

DIDACTIC TRANSLATION, SOURCE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN ENGLISH CLASSES IN BURKINA FASO

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Abstract

In Burkina, the English language is taught through many methods and approaches. One of the most redoubted methods is didactic translation which has the merit of being both a source of interdisciplinarity and of developing translation competence considered as the fifth skill in a foreign language class. Yet, the late curricula reform of 2010 calls for communicative approach whose implementation according to the same reform does not fit with didactic translation likely to boost English teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper intends to pinpoint the contribution of didactic translation both to develop translation competence and acquire interdisciplinary knowledge through English classes while showing that didactic translation is one the best tool of teaching English communicatively through its rehabilitation in English classes in Burkina Faso.

Keywords: *Interdisciplinarity, didactic translation, translation, version, “thème”.*

Résumé

Au Burkina Faso, l'anglais est enseigné à travers de nombreuses méthodes et approches. La traduction didactique constitue l'une des méthodes les plus redoutées d'enseignement de cette langue. Cependant, elle a le mérite d'être à la fois source d'interdisciplinarité et de développer la compétence de traductive considérée comme la cinquième compétence visée en classe de langue étrangère. Toutefois, la récente réforme des programmes scolaires d'anglais de 2010 recommande l'approche communicative dont la mise en œuvre selon la même réforme ne cadre pas avec la traduction didactique susceptible de dynamiser l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais. Par conséquent, cet article vise à mettre en évidence la contribution de la traduction didactique à la fois pour développer la compétence de traduction et acquérir des connaissances interdisciplinaires à travers des cours d'anglais tout en montrant que la traduction didactique est l'un des meilleurs outils d'enseignement de l'anglais de manière communicative à travers sa réhabilitation en classe d'anglais au Burkina Faso.

Mots clés : *interdisciplinarité, traduction scolaire, traduction, version, thème*

Introduction

The aim of school education is to help learners develop various abilities as to allow them to be useful not only to themselves but also to their communities or humanity; this accounts for why many disciplines are taught in schools. In Burkina, school education embodies general education, scientific education and more and more technical and professional education. That is why it is expected that school education at large confers to learners an inclusive typology of ability likely to help them face any situation of life. Interdisciplinarity is of that typology. In other words, how can learners develop interdisciplinarity through didactic translation? This question of research undoubtedly raises hypotheses such as: 1) didactic translation activities help learners acquire interdisciplinarity; 2) English teachers have serious difficulties in conducting didactic translation activities; 3) the rehabilitation of didactic translation in English classes might confer interdisciplinarity to English learners. The purpose of this investigation is, therefore, to explore translation practices in high schools and universities as to show its function in the development of interdisciplinarity in English classes. For sure, this investigation might raise the difficulties encountered by English teachers while teaching English through didactic translation. In the end, it will focus on the rehabilitation of didactic translation in English classes with the double interest to help English teachers teach English through translation and so doing help learners develop interdisciplinarity.

As a theoretical reflection, this work, first of all, proposes the definition of some keywords. Then, it leads to a discussion on the nature of didactic translation, its virtues in generating interdisciplinary knowledges and the need for rehabilitating it in the perspective of boosting English classes. Finally, it comes up with alternative suggestions that could hopefully contribute to develop effectively interdisciplinarity in English classes through the rehabilitation of school translation.

1-Concepts clarification

The knowledge of any domain depends greatly on the knowledge of the terminology related to this domain. It is why it appears of paramount importance to define some keywords likely to bring about confusion of meaning before any development on the topic. The most polysemous terminology that needs clarification is interdisciplinarity. “Interdisciplinarity is understood as the sum of two or more disciplinary components or as achieved through a synthesis of different disciplinary approaches through a process of integration or negotiation” (Muguiro, 2018:3). However, Lenoir distinguishes two types of interdisciplinarity including scientific interdisciplinarity and school interdisciplinarity. For him the former differs from the latter in that it applies to scientific disciplines and aims at integrating these disciplines for the purpose of creating new disciplines whereas school interdisciplinarity is about school disciplines and aims at making learners establish a link of complementarity between them. The focus of this investigation is how to establish this connection so as to help English learners acquire interdisciplinary knowledge through didactic translation. Before defining didactic translation, which derives from translation by hyponymy, it sounds necessary to define translation first. As a matter of fact, translation “consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning, and secondly in style” (Yoda, 2005:115). As for didactic translation, it is very commonly known as an interlinguistic exercise used in foreign languages didactics to teach, learn and assess both linguistic and translation skills. It is subdivided into explanatory translation, version and *thème*. Specifically, version stands for the translation of a fragment of text by English learners from a language to another. Its objective is to develop, evaluate and consolidate comprehension. As for *thème*, it focuses on grammar. It consists in translating sentences, phrases, proverbs, sayings from a language to another with the aim of teaching or learning, evaluating or consolidating the grammar of the involved languages.

2-Didactic translation, a real equation with multiple variables?

As a matter of fact, translation is a daily routine in Burkina Faso with regard to the plurality and diversity of languages serving as channels of communication and successful collaboration. Obviously, the numerous communities and cultures of Burkina owe the prevailing social harmony within and among them to translation, as the main channel of communication between different linguistic communities and cultures. Therefore, the concept of translation is not new to English supervisors, teachers and learners. They all practise or resort to it for the needs for interaction with a person with whom they don't share a language. At school, translation, besides its roles cited above, serves to facilitate foreign languages classes, to teach these languages and assess the linguistic competence and indirectly the translation competence of learners. Correspondingly, an investigation conducted by Youané (2016: 217) showed that 80% of pupils, 62,96% of English teachers and 75% of supervisors confirm the intervention translation in English classes. The respondents declare, inter alia, that "translation helps to know the meaning of some words" or "sometimes some concepts need to be translated in order to facilitate the understanding of a lesson." "Translation permits to master this language (English) and the culture it expresses. Despite didactic translation is known by English teaching stakeholders, it is almost totally relegated to the background. Instead, very recently, the reform of 2010 led to the suppression of the translation activities from the BEPC English written exam. Despite this reform didactic translation remains present in foreign languages classes as stated by Ladmiral (1979) for whom it appears hypothetical to conduct a foreign language class without translation (Ladmiral, 1979 cited by Chevalier 1994:75). In the context of Burkina, didactic translation intervenes under the form of *thème* and version.

English teachers have serious difficulties to conduct translation activities in English classes. In fact, most of English teaching stakeholders find that didactic translation is actually an equation with multiple variables though it constitutes both an asset and a liability for English classes. The problem with didactic translation in English classes, is that, in spite of displaying theories, procedures or rules and therefore a teachable knowledge is not paradoxically taught in these classes.

Instead, it is deemed to be source of French interference and therefore relegated to an uncommunicative method of teaching languages. By contrast translation appears as one of the most efficient communicative methods of teaching foreign languages namely under its interpretative dimension whose focus is meaning and not structures. In fact, translation intervenes in foreign languages as a facilitator, a didactic tool, an assessment tool and a language consolidator. Beyond these roles, translation contributes to the acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge, cultural or intercultural values and translation skills. The translation skill is all that matters for in English classes in Burkina the English teaching stakeholders have the impression that they evaluate a competence that has not been developed since in those classes none of translation theories, translation procedures or rules is taught as to ease the translation process during English classes. This state of fact is due the fact that the English teaching stakeholders have neither been trained to translation nor to its didactics or didactic translation pedagogy (use of translation to teach languages). This might objectively account for the suppression of translation activities from English grading assignments. Yet, translation remains present in English classes. Therefore, it appears necessary to rather conduct researches so as to train English teachers to handle translation activities successfully. Any attempt to shun translation in foreign languages classes may undoubtedly cause more damage than solve didactic problems during English classes. In this connection, the majority of education stakeholders, namely English supervisors, teachers and learners express the wish to be trained to translation procedures and rules so as to be able to handle translation activities (Youané, 2016: 250). The decision to suppress translation from English teaching or evaluation, instead of being a founded reason to teach English communicatively, rather expresses the difficulties encountered by English teacher to deal with didactic translation that is a prominent source of interdisciplinarity.

3-Didactic translation as a source interdisciplinarity

Originally, translation skill, that is to say the ability to translate is the expected ability targeted by the training of professional translators in translation schools. However, more and more, translation as a

polymorph and multifunctional discipline, also intervenes in languages didactics and therefore favours the development of the same ability to the benefit of foreign languages learners. Indeed, in the perspective of complementarity and enriching didactic translation particularly and foreign languages didactic at large, Lavault (1985:74-78) evokes the transposition of professional practices to didactic translation. The transposition of professional practices into didactic translation activities implies the development of translation competence in English classes. Therefore, what does translation competence stand for? Is it part of the traditional abilities aimed at in English class? What does it imply? The answers to these questions lead us first, to the definition of translation competence. It is defined as “the knowledge, skills and aptitude needed to generate target language versions from a source text and to select from these the one that best fits the brief for the task” (John Laver & Ian Mason 2018:143). In fact, didactic translation is known in English classes under the form of *thème* and version. If for *thème* the choice of the sentences generally occurs after grammar classes, the choice of texts for translation in the framework of version is a fatidious task. Before discussing fully the typologies of texts, let’s note that at the image of professional translation, didactic version is of two typologies: general version and specialised version. General version refers to the translation of any fragment of a general text chosen by the teacher for translation purpose. Whereas specialised version is any fragment of a text of a specialised fields (economy, law, history, sociology, marketing, finance). In addition, version may be improvised or prepared. It is improvised when the teacher suddenly gives a text whose thematic has not been studied before, for translation and grading purposes. It is the case of English subject at literary baccalaureate exam. Version is prepared when the source text or its thematic has already been exploited by other didactic methods such as reading comprehension, vocabulary lesson, etc. This dimension of didactic version is unknown and uncommon in English teaching in Burkina. Let’s note that for English assignments, it’s very common to encounter improvised translation, which, already may certainly account for the low performance of english learners at translation. Regarding the ongoing discussions on the nature of translation, it appears important enough to shed light on the translation competence seen by some as a complex, plural, and polymorph ability

and an interdisciplinary ability by some others. In other words, what does it imply actually ?

In fact, the typology of the texts currently used in the translation activities of English learners might contribute highly to determine the ability these texts serve to develop in English learners. In schools, various texts are used for the purpose of teaching English including literary , scientific, technical and economic text . In universities, the general tendency is that every field commands a typology of English. Some fields, therefore, command general English while some call for scientific or technical English. We, henceforth, allude to general English or translation for general fields and specialised English or specialised translation for specialised fields. That is to say that didactic translation always applies to a given field of competence meaning that whenever students are given a text for translation, be it general or specialised, they have to mobilise a set of knowledge to understand the text before translating it into the target language. In addition to the knowledge of the field concerned (thematic knowledge), the translation of a text may require a certain mastery of the source language (linguistic competence), a knowledge of the keywords (terminological knowledge) a mastery of translation procedures (methodological knowledge) and translation rules (theoretical knowledge) grammar rules and even spelling rules of the target language. It's certainly why it is commonly asserted that the practice of translation undoubtedly develops interdisciplinarity in learners. In fact, the thematic knowledge and the terminological knowledge that require consecutively thematic or documentary research and terminological research are the two areas that not only reinforce translation skill but also render it very complex and demanding. However, in English classes it appears quite difficult to dissociate linguistic competence from translation one; so whenever English learners are evaluated on the basis of translation activities be they sentences, isolated terminologies, phrases, idioms, proverbs or fragments of texts, it's their translation competence that is being evaluated. It's certainly why, the abundant need for translation under various forms in English classes led some authors to consider translation skill as the fifth skill aimed at in foreign languages classes(Cotelli 2008 :3). It is, therefore, indicated to envisage didactic translation with an interdisciplinary approach through the integration of the other

disciplines taught in schools and universities. In secondary schools, for instance, the fragments of texts for translation may be chosen in mathematics, history, geography, natural sciences, chemistry, sport, etc. School subjects or any subject likely to enlarge learners' knowledges should be welcome as a thematic targeted by didactic translation. In so doing, English learners learn and acquire competences in the implied fields, their terminology, and therefore the learners are prepared to specialised translation and communication. Moreover, languages are known as important vehicles of cultures and always reflect the thought, the vision or simply the culture of a given community. Therefore, it's not wrong to remark that whenever a fragment of a text is translated by English learners, they acquire various and complex competences including culture or civilisation. As a matter of fact, it is not so obvious to conduct a reflexion on foreign languages teaching or learning without having a glance at the cultural implication it may have for languages. Indeed, culture is undoubtedly the most complex factor whose knowledge contribute to facilitate the translation process and enlarge learners' interdisciplinarity. It's in this regard, that translation culturalist like Basnett (1991) consider translation as an activity of cultural transfer. On this basis, it appears obvious enough that translation, be it professional or didactic, develops cultural and even intercultural skills in their learners. That undoubtedly accounts for the advocacy of some authors to consider cultural skill as the sixth competence in foreign languages classes including English classes (Bationo 2008: 261). Indeed, in translation the tendency is to square source culture with target culture. It's why carpi (2006:75) asserts that translation is an act of cultural mediation. In this regard translation develops intercultural skills in learners. However, the rehabilitation of translation as advocated by Lavault (1985) and lederer (1994) and supported by us for sure may contribute to enhance interdisciplinary knowledge and skills associated with the teaching and learning of English language (Lavault 1985:50 and Lederer 1994: 217).

4-Why should didactic translation be rehabilitated in English classes?

The resurgence of didactic translation after a long period of decline appears like both an improvement of the status of translation as an autonomous discipline and an opportunity to boost foreign languages classes, before enjoyable, but now boring and monotonous. For C. Puren (2010:9), speaking a foreign language implies operating a translation mentally meaning it is quite difficult to separate the notion of translation from the practice or teaching or learning of foreign languages in the context of Burkina Faso. Therefore, there is no doubt about the ever-presence of translation in English classes. It intervenes in foreign languages didactics under various forms and typologies invested with a triple function of foreign languages classes facilitator, didactic tool and a tool of evaluation of both translation and linguistic skills. Actually, it is a tool that not only helps students acquire various knowledges but enables teachers check students' language acquisition and assess their translation performance. Moreover, translation has the merit to develop interdisciplinary knowledges and intercultural values in English learners. However, ongoing discussion based on the curricula reform of 2010 deem translation to be ineffective and to cause interference of French in English teaching and learning. As a matter of fact, translation is said to be uncommunicative and to weigh in English teaching and learning with multiple variables.

Contrary to these ongoing recriminations towards didactic translation, English teachers rather, and very often, resort to explanatory translation to facilitate their classes even though they admittedly have difficulties in some interlingual translation. In this connection, Widdowson (1978 :179-180) clearly shows that there is no possible contradiction between communicative approach and translation by reason of the fact that in translation the focus is to lead the learner perceive and use the foreign language (L2) like French (L1). Moreover, Lucilla Lopriore (2006: 85-86) indicates that during their lessons, “many teachers who have been trained under the banner of the communicative approach and although opposed to the use of translation as a didactic tool, find themselves using, or to ask their students for the translation of certain messages, passages or paragraphs – generally from L2 to L1 – in

an almost involuntary, unconscious way, during an often unplanned, almost furtive act⁹. Once more, interlingual didactic translation is a communicative activity for it consist in reformulating a source text into a target text using a language different from the source one (Carpi, 2006:75). At last, and contrary to the ongoing discussion on the incompatibility of translation with communicative approach and the evils ascribed to didactic translation, it stands to reason to advocate for the rehabilitation of pedagogical translation in English classes.

However, the rehabilitation of translation in English classes obviously raises a lot of questions as to know what it stands for and implies. It simply consists in using translation to teach foreign languages formally. Already, some authors advocate the transposition of professional translation didactic knowledge into teachable knowledge for the benefit of didactic translation. In this perspective they suggest the transposition to be done under the banner of interpretative theory.

In a word, interpretation can be universally defined as understanding a speech and rewording that understanding in a different language. So, it's of prominent importance to transpose interpretative theory's virtues and technics into didactic translation for the benefit of English learners (Lavault, 1985:72-74). Actually, it consists for English teachers and learners to know how to translate their sentences or fragments of text on the basis of the principles of this theory. Students then have to translate meaning but not just structures. In so doing, English learners successfully acquire the English language and develop translation skill supposed to be the fifth skill in foreign languages classes (Cotelli 2008:3). Beyond English classes, the rehabilitation of translation has the merit to found the basis of a career of professional translator in English learners. It's also evident that translation or interpretation activities contribute to dynamize foreign languages classes notably in its ludic dimension. These activities therefore contribute to render English teaching and learning more pleasant for they generate eagerness and motivation to manipulate the target language as the source language. Is that not the communicative dimension of translation?

Moreover, interpretative translation, also considered as an act of communication pursues the same goal as teaching or learning foreign languages which is to understand and transmit a message. In practice, it is obvious that neither linguistic theory nor cultural theory, and none of

social and psychological theories, can help solely to teach or practice professional translation for each of them deals with only an aspect of translation. Thus, interpretative translation theory turns out to be the most inclusive theory since it has the advantage of grouping together all the other theories through its operationalization process carried out around the notion of meaning. As a matter of fact, the needs for interpretative translation transposition in foreign languages' classes, evidently requires the initiation of English pedagogical supervisors and teachers not only to the basic rules of translation but also to its methods and all know-how likely to enable learners carry out translations for the purposes of learning English and communication. This is why we agree with the suggestion of transposing interpretative translation for the benefit of foreign languages teaching and learning, including English (Lavault, 1985: 68).

Conclusion

Translation stands not only as a procedure to impart knowledge but also a way of assessing learning. Through this discussion, we happen to show that didactic translation is a genuine channel for acquiring interdisciplinary knowledge though teachers display much room for improvement when it comes to leading learners to successfully perform in translation. By contrast to the ongoing discussion on the compatibility of didactic translation with the communicative approach, the analyses led to the conclusion that didactic translation activities can interestingly be conducted communicatively. It is also confirmed that the rehabilitation of didactic translation may certainly contribute to dynamize English classes and constitutes an asset for English learners to develop especially translation competence and at large interdisciplinary competence.

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