PHILOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES' PERCEPTION OF TRANSLATION. A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This idea lies at the basis of the present pilot study, which aims at discovering the impact of students' evaluation of their literature classes on the classroom environment as, in our opinion, such assessment may lead to the improvement of the teaching strategies used during literature courses and seminars.

Keywords: *literature class, evaluation, teaching strategies, improvement*

1. Introduction

The present paper is intended to examine students' views on the effectiveness of the translation method as part of their English practical courses. Taking into account the fact that in order to graduate students take a written test which includes a translation module most practical courses teachers use translation exercises in a gradual manner. For first year students translation represents an auxiliary exercise together with other language teaching strategies, second year students start getting familiar with translating more complex texts during practical courses of English and the third year students take part in classes whose major purpose is improving their translation skills.

We chose to analyse students' perception of translation classes as such a skill requires a different approach from teaching the other skills. As known, translation represents a complex process that needs students' good knowledge of both languages (source and target) as well as teachers' good command of using adequate instructional strategies.

A simple definition of the translation process is that it consists in "transferring a written text from SL to TL, conducted by a translator, or translators, in a specific socio-cultural context" (Hatim, Munday, 2004, p. 6), the written product being generally of two kinds as shown by Bell (2000, p. 88): close and free translation. The first means literal translation from a semantic point of view, whereas the latter implies the communicative dimension which is based on rephrasing. Although Bell (2000) presents a

complex classification of translation consisting of seven subdivisions, Petrescu (2000, p. 81) suggests a more synthesized classification which better corresponds to our purpose, including only three technical procedures: substitution (replacement of the syntactic structure of one language to another), transposition (structures from the SL are replaced with semantically equivalent structures in the TL) and modulation (the change of speaker's point of view), representing "a series of transformations of the original message so that it can be incorporated in the system of the TL." (Petrescu, 2000, p.80).

Although the studies dedicated to translation as a special skill are numerous, indicating the complexity of this phenomenon, we preferred simplifying this vast material to several clear points to guide us in the analysis of the data that we collected from students.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research questions

The aim of the present study is to find out and interpret students' perceptions of their translation classes, performed during English practical courses at academic level.

In order to achieve our aim we established the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students appreciate translation classes?
2. Do teachers apply interactive strategies during their translation activities?
3. What is the students' opinion on the usefulness of translation classes as regards their future career?

### 2.2. Participants in the study

The 48 students who took part in the research are specialising in foreign languages (English and French) at the Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti. They are in their final year and they attend practical courses of English and French as part of the curriculum, this subject being a major component of their graduation examination.

2.3. Research instrument

We based our study on a quantitative method, the main instrument being a questionnaire that consisted of 8 items. The students' answers to these items provided us with interesting information that help us to have a general image of the way in which translation is taught and perceived at academic level. We are aware that the data we obtained cannot be generalized but they can be used as a point of reference by teachers who wish to improve their instructional strategies by taking into account students' feedback.

3. Data Analysis

The findings of our study offered us relevant answers to the research questions above, helping us to draw several conclusions based on the analysis below.

I 1. How frequently do you practice translations during English practical courses?
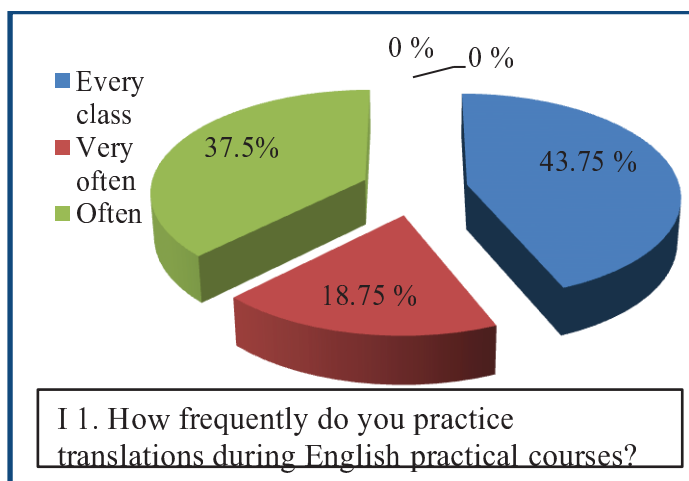
The first item aimed at checking the degree to which students practice translation within practical courses. As seen in the figure above the high proportion of students who practice translation demonstrates the fact that they benefit from sufficient training regarding the development of translation skills.

At the same time, this show that teachers follow the syllabus paying a lot of attention to tranlsations, having a view the fact that students have to pass a translation test in order to successfully graduate from our university.

I 2. How do you consider the translation classes you take part in?
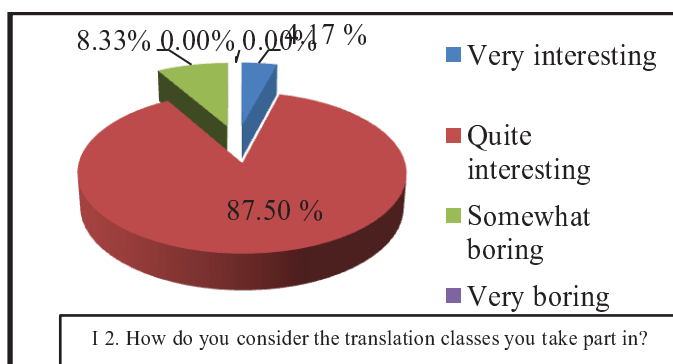
Another positive aspect is illustrated by students' answers to item 2. A very high percentage of the respondents (87.50%) have a favourable opinion of these classes, their motivation being a strong factor that
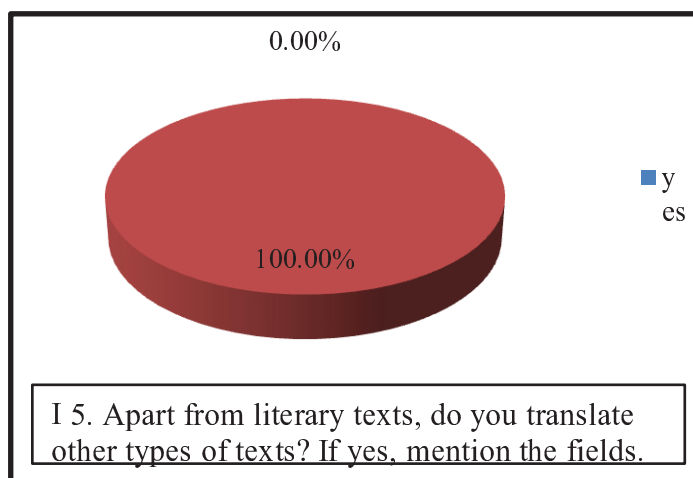
contributes to their very good performance and results as far as this skill is concerned.

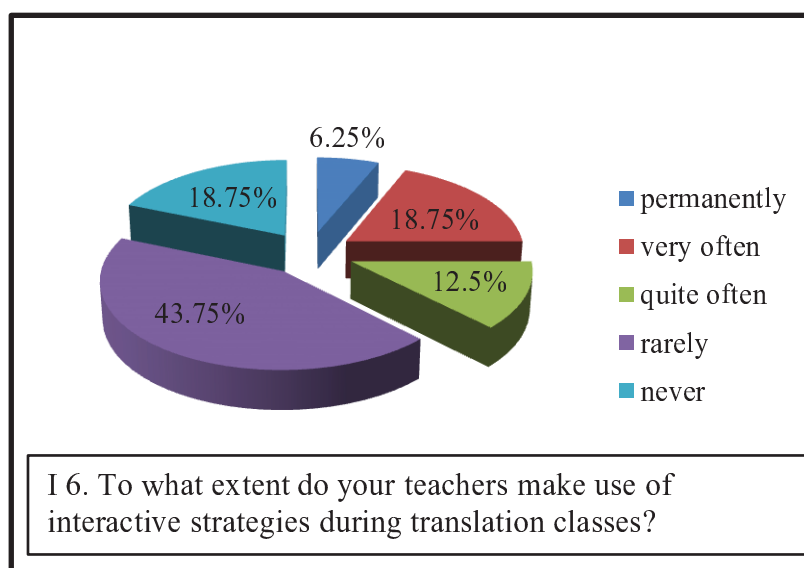I 3. Do you consider translation classes useful
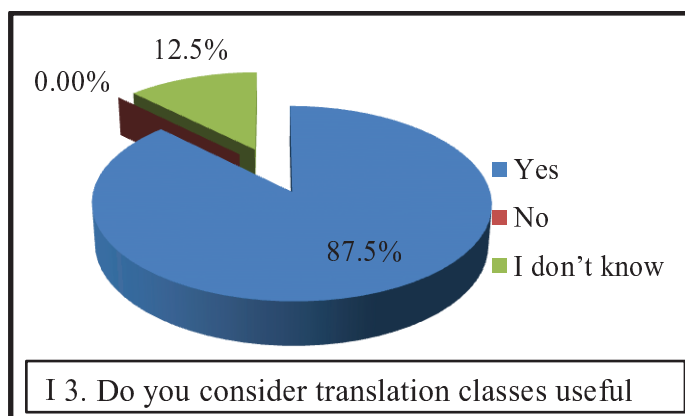
The answers to item 3 in the questionnaire reinforce the opinion expressed above, as the same high percentage of students attaches great importance to translation classes which are seen as a basis for their future career. We should mention that a possible explanation for the students' responses lies in the fact that after graduation they can practice not only the teaching profession, but also the translator or interpreter job, which, in their view, is more attractive.

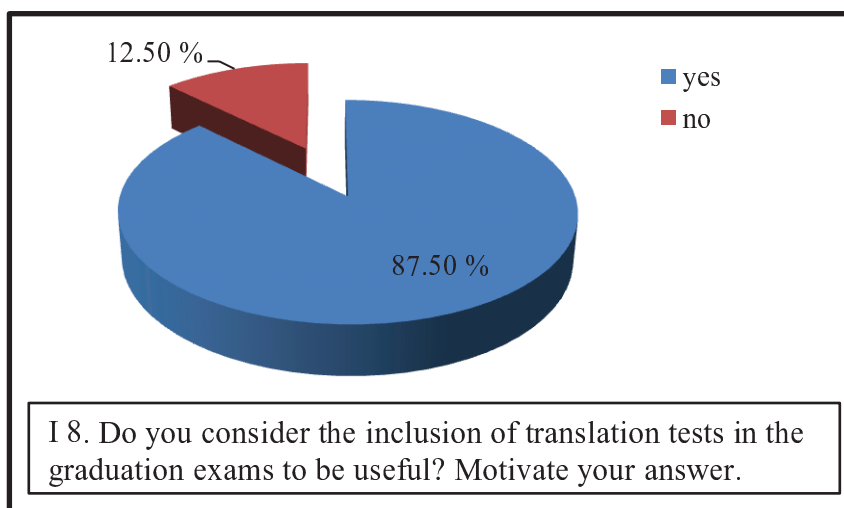I 4. Which types of translations do you find more useful for your future career?
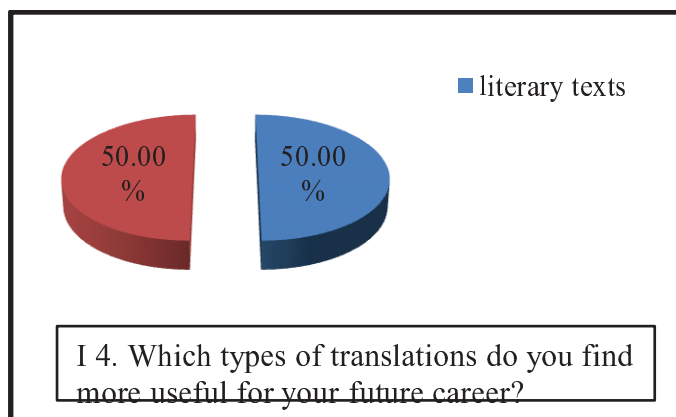
With regard to the type of translations students consider useful for a future career, their answers to item 4 show that they have equal preferences for literary and specialized texts. This equal proportion of their responses is not surprising because translations of literary texts are mostly used in the educational process, at high school and academic levels, whereas specialized constitute the field of activity of the ones who choose to work as translators or interpreters.

0.00%

100.00%

■ y
es

I 5. Apart from literary texts, do you translate other types of texts? If yes, mention the fields.

However, a negative aspect mentioned by the students is the fact that, even if specialized texts are considered useful, they do not practice this kind of translation during their classes, which shows that in the academic environment more emphasis is laid on the teaching profession rather than on working as a translator. This state of affairs is explained by the different purposes of the two academic cycles: the undergraduate cycle requires general knowledge of English, while the postgraduate one aims at developing skills specific to specialized translations.

6.25%

18.75%

18.75%

12.5%

43.75%

■ permanently
■ very often
■ quite often
■ rarely
■ never

I 6. To what extent do your teachers make use of interactive strategies during translation classes?

■ Online dictionaries

■ Printed advanced learners' dictionaries

25.00 %

75.00 %

I 7. What are the most frequently used aids during translation classes?

12.50 %

■ yes
■ no

87.50 %

I 8. Do you consider the inclusion of translation tests in the graduation exams to be useful? Motivate your answer.

4. Conclusions

To sum up the students' opinions analysed so far, we may state that translation practice is a major component of the philological academic curriculum, helping students in obtaining the skills necessary for their graduation examination and their future career as a teacher or translator, which stands as a possible answer to RQ3.

The fact that teachers are preoccupied with it during practical courses shows that the requirements of the curriculum are fulfilled and students benefit from a suitable training in order to successfully graduate. This explains the general positive opinion of the students regarding the effectiveness of the translation classes they take part in. (a possible answer to our first research question). Their view of translation as an effective language teaching technique corresponds to the well-known teaching principle

according to which translation is "a linguistic skill-enhancing tool, with the aim of confirming its value as an indispensable activity in the language learning process" (Visintin, 2008, p. 460).

Even if teachers see translation as a necessary classroom activity, students' answers revealed teachers' tendency to choose traditional methods more than interactive ones during practical courses (response to the second research question). They seem to ignore the fact that translation is a specific skill that requires specific techniques. Thus, translation is a bilingual process which involves a semiosis, namely a communication process consisting in a transformation of the original message received by the translator into the TL system. To fulfil this transformation, the translator should be in command of a solid knowledge of both languages and translation techniques. As Jeremy Harmer (2007, p. 133) states, translation is "the fifth skill, after reading, writing, speaking and listening". That is why translation activities "should be done in groups because a discussion of the issues they raise is likely to be more revealing with two or more people than we just think about it ourselves" (Harmer, 2007, p. 133). Although most theories and researchers' opinions indicate that the translation skill should be taught in an interactive manner, classroom practice does not necessarily take this view into account. The major disadvantage of teaching the translation skill is that the essence of the process is ignored, that is, the equality of the translator and creator especially in the case of literary translations, which are so frequent at academic level, as our data show.

That is why, when teaching translation, teachers should make use of various interactive techniques meant to encourage and develop students' creativity, which is absolutely necessary for doing literary translations of a high quality.

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