

Paper ID: 0101

Translation in a Foreign Language Learning Context:

Materials and Technique

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ABSTRACT

Translation was used both as materials and technique in making the three learners acquire English through films and media; the English lessons at schools are used to enhance their English grammatical acquisition. Reading on topics based on learners' interest is considered an important factor in the learners' development in English. Two learners who like and did a lot of reading achieve more than 500 in TOEFL prediction score and one learner who did not only achieve below 450. One factor that also plays an important role is the seriousness in doing the TOEFL prediction test.

Keywords: translation, technique, materials, reading.

Introduction

As Holmes (2000:181) said, "translating has been used for centuries as a technique in foreign language teaching...." However, "twentieth-century theories of language teaching and learning have at best ignored the role of translation, and at worst vilified it" (Cook 1998:117). "Though there have been eminent voices raised from time to time in its defense..., it has remained only marginal in mainstream applied linguistic and English language teaching theory (Cook, 2007). This paper aims at giving a proof how translation, both as materials and a technique, has been useful in English language acquisition and learning for three Indonesian learners. The range of time of observation is from they were still toddlers until adolescence. In 2012 they are already teenagers.

Translation as a Technique

Translation as a technique has been used since the three learners were toddlers, when the three learners still did not know how to read. In first language acquisition, meaning is what children pay attention to when they try to understand what other people say in Indonesian. Likewise, translation provided the meaning in comprehending English when the three learners did not understand the meaning of the English utterances they heard.

With translation as a technique, the materials used when the three learners did not go to school yet pertained to the here-and-now; this largely meant songs and films for children in English, e.g., Disney films, Winnie the Pooh series, Madeline, etc. (Rini 2001). The films contained lots of utterances, e.g. formulaic, clear, and not complicated utterances. Not all children films, however, are good materials for language learning, e.g. children films that contain very little or no utterances, like Tom and Jerry, or the ones that use voice manipulation like Donald Duck.

Translation as Materials

When the learners have already known how to read, the films in English contain Indonesian subtitles. Another kind of material used is bilingual texts, English-Indonesian. Both the subtitles and the bilingual texts are materials used in acquiring English. The criterion of this kind of material is good translation that emphasizes the meaning rather than form.

Reading in English

Besides the use of translation as materials and a technique, another important factor in acquiring English is reading. Two of the three learners read a lot in English, the other reads mostly in Indonesian. The reading done depends on the learners' choice. The most important criteria is that the learners like the subjects or topics and are curious to know about them. Difficulties come second. If they like them and are curious about them, difficult words and difficult structures are no problem, provided that the learners know how to deal with the difficulties they face. An example to deal with such difficulties is that they know what dictionaries they should use, e.g. dictionaries for advanced learners or ESP dictionaries. Pace, topic, and coverage of materials are determined by the learners. No goal is determined by others, but by the learners themselves.

Differences and Similarities in Result

The two learners achieved above 500 of TOEFL prediction; one learner achieves 577 after finishing her senior high school, the other learner achieves 510 after finishing his junior high school. Both of them tried hard to do their best in the TOEFL prediction test. When they were interviewed after doing the TOEFL test, they answered that they were thinking seriously before giving their answers in all the three parts: listening, structure, and reading. The other learner achieves only 433; when interviewed, she did not try her best in answering the questions. She did not do the reading part seriously, saying that she got bored and felt very sleepy. She did not check the answer with the reading again before crossing the letter for the best answer in the answer sheet. The structure was done in practically the same way.

However, the three of them get high score in listening and are also very confident in speaking. The learner who gets 433 once said that she chose to be interviewed in English when she had the choice of being interviewed in Indonesian or English in the high school enrollment. Had she not been that confident, she would have chosen Indonesian for the interview. They can understand film dialogues if the films are not about topics requiring ESP knowledge, for example politics, law, or economics.

Conclusion

As far as meaning is concerned, translation is worth using in teaching and learning languages in foreign language context. Translation bridges the gap between the new language and the comprehension of the learner by providing the meaning. Media and films are good facilities in language learning, but without translation, meaning is not fully comprehended by the learners. When difficulties abound and full comprehension is not achieved, learners can be demotivated. However, reading and good use of dictionaries are also important in a later stage.

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Biodata

Julia Eka Rini finished her doctorate program of Applied English Linguistics at Catholic University of Indonesia Atma Jaya Jakarta in July 2012. Her research interests are language acquisition and translation. She has been teaching at the Faculty of Letters of Petra Christian University Surabaya since 1992.