

WCES 2012

## Translation to test vocabulary and language skills

Arif Saricoban\*

---

### Abstract

It is common knowledge that translation has been favored by the majority of foreign-language teachers since the birth of foreign-language teaching started many years ago. Translation requires awareness of native language (L1) and target language (L2) in both language structures and cultures exploring similarities and differences between them. This paper focuses on the applicability of translation as a testing tool not only in the four main languages skills; namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also in other language areas such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. However, this paper only focuses on vocabulary and four main language skills. At the end of the study some recommendations for evaluation procedure are given.

*Keywords:* translation, testing, language areas, language skills

---

### 1. Introduction

It has been stated that translation is the process of transforming the expression of thoughts in the source language into the target language in terms of mental processes. In this process semantic, linguistic and stylistic equivalence should be kept safe.

When we think about translation and English Language Teaching (ELT), we immediately recall the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). “To know everything about something rather than the thing itself” was the motto of this method. In other words, it maintains that in order to know every detail we should translate. GTM was popular from the 1840s to the 1940s and the modified form of it continues to be widely used in most of our schools today. In the past, it was too excessively implemented that translation turned out to be remembered with distaste or disgust. It meant memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of formal or literary works.

Nowadays many linguists propose that translation should be made with regard to the language level the students have reached. For that reason, they assume that advanced foreign knowledge is a prerequisite for starting translation. In other words, translation education should start when language teaching is completed because translation is an effective means of language use in foreign language teaching (Richards&Rodgers, 1986:1-3). As we all know, the translation process occurs between the source language text and the target language text between which memory, analysis, semantic representation, and synthesis take place.

Translation is *a science* in the sense that both the discourse and practice of science are fundamentally related to the idea of translation. The multi-semiotic nature of scientific texts makes this explicitly visible. Even at the foundation level, it is possibly a science simply because it sees the world as the original; the response of science to the original-world shares common features with the concerns of translation” (Sarukkai, 2001). It is a science because it is (a) amenable to rigorous description, (b) descriptive, (c) transfers message, (d) objective, and (e) can be taught and applied. On the other hand, it is *an art* because it includes (a) translator’s understanding and interpretation of the message, (b) translator’s style regarding choosing the equivalent, (c) same message in diverse sort, (d) is subjective, and (e) permits translators to exercise personal gifts he may be endowed with.

---

\*Assoc.Prof.,Hacettepe University, Faculty of Education, Ankara, Turkey (arifs@hacettepe.edu.tr)

As to the problems of translation, we can list them as follows: (a) *lexical*, (b) *grammatical and syntactical*, (c) *semantic*, (d) *stylistic*, and (e) *cultural*, which I will not discuss in this presentation but focus on how to use translation as a tool to test vocabulary and language skills.

**2. Types of Translation**

Mainly there are two types of translation (a) *written translation* and (b) *live translation* (Picken, 1983 and Bell, 1991).

2.1. **Written translation** in turn may be of two kinds: (1) *factual*, intended primarily to convey information with precision. *Factual translation* is used in letters, books, magazines, newspapers, radio, and for commercial purposes in sales, booklets, instructions on the use of a product, etc... (2) *literary*, intended to reproduce a work of art. *Literary translation* is used in prose, poetry, drama, and opera which are intended not as factual reports on the originals, but as literary works in their own right.

2.2. **Live translation**, the translation that an interpreter does directly from the speech of original speaker is somewhat different when performed as consecutive interpretation while the speaker is silent and must be done at the same time the speaker continues to talk. The latter is known as *simultaneous translation* and is usually practiced in international meetings where several languages may be used by the speakers. The interpreter listens to the addresser and he renders it into the target language (Picken, 1983 and Bell, 1991).

For instance, the translator making simultaneous translation will *listen, understand, analyze the message of the source language. When he transfers it to the target language, he will undergo some operations so as to ensure the equivalence in that language.* While realizing this information he will have to *listen and understand the rest of the information.* On the other hand, a translator making consecutive translation, even if it may seem easier as the translator has the opportunity to take notes, *will have to be experienced in the target language and teaching skills* (Bell, 1991).

As for the ways of translation the following chart can easily be obtained in studying the literature about the issue. However, I will try to define the most preferred ones; **word for word translation** and **meaning for meaning translation.**

<u>SL emphasis</u>	<u>TL emphasis</u>
WORD FOR-WORD TRANSLATION	ADAPTATION
LITERAL TRANSLATION	FREE TRANSLATION
FAITHFUL TRANSLATION	IDIOMATIC TRANSLATION
SEMANTIC TRANSLATION	COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION

**a) Word for Word Translation**

While translating an original text in the source language to the target language, the translator pays great attention to the strict equivalent of the words and ignores the sense and style of the text. This is generally referred to as interlinear translation “with the TL immediately below the SL words”. The translator just translates the words into TL without referring to **any context** which makes the text meaningful and interpretable.

**b) Meaning for Meaning Translation**

The translator gives full attention to the beauty and aesthetics values of translation. She never wonders about the strict accuracy of the original text. She prefers using her style in order to give the same meaning.

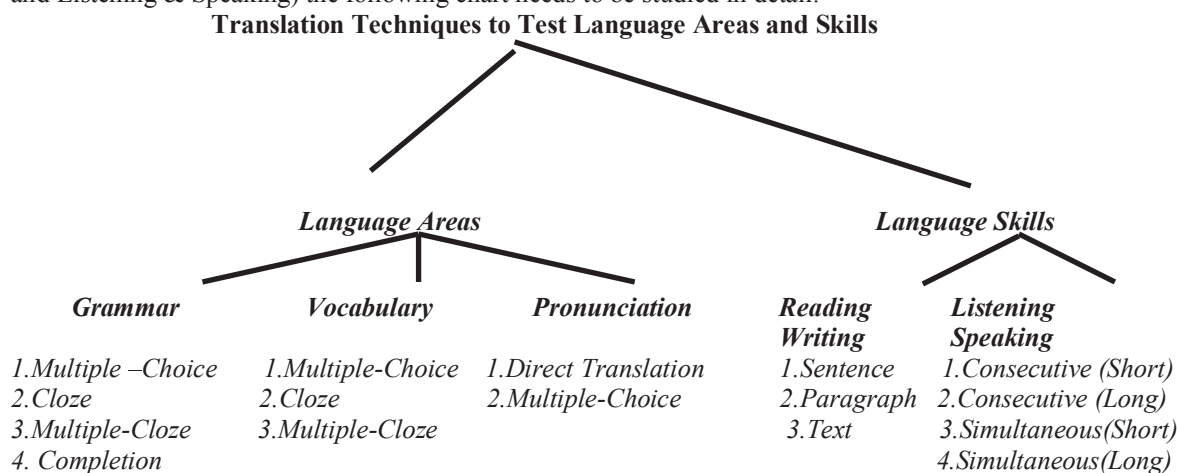
**3. Translation and Language Skills**

Translation can be considered as *the fifth skill* since the translator contributes his/her *creativity, productivity and knowledge of the target and mother tongues into his/her work* and since *translation requires a collective mixture of the related four skills, and it is still not enough for translation.* No one can claim that everybody who knows English is a good translator. In order to use translation in our EFL/ESL classes, the testees should have advanced foreign language knowledge. This does not mean that we should not make use of translation in elementary and intermediate levels; however, the use of translation in these levels is not preferable and beneficial since we believed that

translation can be made only when the students have detailed knowledge about various uses of the target language (Linguistic Knowledge), text types, language parts and the use of language within the context. Moreover, if fifty people translate the same sentence, there will surely be fifty different equivalents of the source sentence since translation is subjective. That is, translation changes from one person to another as all other skills do. As mentioned before, translation is a decision-making process and translators try to solve many problems described above to reach the right correspondence. Surely, it is similar in reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. All of them operate in a process and the participants try to solve problems. Readers try to comprehend the written passage while the speaker tries to make him/herself be understood by the listener and so on. *Lastly translation requires the mastery of, at least, two other main language skills. A translator should be able to read the source language and write it into target language. Similarly, s/he should be able to listen to the source language and translate it orally in the target language if the translation is live. Taken together all these issues prove that translation can be considered the fifth skill in language teaching and learning.*

**4. A Testing Tool: Translation**

In order to examine translation as a testing tool with regard to vocabulary and language skills (Reading & Writing and Listening & Speaking) the following chart needs to be studied in detail.



**4.1. Vocabulary**

Translation can also be used to test vocabulary by means of the following techniques:

**1. Multiple Choice Items**

In this technique, a sentence and its translation are given but a word in this translation is left blank and the testees are required to choose the best option to complete the translation.

**Native into Target**

**i.** Kesinlikle hiç kimse kuşların neden göç ettiğini ve tekrar geriye yuvalarının yolunu nasıl bulduklarını bilmez. (Hasdemir, 1995:341)

No one definitely knows why birds ----- and how they find their way back home.

- a. move    b. collapse    c. migrate    d. pass on    e. imitate

**ii.** Yuvalarını bulmak için bir içgüdüye sahip olduklarını söylemek gerçekten bu sırrı açıklamaz.

To say that they have a/an ----- to find their home doesn't explain this mystery.

- a. magic    b. instinct    c. nest    d. inspiration    e. aspiration

**Target into Native**

**i.** If any form of precipitation is falling to the earth, we say, "It is raining, sprinkling, snowing, drizzling, hailing, sleeting, or showering".

Yağışın herhangi bir şekli yeryüzüne düşüyorsa şöyle deriz: "Yağmur yağıyor, -----, kar yağıyor, -----, dolu yağıyor, sulu kar yağıyor ya da yağmur boşanıyor."

- a. sulu sepken yağıyor/pus bastırıyor    b. pus bastırıyor/kar atıştırıyor

- c.pus bastırıyor/yağmur çiseliyor d.yağmur çiseliyor/pus bastırıyor  
e.yağmur çiseliyor/sulu sepken yağıyor

## 2. Cloze

This time, the testees are given a paragraph and its translation but certain words are left blank in the translation and the testees are required to fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

### Native into Target

Birleşmiş Milletler, bağımsız bir ulusal devletler topluluğudur. Bu topluluk, İkinci Dünya Savaşının galip ulusları tarafından, uluslar arası çalışmayla en iyi şekilde çözülebilecek problemlerle ilgilenecek harbi önlemek ve harbe son vermek için kuruldu. 26 Haziran 1954'te BM Charter'ı olarak bilinen Birleşmiş Milletler anayasası tamamlandı ve 50 ülkenin temsilcileri tarafından imzalandı.(Hasdemir, 1995:352)

The United Nations is a/an ----- of independent nations. It was ----- by the -----nations of World War II to prevent and war by ----- problem which can best be solved through ----- action. On June 26, 1954, The United Nations -----, known as the UN Charter, was completed and signed by ----- of 50 nations.

## 3. Multiple-Cloze

This type is again similar to the type 2, but this time, options are provided and the testees are required to choose the best option to complete the translation. The following is from native into target language.

Doğal su kütlelerini birleştiren yapay su geçitlerine kanal denir. Kanallar temel olarak iki nedenle açılır. Biri, su üstü yolculuğunu kısaltmak, diğeri de malları ucuz ve çabukça taşımak içindir. Kanallar, eşyaları yüzdürerek taşımak ve susuz tarım alanlarına su getirmek için de açılır. Bazı kanalların, su depolarından şehir su bağlama sistemlerine su taşımalarına karşın bazıları da hidroelektrik santrallerinde elektrik üretmek için suratl bir su akışı sağlarlar (Hasdemir, 1995:354)

The (1)---- channels that connect natural bodies of water are called canals. Canals are (2)---- opened for two reasons. One is to make a/an (3)---- shorter, and the other is to carry (4)---- cheaply and quickly. Canals are also dug to (5)---- away things, and to bring water to dry farm lands. Some canals provide a fast (6)---- of water to produce electricity at hydroelectric (7)--- while some others carry water from (8)---- to city water supply systems.

- |               |                |                |                |               |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1- a.handmade | b.artificial   | c.linear       | d.broad        | e.superficial |
| 2- a.chiefly  | b.merely       | c.particularly | d.tremendously | e.relatively  |
| 3- a.travel   | b.trip         | c.journey      | d.vocation     | e.voyage      |
| 4- a.load     | b.crops        | c.goods        | d.wheat        | e.baggage     |
| 5- a.dive     | b.swim         | c.sink         | d.float        | e.drown       |
| 6- a.flow     | b.row          | c.hostility    | d.device       | e.glance      |
| 7- a.stations | b.institutions | c.plants       | d.centers      | e.cavity      |
| 8- a.sprink   | b.respiration  | c.irrigation   | d.reservoir    | e.stream      |

## 4.2. Reading and Writing

It is accepted that the testee will be successful in reading if s/he can comprehend and translate a sentence, a paragraph or a text in the foreign language. Similarly, s/he will be successful in writing in the foreign language if s/he can translate a sentence, a paragraph or a text in his/her native language. Therefore, to test reading the sentence, the paragraph or the text should be in the foreign language or in the native language.

The techniques to test reading skills are: (1) *Sentence Translation*: (a) Direct Translation: the testee is given a number of written sentences and required to translate them into his/her native language. (b) Multiple–Choice Items: The testee is again given a number of written sentences but with options and the testee is required to choose the best translation, (2) *Paragraph Translation*: the testee is given one or more separate paragraphs in the foreign language and required to translate them into the native language, (3) *Text Translation*: the testee is given a whole text in the foreign language and required to translate them into the language. Techniques to test writing are really similar to the ones used to test reading but the sentences or the text are in the native language.

#### 4.2. Listening and Speaking

Similar to tests of reading and writing, the testee is accepted to be successful in listening if s/he can translate the oral sentences in the foreign language into the native language. Likewise, s/h will be successful in speaking if s/he can translate the oral sentences in the native language into the foreign language:

Listening	→	Foreign to Native
Speaking	→	Native to Foreign

The techniques to test listening are the following:

1. Consecutive Short Sentences: The testee hears a certain number of short sentences in the foreign language from the earphone one-by-one and translates them into the native language again one-by-one.

Testee hears : “It took me more than two and a half hours to change the flat tire.”

Testee translates : “Patlak lastığı değiştirmek iki buçuk saatten fazla vaktimi aldı.”

The examiner records the translation and evaluates it later.

2. Consecutive Long Sentences: The testee hears three long sentences in the foreign language one-by-one and translates them into the native language again one-by-one.

3. Simultaneous Short Sentences: The testee hears ten short sentences in the foreign language without any pause and translates them into the native language simultaneously.

4. Simultaneous Long Sentences: This time, the testee hears 3 long sentences in the foreign language and translates them into the native language without any pause.

The techniques to test speaking skills are the same as the ones used to test listening, but the sentences are in the native language and the testee translates them into the foreign language.

#### 5. Conclusion

As a result, it has been observed that translation can be tested in various ways in which these tests result in the over-representation of language skills in classroom settings. Therefore, it can be said that translation is a reinforcer of the integrated skills. It has an integrating power on the language skills. It also further indicates that one of the suggestible ways of testing language areas and skills of the students in the open-ended procedure can be replaced with various testing techniques as well as translation since “translation has a very pivotal role in foreign language teaching in transforming the receptive skills into productive ones” as is stated by Hişmanoğlu (1999). Thus, he asserts that students will find ways to convert their linguistic competence into communicative competence in the target language. Moreover, the learners will be removed from the monotony and the boredom of open-ended tests and will be aware of the contextual clues to use the appropriate grammar and vocabulary for meaning. However, it should be kept in mind that it is difficult to find exact equivalence in the target language such as stereotype expressions like *Allah razı olsun!*, *Sihhatler olsun!*, *It's raining cats and dogs*” and so on.

Of course, the above mentioned techniques must be tested in various contexts and classrooms to reach more reliable and valid results. Therefore, a further study should be conducted to see if these suggestions will also work in different translation classes. At first it can be thought that this may not contribute to students' creativity in translation, but it should not be forgotten that it will contribute for learners to think and decide which structure and vocabulary would be appropriate for meaning in a certain context. Furthermore, in multiple-choice test items as required in the standard tests so called KPDS or ÜDS in our country, the candidates are required to find the most appropriate meaning translation in the target or in their native language. Here, the purpose is to show that translation can be used to test through various means of testing, which can be a concern to language testing researchers. This technique can also be applied to test grammar and pronunciation, too.

#### References

- Bell R.T.(1991). **Translation and translating: Theory and practice**. London: Longman.
- Hasdemir, Y. (1995). **Translation methods**. İstanbul: Alfa (pp.315-443)
- Hişmanoğlu, M. (1999). The Role of Translation in Language Teaching. *Journal of Language*, 81, 30-37.
- Picken, K.(1983). **The translator's handbook** (2nd Edition). London: Information House.(pp.99-100).
- Richards, C. R. & Rodgers, T. S. (1986). **Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarukkai, S. (2001). “Mathematics, Language and Translation”. *META*, 46 (4), pp. 664-674.