TILTM 2020
Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

TRANSLATION COMPETENCE IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASS: APPROACHES AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Translation competence in multilingual classes requires several teaching strategies and approaches to be taken into account. Students obtaining Master's degree are mainly interested in developing their English for Academic and Scientific Purposes (EASP) as the students have to publish and share their research results with the global academic community. It is a regular practice to create multilingual groups in RUDN where Russian-speaking students are mingled with their peers from different world countries. The students can speak some languages including their mother-tongue which is not necessarily Russian. Generally, Russian and English are two languages serving the educational purposes at RUDN. Students from different countries (both Russian and non-natives) learn EASP and study in one group when they acquire their Master's degree. Teaching and learning English in the multilingual and multicultural class start from comprehensive analysis of the students' multilingualism. Theory and practice of translation from/to English/Russian is trained and could be applied in some cases to other pairs of languages. Translation competence builds to scientific text comprehension. A teacher should be aware of students' multicultural background as well as of their English and Russian CEFR level to train translation competence in EASP. Academic and scientific varieties of European languages, including Russian, possess a lot of common characteristics which facilitate the teaching process. However, it is the teacher's task to tailor the course to achieve educational goals. Translation competence bridges other disciplines due to the scientific and academic lexis operating in different scientific discourses, and is related to the scientific integrity.

Keywords: EASP, university curriculum, intercultural communication, multilingual, sociocultural competence, translation.

1. Introduction

Teaching a foreign language for academic/scientific purposes to multilingual classes with the corresponding background is both a very noble task and a laborious challenge deserving maximum efforts on the teachers' board side. Students from different countries of the world as well as Russian students may together study EASP at the Engineering Academy of PFUR (RUDN University); the teacher of English faces multilingual classes with a certain pluricultural background when they obtain their Master's degree. EASP is taught mainly to first- and second-year Master students, as they have to develop a sufficient command of English to correspond with scientific editorial boards of journals, scientific and organising committees of the international conferences, as well as deliver their research results to the academia and peers at the conferences, to achieve a certain adequacy in translation practice and train the students' skills to speak, read, listen and write in English. Every skill should be trained within EASP course alongside with training the translation competence unifying and balancing the workload for all students.

An average RUDN University student speaks Russian, English and 1-2 other foreign languages; sometimes the students are bilingual (e.g., Russian + mother-tongue), less frequently, but not rarely, trilingual (Russian + bilingual family background) and they study English as a global communication language. Recognition of the situation would assist in achieving some short-term goals (to practise academic language communication skills, learn to write academic texts/research papers in English, etc.) as well as long-term goals (to expand intercultural understanding, build up awareness of inclusive language, open opportunities for young graduates and researchers, unveil the multicultural/pluricultural context, enhance learners' motivation to acquire more languages).

The unpredictable diversity of the students' backgrounds does not imply the only once and forever elaborated teaching approach; many approaches are blended in different proportions. First, translanguaging occurs when multilingual students are able to communicate, think and write behind their native or studied foreign languages, interchanging languages and learning activities. Second, a code-switching cross-cultural/ cross-linguistic approach is appropriate when teachers and students have an identical background. Bilingual students frequently show linguistic awareness and make better progress in studying English as a third language (L3) for general communication. However, EASP teaching to bilingual students, as well as to monolingual ones, presents some difficulties depending on students' social backgrounds. As a result, an integrated or hybrid educational approach would be considered as practical and efficient in all situations, as long as it allows students to learn academic/scientific content through English. It is the teacher's task to implement the 'atomistic/holistic' approach within the social-cultural context of plurilingualism/multilingualism in class. Moreover, multilingual education helps to interlace different methodological approaches as far as altogether they encourage self-identity understanding, build up multicultural awareness, and enhance mastering a good command of English as a *lingua cultura* and *lingua academica*. Pluralistic approaches should be blended reasonably through EASP teaching in order to facilitate further global and international scientific communication, intensify the academic mobility and promote constituting individual's national and ethnic self-identity. This problem was once discussed by the author investigating engineering students' competences acquisition (Anossova & Dmitrichenkowa, 2018).

Thus, a new insight is undertaken in order to find out if the translation competence is appropriate in a multilingual class and to what extent it could be developed with students of the class. Several

accompanying questions are bound to arise, if the translation competence is assisting in the teaching process and if students find it useful while studying EASP. All these questions are in the scope of the paper.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Students' Linguistic Background

Among other challenges that the teacher confronts when teaching a multilingual class is different English and Russian language commands and their different cultural backgrounds. This situation requires some preliminary analysis to overcome the main difficulty in translation with two – the source and the target – English and Russian – languages. Besides this, the teacher should be well aware of the level (both Russian and English) the students in a non-linguistic class acquired before they start learning and working with English academic and scientific vocabulary. Every student is assigned to carry out a certain number of tasks, peruse several instructions, do some exercises and submit a term paper comprising analysis of the scientific journal paper in English, thus, training reading skills, practising translation and rendering, together with studying scientific journal paper syntax. Students may score their term credits through practising English speaking skills, i.e. delivering in English a presentation focused on a particular scientific, academic or research subject; sometimes they have to write a research essay so to practice their academic English writing skills. At the beginning of each term students write a short test screening a particular academic or scientific issue (for example, on research paper writing and plagiarism; or on the forms and purposes of the academic or scientific texts; or about the research paper and scientific presentation structure). Each of the three terms a teacher starts with a series of discussions concerning some incoming awareness of the studied material. The teacher unifies the vocabulary both in English and Russian and sets the goals to be achieved. At the same time the teacher implicitly studies the group's academic vocabulary limits during a joint discussion and defines the starting threshold/ level of academic and scientific English within one engineering students group.

2.2. Problems Analysis

Motivation is the key to different types of language practice and skills training. As a rule, students are aware of the academic and scientific variety in English, though they are not well acquainted with the forms and requirements, are not familiar with a certain socio-cultural, intercultural or academic background to be acquired, do not have sufficient practice; and, as a result, their academic and scientific English is not developed properly at the very beginning. The first problem to be solved is the discrepancy between the colloquial and scientific registers of English. Students are used to one-two syllable general English words, their written texts are descriptive in rendering and incoherent; students are not acquainted with some academic language phrases and constructions when writing. Their first renderings, first presentations, first translations and first written paragraphs or abstracts are very linear, naïve and hardly comprehensive. Gradually, working together in class, enriching each other's approaches, learning specially selected and didactically arranged materials offered by a teacher, they acquire necessary skills, practise them, eliminate their mistakes and improve their EASP competences together with a translation competence. The latter becomes the glue cementing the EASP background, building up the academic and scientific English skills, creating academic culture background regarded as unifying and homogeneous for all students, the one that

creates a new academic discourse and within it another scientific discourse, both very similar to a separate language.

The second problem to be discussed concerns the difference of students' cultural backgrounds and varieties of ideas coming from academic/scientific text peculiarities, or from academic/scientific presentation performance, as well as from academic or scientific paper to be rendered or written. Students with French speaking background (for example, from Cote-d'Ivoire) are able to make a very concise rendering in English using syntactic constructions borrowed from French or Russian. Russian speaking students tend to a descriptive versatile rendering mixing either Russian and English syntax, or American and British English spelling, frequently missing the subject of the text. Students with Arab background (e.g. from Syria) get concentrated solely on a singular idea from the text for rendering, mix colloquial and academic words and structures and emphasise a personal opinion. All these problems can be traced in every student's work disregarding their cultural background to a certain extent as the problems come from general language grammar acquisition. Therefore, the teacher's main task is to formulate the course goal, to outline the key guidelines and practise the required (not necessarily the best) sample for each type of skills and competences together with constant English grammar and syntax drilled within academic and scientific contexts.

One more problem to be considered is the student's ability to edit or proofread the translated text. Engineering Academy students use different types of translating software, online translators, machine translation, English corpora, etc. Gaining a Bachelor's degree they are taught to create a translation from English into Russian resorting to different translation techniques and transformations, using an academic or scientifically popular text (General English, A2-B1, CEFR) as a source. However, first year Master students gathered in one group may have graduated from other than RUDN University, or, they could have studied Russian and their English classes, if any, might have been certified long time ago, at school. Some of the students may have studied a language other than English at RUDN University and obtained a translator's certificate in German or Spanish, in this case, the group majority do not understand the English source text (scientific, B1-B2, CEFR); and therefore, they are unable to make the Russian target text due to its scientific or academic syntax, its specific glossary, or peculiar author's choice of words and structures. Under the circumstances, any teacher will start with academic and scientific vocabulary as it is the key to any language, especially to its academic or scientific variety. Therefore, every skill and competence acquired by the students should be properly scaffolded and arranged, practised or even drilled in class depending on every student's linguistic and cultural background.

3. Research Questions

The key research question deals with translation competence as being used in a multilingual class for EASP teaching. The complicated analysis of the incoming data shows the necessity of translation competence teaching when students study EASP, as it enforces their commands both in English and Russian, which becomes the most appropriate in the context of students' further research skills and professional knowledge and experience development, especially so for non-Russian students or other than Russian natives.

3.1. Engineering Academy and Foreign Language Teaching

Nowadays, a lot of opportunities are created for the students, open access online platforms together with special access granted by the University to a lot of publishing, research and sciences platforms, corpora and databases are accessible for a student and faculty of the university. A lot of cultural events, as well as national and multinational fairs, are organised and conducted within the University's walls. RUDN students do not feel any distance in communication as they are accompanied and supported on the way by tutors and managerial staff from different services and departments, by their peers on the course, and by RUDN students' club community entertaining and facilitating everyday student's life.

Russian has become the language unifying RUDN University life but students often use "translanguaging" (Lewis et al., 2012) which enriches their native languages and enlarges any linguistic vocabulary and assists in everyday communication. Russian language is mostly used for communicative purposes. A multi-ethnic and multicultural atmosphere of Russia is very tolerant and quite hospitable towards every student. At Engineering Academy four foreign languages are offered to students at the Bachelor's degree level – Spanish, German, French, and English. Students who do not speak Russian, i.e. are from other countries of the globe and sometimes from the CIS, could start with Russian language classes if they choose curricula and engineering programs being delivered in Russian, or they may choose some programs taught in English. In case students select the Engineering Program delivered in Russian they have to develop their Academic and Scientific skills in English when they continue their education as Masters. English for Academic and Scientific Purposes is studied to enforce students' academic and scientific competitiveness and promote them professionally. Students in one group may speak English at A2 to C1 (Council of Europe, 2002), nevertheless, they work together in one group studying EASP. A decade ago the situation when English could replace Russian in Higher Education was predicted by a RUDN Professor, Balykhina (2011). She followed Borghans & Coervers' (2009) ideas who anticipated the Higher Education Americanisation in Europe:

> *While higher education started to grow substantially around 1960, only a few decades later, research and higher education transformed gradually to the American standard. Decreased communication costs are likely causes for this trend. This transformation is most clearly revealed in the change of language used in research from the national language, Latin, German and French to English. Smaller language areas made this transformation earlier while there are also clear timing differences between research fields. Sciences and medicine tend to switch to English first, followed by economics and social sciences, while for law and arts only the first signs of such a transformation are currently observed. This suggests that returns to scale and the transferability of research results are important influences in the decision to adopt the international standard.* (pp. 2-3)

3.2. Challenges, Approaches and Strategies

For the research, different groups of students should be taken as an illustration for the case study. Students coming from Russia, Kazakhstan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria were joined together in one group for EASP class for two academic years (2015-2017). Another group with Russian and Syrian students in a class studied EASP within the state curriculum course "Foreign Language for Professional Activity" (2016-

2018). There was a group with students from Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire (2017-2019). The most "mingled" in the studied context group comprised students from Russia, Tajikistan, Sudan, Syria, and Côte d'Ivoire (2017-2019). These groups stemmed from different Engineering areas including Geosciences, Information Technologies and Applied Engineering (Technical Systems Controlling). The diversity of engineering fields offered at Engineering Academy (of RUDN University) should be specially emphasised, there are several research directions and engineering areas offered to students: Applied Mathematics and Computer Science, Management of Innovation in the Engineering Business, Oil and Gas Business, Applied Geology Mining, Operation of Transport-Technological Machines and Complexes, Power Engineering, Design and Technological Support of Machine-Building Production, Construction Engineering, Design of Architectural Environment, Architecture, Nanoengineering, Control in Technical Systems. The task was to teach students to read and analyse scientific texts, to render the texts both in Russian and English, and to create and perform a presentation based on a research paper.

During each term, it was important for students to work with terminology and compile a glossary within a particular discourse that group belonged to. Specific Engineering terminology associated with a certain discourse was selected from a scientific paper chosen for the purpose. Every student selected the journal paper bound or related to his/her research subject.

Among the teaching approaches used for the programs implementation we should enlist several, traditional/classical "reading-translating-learning" ones, i.e. the "Grammar translation" approach. One of the most important approaches is a skill teaching approach which allows training four main linguistic skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking. A structural approach is found to be very useful as it allows to create a set of syntactic constructions frequently used in scientific papers, colligations or collocations, and the part-of-speech-dependent ones, etc. For teaching presentation an audio-lingual method/approach was used. Transitional expressions relevant for the academic presentation were listened to and repeated and then incorporated into student's presentations, while sequences of word-chunks were pronounced and articulated incessantly in classes. The Lexical Syllabus (Willis, 1990) as a teaching method was used when it was appropriate to analyse word frequency together with English Corpora work (British National Corpus, n.d.). When teaching EASP, a teacher nowadays often resorts to blended learning approach using TedTalks Presentations streaming them in class or remotely. Many other approaches developed by teachers globally including FLT/ TEFL, CALL, CLIL, etc. were used when they were accepted as appropriate both by a teacher and by the group. The approach could be dubbed as 'an integrative/holistic approach' as it allows to apply some of the most appropriate approaches while teaching particular skills, vocabulary and doing it in a specific environment. There is no any once and for ever elaborated methodology, though several approaches are to be used so to achieve the comprehensive goal: EASP acquisition.

4. Purpose of the Study

While training academic skills, students read and discuss scientific papers published on the contemporary online research platforms. Students analyse research papers taken from scientific journals and published globally in English. The research papers serve as a basis for the student's presentation and for understanding the writing process, both as a source for syntactic analysis and for paragraph writing. First- and second-year Master students study EASP during three terms; assignments to be fulfilled comprise

a scientific presentation based on the research paper, a scientific text analysis and research essay writing. It was important to understand which of the students' skills in EASP should be practised first, speaking or writing, for example. For the purpose, the 2015-2017 academic year students first practised working with academic essay writing, then academic presentation and after that they were asked to analyse the scientific paper. During 2016-2018, students were offered to start with academic presentation, then practised scientific text analysis, and afterwards they studied research essay writing (from a paragraph to an essay). Recently, students followed another sequence of the skills: first, scientific paper analysis, then, scientific paper presentation for the conference, and lastly, students studied how to write a scientific paper, starting with different types of paragraphs and completing the course with writing a 7-8 paragraph essay related or bound to their Master research topic.

The purpose of the study is to find out if it is possible to practise translation competence in multilingual class regarding the English and Russian language commands discrepancies related to students with different cultural background. It is also necessary to elaborate the best approach in teaching EASP during three terms selecting the best sequence of the programs designed for multilingual classes within three terms. The programs are as follows: "Scientific Journal Paper Analysis", "Academic/Scientific Presentation", "Research Essay Writing: from Paragraph to Essay". It is also important to find out what makes translation competence so important in acquisition of English for Academic and Scientific Purposes.

5. Research Methods

For the research it is sufficient to relate the observations made by the Foreign Languages Department teachers at Engineering Academy together with some archived results of group's evaluation. We are not going to disclose the information in any tables but use a simple statistical analysis comparing the group overall results, i.e. use secondary data analysis. For the conclusion, the received data are extrapolated to the whole analysis and some new observations are added.

Student results collected for the three schemes of programs taught to students were the best for the groups who first worked with the analysis of the scientific paper grammar, vocabulary and syntax; then, developed a scientific presentation, and lastly analysed scientific paper paragraphing and practised writing 6-8 paragraphs for an essay based on the research paper and the Master student's own research.

Three schemes comprised an essay, presentation, paper analysis in different sequences: 2015-2017 ac.yr. groups worked with a research essay, presentation and paper analysis. 2016-2018 ac.yr. groups started with a presentation, then practised paper analysis and writing; 2017-2019 ac.yr. groups started with paper analysis, then worked with a presentation and, finally, practised writing. It is necessary to say that all the groups under analysis scored a sufficient number of credits and "passed" their attestations in each of the schemes. Though the highest results were scored when the third scheme was applied and even non-Russian students were marked as good or excellent, i.e. their ratings were very high.

6. Findings

The "term" being a glossary unit belongs to the language it stems from, and first appears in the communication process of the language. Other languages process, or 'digest' the new term and either

borrow it or substitute it with a more appropriate equivalent. Russian language uses a lot of terminological borrowings stemming from Greek and Latin, some of the terms are taken from French and German, depending on the historical period the terms originated, nowadays a lot of words are borrowed from English and the borrowings are not only used for recently invented, devised or discussed phenomena, but sometimes the method of borrowings becomes 'productive' for the terms listed in Russian terminological dictionaries. Studying EASP is equally easy or difficult for students as they work in a scientific discourse where the terms in their majority nowadays have an English origin.

English borrowings become attractive when they sound shorter and easily recognised by the speaking majority, especially in a multilingual environment. Engineering Academy students do their translation exercises with a great deal of borrowings and even "create" Russian words following the repeated technique. The teacher may help them and if it is possible spend some time discussing a more appropriate Russian equivalent, but for future engineers studying EASP it is important to remember the English term first, and then, memorise its equivalent. Students coming from other than Russia countries tend to keep in mind both Russian and English terms as they hope to continue working or contacting with Russian industries or companies, students coming from former Soviet Union republics, the CIS; tend to remember the English term in this case, without making any efforts to memorise the Russian equivalent, as they hope to make their career in their native countries with the national, other than Russian, language. This is an example when direct English-Russian translation is practised, and either a loan translation or new borrowing is preferred. When it is necessary to remember the word, students easily revoke the English term so to discuss the problem even in Russian, thus, translanguaging occurs in multilingual classes.

One more comment on the translation competence drilled within a multilingual class is as follows. Academic and scientific varieties of English and Russian are more or less comparable in terms of vocabulary, but they could be absolutely different when it deals with grammar and syntax, and, moreover, the formal or official scientific register makes both languages sound a bit artificial. However, for Russian speaking students it is much easier to start writing in English when they understand the requirements for English text writing. French or Spanish speaking students are trained to the academic/scientific genres but they make mistakes in English terms spelling and often substitute the English terms with the ones from corresponding European languages.

Studying English academic and scientific vocabulary creates a situation of learning "a language within a language"; the academic variety becomes a new language and its rules are common for General and Academic/Scientific English at B2-C1 (CEFR); every student in any group starts learning EASP as a new language, and from the very beginning, this makes translation competence important for any student as it promotes language learning in a multilingual class possessing a starting command in both English and Russian. According to Balykhina (2011), a researcher of a particular discourse, a specialist in a certain vocation becomes a kind of *bilinguist;* though, the science discourse is wider than a certain set of terminological units, and it is not a new language, even if it uses special lexis though its grammar, its nomination system and other norms remain the same for the language.

7. Conclusion

The translation competence is definitely the one to be practised in a multilingual class as it promotes the acquisition of both languages – source and target – English and Russian. The translation competence could be trained in classes where Russian and English unify every member of the group even when Russian and English are non-native languages, and especially for the purpose. An academic discourse in both languages under discussion is a set of comparable concepts. A scientific discourse is an LSP and in a multilingual class every student is immersed into their research and is surrounded by the academic and scientific context, therefore the whole process reminds another language learning, with learning new words (terminology), more complicated syntax though the more frequently repeated, and a number of "ready-made" phrases and expressions. Multilingualism in class does not hamper but promote the process of studying EASP.

Acknowledgments

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