" The cultural component as a translational skill is highlighted. The translation is a bi-cultural phenomenon; it's training undeniably includes cultural skills enrichment.

Guzman and Gill (2011) shed light on the importance of social awareness in translation teaching. Their point of departure is how students in Toronto perceive the intercultural and inter-language

differences from an ecological perspective. The authors point out the main questions raised by their students:

"*In my teaching practice, I am confronted with several questions daily: Are the realities of multicultural Toronto visible in my pedagogy? Do translation students have a sense of the plurality of communities that surround them and of the extent to which these communities are part of the city's translation reality? Am I aware of whether the needs of these communities are being addressed*?" (2011: p.95)

the study reveals that adopting the ecological approach to teaching translation is of paramount importance in raising learners' social and cultural awareness. They put to the fore the fact that cultural issues in translation teaching may become ideologically motivated:

"*As teachers, we must expose the cultural assumptions that underlie university curricula. For example, in translation teaching, technological change is seen as inherently progressive, and our institutions' technologies for fostering such change are given high status. In such a paradigm, cultural knowledge and the anthropocentric view of the world can be quickly turned into commodities.*" (2011: p.107)

A critical and practical curriculum is the one that takes the cultural values of humanity as its point of departure.

Tomozeiu and Koskinen, and D'Arcangelo (2016) present the major studies conducted in the context of intercultural competence in translation teaching. They define the interculturally competent translator as "*one that demonstrates a high level of intercultural*

knowledge, skills, attitude and flexibility throughout his or her professional engagements" (p.01) and ask to clearly and explicitly implement IC in the translation curriculum.

Moreover, they highlight the PICT project (2012) in which they studied the intercultural competence among teachers and students of translation in seven European countries. (p.02) the study revealed the fact that there was a high level of awareness among teachers and students of translation. However, there were some gaps in the contents proposed to students. They handle a set of primordial issues related to IC, such as the place of cultural background in translation studies, how to make IC explicit in translation curricula, the fuzziness of the concept of IC and its repercussion on translation training. For future studies, they recommend the following points:

– *Which IC sub-competencies are relevant for professional translators?*
– *What is the optimal balance between IC as a textual competence and IC as an interpersonal competence?*
– *Given the practical nature of the translation, what is the appropriate theoretical basis for conceptualising IC sub-competencies?* (2016: P.06)

Accordingly, research in intercultural competence from a translational perspective focused on the investment of possible tools and methods that translate the course into a place where the learner discovers and apprehends the target culture.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research design adopted in this study is explanatory and descriptive. The paper tends to explain the main possibilities of developing students' IC through translation courses and describe the findings of the study conducted at the University of Mascara.

3.2. Research Method

The present paper adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed method to answer the research questions. Students were given a questionnaire dealing with IC in the translation course and a text to translate. The text tackles a cultural issue, "Mardi Gras" in the USA. Techniques and tactics of students to deal with this issue have been recorded.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Cultural issues are the most striking challenges of translation

Among the consensual answers of students is the one related to the challenge they face while translating. Students argue that cultural differences between English and Arabic are the most critical challenge they encounter. As examples of these cultural differences, they state interferences, idioms, cultural specific concepts, etc. One of the answers:

Some things have different meanings in different cultures, or they do not exist in the target culture.

Students are aware of the importance of culture in translation. However, the ways and methods of developing intercultural

competence have not been tackled as mentioned in the following questions.

4.2. Cultural skills are sine qua none in translation competence

Students argue that cultural competence is an essential part of translation competence. When asked about the components of translation competence, they mentioned: "extralinguistic competence", which refers to the cultural and ideological issues. 100% of students assert that their translation teachers have already tackled cultural issues through texts to be translated. Illustrations and explanations are the main methods these teachers adopt to transmit these cultural differences and challenges. Some examples done by students are:
"Green refers to sickness in English culture, while it refers to Prosper in the Arabs' culture."

"Saying that someone looks like a moon is bad in the English culture, it means he is pale, but in the Arabs' culture it means he looks pretty!"
 "There are also certain foods in the European environment, such as Porridge, and clothing such as dinner-jacket, which are also uncommon in Arab culture. On the other hand, we find in the Arab environment some foods such as mallow and "Kuskus" "كسكس", and some clothing such as "Amama" "عمامة" and jilbab, in addition to some legal and social measures such as khula, which are not all found in the foreign environment, and in the Islamic religion there are words such as "Idda" "عدة" and "Kafala" "كفالة" which are Words have no equivalent in the English language."

It is clear that learners admit the importance of cultural issues in translation. The worth asking question is: do they methodically tackle cultural diversity, or do they rely on some examples they come across

when translating? One of the present studies aims to call for the implementation of cultural diversity in the translation syllabus.

Alluding to cultural issues is not sufficient concerning the importance of the issue.

4.3. Students' awareness of the importance of translation course

Learners showed a positive attitude towards the importance of translation courses in enhancing IC. They admit that translation course may be the most appropriate module in which IC can be the most tackled and analysed:

"They will give the learners an idea about the foreign cultures, how foreigners use their language........and shed light on the cultural differences. Also, to clarify the misunderstanding about any foreign culture and accepting, or at least understanding, cultural differences.

The translation is taught through the adoption of a comparative stylistics approach. The majority of programs focus on Vinay and Darbelnet's translation techniques in their syllabus design. From this perspective, cultural issues are tackled with the three (oblique) techniques: equivalence, modulation, and adaptation. However, one of the findings of this study, borrowing is also a technique of "cultural transmission.

4.4. Borrowing reflects learners' acceptance of the different "Other."

Students were asked to translate the text deals with "Mardi Gras" in the USA. The main finding is that they all borrowed the concept as it is (ماردي غرا). Borrowing is the technique that consists in taking the

foreign concept as it is pronounced in its original language and writing it in the target language's letters. Students tried to explain the concept through translating French originated concept into Arabic الثلاثاء الدسم،
...الثلاثاء البدين، (fat Tuesday). In translation studies, borrowing is a part of foreignisation—respecting the "strangeness" of the target language.

5. Conclusion

It goes without saying that all translation skills approaches encompass the "cultural" or the "extralinguistic" competence, which refers to two meanings; knowledge of the foreign (target) culture and the openness to this culture. In this study, we focused on the importance of translation, as a module in English Language Department, in shaping learners' intercultural competence since it is the perfect module in which two cultures (English – Arabic) are explicitly used. In a nutshell, the paper revealed students' awareness of the importance of intercultural competence in translation training, but translation syllabi do not devote a considerable place to this issue. Hence, the main recommendations of this study are the study of syllabus design in translation, the implementation of cultural texts in a translation course, the importance of audiovisual translation in enhancing intercultural competence.

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7. Appendices:

1. Questionnaire

<u>**Intercultural Competence in Translation Course Questionnaire**</u>

The present questionnaire explores the importance of translation courses in enhancing students' intercultural competence (i.e. the ability to accept the foreign culture difference). We will be most grateful if you help us to conduct this study.

1. What is your gender?
   Male ☐   Female ☐

2. Do you think a translation course is essential in studying a foreign language?
   YES ☐   NO ☐

3. What is the most challenging translation challenge when we are foreign language students?

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4. Did you ever tackle "translation competence" with your teachers?

   YES ☐   NO ☐

5. If yes, what are these required competencies? 7

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6. Did you tackle cultural issues in the translation module?

   YES ☐   NO ☐

7. How do your teachers explain cultural differences between English and Arabic cultures?

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8. To what extent is translation helpful in dealing with cultural issues?

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9. In your opinion, how could translation courses develop learners' intercultural competence?

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10. Would you please state some examples of cultural competence in the translational course?

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10. Do you recommend anything?

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2. Text

Mardi Gras *in New Orleans*

Mardi Gras, meaning literally "Fat Tuesday" was first celebrated in Louisiana by French colonists in the eighteenth century. It was, in those days, a day of feasting before the start of *Lent*, the 40-day period leading up to Easter.

As the last "normal" day before the austerity of Lent, "fat Tuesday" was a day **to make the most of**, a day of carnivals, eating, drinking and **revelry**. It has remained a day of carnival ever since; but the original French celebrations are just a small part of today's festivities. Mardi Gras, New Orleans style, owes as much to Afro-Caribbean **customs** and the Latin American carnival tradition as it does to the French colonists who established it in their new city.

The Mardi Gras celebrations actually **last** for several weeks. About a month before the main carnival, a season of elaborate balls and parties begins: the official Mardi Gras program is published, and shops start selling the very sweet and colorful "King Cake", a delicacy that can only be found during this holiday season.

In other parts of Louisiana, the first Mardi Gras parades actually take place three to four weeks before the big carnival in New Orleans, and even in the city itself, smaller parades begin two weeks before the big day.

My first Mardi Gras party took place in a friend's apartment in New Orleans a few days before the parade. The apartment was decorated out in the season's traditional colors of green, gold and purple; the hi-fi system pounded out carnival music, while the guests danced, talked, and ate King Cake, washed down with "Blackened Voodoo Beer", another specialty **brewed** in a local brewery.

On Fat Tuesday itself, I joined the hundreds of thousands of local people and visitors, to watch the processions **wind their way** through the streets of New Orleans. The processions are organized by groups called "Krewes", which each have mythological or historic names, such as Proteus, Endemion, or Bacchus. The one I liked best was Zulu, a parade organized by members of the city's black community, **resplendent** with its colorful ornate **floats** and costumes based on African themes.

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of Zulu and other parades was the "throws". As the floats move slowly through the crowds, tradition has it that those on them should throw all kinds of **trinkets** into the crowd — plastic necklaces, engraved plastic cups, plastic medallions (a **coveted** prize) and other souvenirs. Most parade-goers do all they can to catch these materially worthless items, and I found myself quickly caught up in the **frenzy**, scraping on the sidewalk among the **surging** spectators to proudly pick up my plastic prize. In the heat of the moment, it's hard not to be caught up in the madness of this ritual, in spite of the worthlessness of the prizes!

Traditionally, people in New Orleans use the "throw cups" they pick up, and decorate their cars or homes with the other souvenirs they take home.

As a Yankee spending my first Mardi Gras in New Orleans, however, I made some mistakes in planning my time. There is so much going on at Carnival time, that you can't see everything, and I was disappointed not to see more of the city's famous Dixieland **jazz** bands parading through the streets, but obviously I was often in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After a year, I know that I still have a lot to learn about the customs, cultures and traditions of Mardi Gras in New Orleans. This year, I'll try and restrain myself during the throws, so that I won't come home with a bagful of plastic objects that I simply have to recycle. I'll let someone else have that pleasure!

Adopted from: John Robillard, 2021Mardi Gras *in New Orleans*