

## **Translation in the FLE classroom: difficulties encountered by L3 students**

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### **Abstract:**

This study is a collaborative effort with third-year undergraduate students in the French department at the University of Oum El Bouaghi, focusing on their translation difficulties. Together, we aim to identify these difficulties and assess the effectiveness of teaching practices in addressing them. To this end, a corpus of 30 texts translated from French to Arabic, contributed by the students, was analyzed. The objective is to understand better the obstacles they face and propose suitable pedagogical solutions, emphasizing their ownership and responsibility in this research.

**Keywords:** translation, classroom, FFL LE difficulties, university

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### **Introduction**

With globalization, translation has become ubiquitous in all sectors due to the economic, cultural, and scientific exchanges between nations. It is an essential tool for communication between individuals and societies. Similarly, the prejudices accumulated overtime against the use of translation in language courses have been discarded. Recent research and studies in didactics have progressively demonstrated that translation promotes foreign language learning. According to Lederer, translation has two main tasks in language teaching. Firstly, translation must establish a correspondence between

the (meaningful) words of the foreign language and the learner's mother tongue. This helps students to identify and memorize the vocabulary of the new language. Secondly, it's crucial to make it clear that the meanings (signifieds) of these words do not always overlap exactly, as each language has its nuances and contexts of use:

From the outset, translation in language teaching has a twofold task: to bring out the signifiers corresponding to the signifiers in the learner's mother tongue and to make the learner understand that the signifieds to which they refer only approximately overlap. Well-directed

linguistic translation enables comparatism and can be highly profitable, but it must remain a prerequisite for translation by equivalence". (Lederer, 1994:131)

Translating texts by equivalence is the basic rule of the interpretive approach and translating words and phrases by correspondence. Lederer points out, "Interpretive theory establishes a fundamental difference between the linguistic meaning of a word or phrase and the meaning they designate in a text. At the linguistic level, words have meaning that does not necessarily designate an external reality; at the textual level, they designate external referents". (Lederer 1994:89)

Since the introduction of the LMD system in 2004 and the subsequent reorganization of curricula at Algerian universities, several translation institutes have been opened, and university translation training programs are now offered in all language departments. The translation and interpreting course is integral to the French language curricula for a bachelor's degree. According to Delisle, the activity of translation is "an exercise in interlinguistic transfer practiced in language didactics and whose purpose is the acquisition of a

language" (Delisle, 2005: 49). It should be noted that translating a text requires several skills: linguistic, translational, methodological, disciplinary and technical (Delisle, 1992: 42).

However, it should be noted that most university teachers in charge of this course are not professional translators but specialists in literature and civilization. Furthermore, several authors have pointed out that the university course is not open to all discursive genres. In this respect, Klein-Braley and Franklin point out that "The texts in the university translation course are preferably extracts from press articles or literature" (Klein-Braley and Franklin, 1998: 54).

This study aims to analyze the main difficulties encountered by 3<sup>ème</sup> year undergraduate students enrolled in the French Department at the University of Oum El Bouaghi. Specifically, we strive to answer the following questions: what difficulties do L3 students encounter in translating FLE texts? To what extent do teaching practices help to remedy them?

Our research focuses on written translation or simple translation. Oral translation, known as interpreting, is not included in our study. To answer these questions, we will analyze a corpus of 30 texts translated from Arabic into French

to target the difficulties encountered by the students observed and finally attempt to examine them.

## Theoretical framework

### 1.1. Translation: defining concepts

Translation has been practiced since ancient times for many reasons: to discover a new culture, to appropriate knowledge, to impose or combat philosophical or political doctrines, to spread or defend religious ideas, to advance science or technology, and to broaden the scope of commercial exchanges. Petit Robert defines translation as "the action or manner of translating." This verb was introduced into French in the 16th century and had its origins in an ancient Latin irregular verb: "Comme jadis drogman en italien (dragoman), which is a word derived from the Arabic *Turjuman*, itself derived from the Assyrian ragamou. Molière later used it in the form of parchment. (Guidère 2010: 16) J.-P. Cuq defines translation as:

Translation is a complex semiotic activity linked to the behaviors of comprehension and expression through deverbalization and reverbalization. [...] Translation is generally understood as finding equivalences between texts expressed in

two languages. However, since languages are not isomorphic systems, it is hardly possible to count on the existence of term-to-term correspondences from one language to another, i.e., on the existence of a semantic identity (Cuq, 2003: 239).

In his definition, Cary evokes a set of parameters the translator must consider.

Translation is an operation that seeks to establish equivalences between two texts expressed in different languages, these equivalences always and necessarily being a function of the nature of the two texts, their destination, the existing relations between the culture of the two peoples, their moral, intellectual and emotional climate, a function of all the contingencies specific to the time and place of departure and arrival (Cary, 1987: 3).

It should be noted that translation has long been based on dichotomies such as "fidelity to the letter" versus "fidelity to the spirit." Edmond Cary presents the trend that considers translation not as a linguistic operation but instead as a literary operation, namely, equivalence: "Translation is an operation that seeks to establish equivalences between two texts expressed in different languages, these equivalences always and necessarily being a function of the nature of the two texts, their destination, the relations

existing between the culture of the two peoples, their moral, intellectual and affective climate, and the place of departure and arrival." (Lederer 1994: 11)

When learning to translate, teaching correspondences is essential before looking for equivalents. However, equivalences become necessary since pedagogical translation cannot always be limited to correspondences. This is why we have indicated that our research is concerned with both the pedagogical and pedagogy of translation. Finally, we can say that with correspondence and equivalence, translation in language teaching is now placed in a systematized situation.

That said, translation is a complex activity that involves finding synonyms, equivalences, or analogies between two different or closely related languages. Translation in the language classroom fulfills a metalinguistic function and aims to teach languages in their various components: lexical, syntactic, and socio-cultural.

## **1.2. Translation and Equivalence**

Equivalence is an integral part of translation. It is achieved by comparing languages and texts while considering each language's socio-cultural

particularities.

On the other hand, the purpose of equivalence is to learn professional translation, whereas the purpose of the correspondence is to know the two languages in question: "The matching of two languages is the first level of translation; in the case of isolated vocables or phrases, it can be useful in language teaching; in the case of mono-referential terms, it is almost always indispensable; in the case of wholetexts, it is inoperative." (Lederer 1994: 52)

Dynamic equivalence tends to interpret the utterance with less literal precision, while the formal equivalence approach focuses on fidelity to the source language's lexical details and grammatical structure. In other words, dynamic equivalence is a translation based on the meaning of the whole sentence and the creation of effects equivalent to those in the source language. In contrast, formal equivalence is a translation based on form.

For her part, M. Baker distinguishes four types of equivalence: lexical equivalence, grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence. She points out that equivalence at the word level is the first element that the

translator must consider, taking into account number, gender, aspect, tense, etc. (Baker, 1992: 11).

According to the meaning theory, translation consists of the spontaneous creation of equivalences. In other words, these equivalence "are valid only in a given communicative situation, given a certain cognitive context and a certain relevant knowledge." To this end, Laplace believes that "to be able to propose an equivalence in meaning, one must necessarily begin by assimilating the meaning of the proposed discourse or text into an act of comprehension, i.e., pushing the processing of the sound or visual chain to the point of the emergence of a new state of consciousness." (Laplace, 1994:245)

### **1.3. Interference during translation**

Linguistic interference is one of the main difficulties encountered in foreign language learning. Contact between different languages becomes inevitable, and errors made by learners at orthographic, semantic, and syntactic levels are often the result. These errors are due to differences between the linguistic system of the mother tongue (Arabic) and foreign languages such as French or English.

The differences between these linguistic systems lead learners to resort to literal translation, often the source of common syntactic errors. These errors include the position of the direct or indirect object pronoun, the place of the gerund in the sentence, the position of the adverb that modifies the meaning of the statement, and the use of prepositions, coordinations, and juxtapositions. Lederer points out that: "The encoding of a French text in a foreign target language will facilitate interference from the strong structure of the French source, and the speaker tends to memorize the faulty performances of his idiolect" (Lederer 1994: 136).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Participants Equipment**

The participants in this research are third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the French department at the University of Oum El Bouaghi, particularly from the class of 2020-2021. Most of them are 22 years old, and their total number is twenty. The choice of this level is not gratuitous and is justified by the fact that the students observed had already taken two years of Translation courses. Consequently, they should have better linguistic and strategic skills to carry out

this activity effectively. The main aim of our study is to identify the recurrent difficulties students encounter when translating texts from French into Arabic. To list and identify the real linguistic and cultural problems, we submitted to the

observed students a text to be translated entitled "**Le joujou du pauvre**" (**The Poor Man's Toy**) by Baudelaire, extracted from *petits poèmes en prose*, 1869.

**Texte :**

« Sur une route, derrière la grille d'un vaste jardin, au bout duquel apparaissait la blancheur d'un joli château frappé par le soleil, se tenait un enfant beau et frais, habillé de ces vêtements de campagne si pleins de coquetterie.

Le luxe, l'insouciance et le spectacle habituel de la richesse, rendent ces enfants-là si jolis, qu'on les croirait faits d'une autre pâte que les enfants de la médiocrité ou de la pauvreté.

À côté de lui, gisait sur l'herbe un joujou splendide, aussi frais que son maître, verni, doré, vêtu d'une robe pourpre, et couvert de plumets et de verroteries. Mais l'enfant ne s'occupait pas de son joujou préféré, et voici ce qu'il regardait : [...] »

« De l'autre côté de la grille, sur la route, entre les chardons et les orties, il y avait un autre enfant, sale, chétif, fuligineux, un de ces marmots-parias dont un œil impartial découvrirait la beauté, si, comme l'œil du connaisseur devine une peinture idéale sous un vernis de carrossier, il le nettoyait de la répugnante patine de la misère.

*Baudelaire, petits poèmes en prose, 1869.*

**Text translated:**

"On a road, behind the gate of a vast garden, at the end of which appeared the whiteness of a pretty castle struck by the sun, stood a fresh and handsome child, dressed in those country clothes so full of coquetry.

Luxury, carefreeness and the habitual spectacle of wealth make these children so pretty, you'd think they were made of a different dough than the children of mediocrity or poverty.

Beside him, a splendid toy lay on the grass, as fresh as its master, varnished, gilded, dressed in a crimson gown, and covered with plumes and verroteries. But the child did not care for his favorite toy, and this is what he was looking at: [...]"

"On the other side of the gate, on the road, between the thistles and nettles, there was another child, dirty, puny, sooty, one of those marmots-parias whose beauty an impartial eye would discover, if, as the connoisseur's eye divines an ideal painting beneath a coachbuilder's varnish, it cleansed him of the repugnant patina of misery.

*Baudelaire, petits poèmes en prose, 1869.*

### 3. Summary of results

Translation presents challenges at every stage of the process: upstream (difficulty in understanding the source text), during (difficulty in conveying meaning), and downstream (difficulty in completing the translation process). These difficulties are often due to a lack of linguistic competence, particularly between two languages belonging to

different cultural and linguistic families, resulting in a misunderstanding of syntactic and semantic systems or difficulties constructing meaning. Cultural barriers can also complicate the task. We distinguish between comprehension, translation, and language errors in students' productions.

#### 3.1. Typologies of translation errors

Error types	Number of errors
Errors of understanding	68
Linguistic errors (lexical-semantic and morphosyntactic)	346
Translation errors	97
Other	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>532</b>

The table below lists the different types of errors made by the students. Note that our text contains 177 words and four paragraphs. We, therefore, found 532 errors in the entire corpus. Linguistic errors slow down the translation process, followed by translation errors and, finally, errors of comprehension of the text to be translated. The highest number of errors is attributable to lexicosemantics and morphosyntax. However, it should be noted that the origins of errors in the other two categories (translation errors and comprehension) are often correlated with the student's prerequisites and levels of linguistic and translation skills.

Morphosyntactic errors include non-compliance with gender and number, incorrect use of tenses/modes, incorrect

sentence construction, incorrect word order, lack of agreement or incorrect agreement, incorrect punctuation, intralinguistic errors, and morphosyntactic interference. That said, analysis of all the errors committed by the students reveals that the participants' most significant difficulties stem mainly from failure to respect numbers, incorrect use of verb tenses, followed by incorrect use of gender, and, finally, morphosyntactic interference.

Below are a few examples of the most recurrent errors students commit. In copy 6, the student committed a language error of the morphological kind resulting from the morphological calque "over translated by قفو". Similarly, the literal translation of "frais par طازج" introduced lexical interference.

فوق طريق، وراء ابواب حديقة واسعة، ظهر في نهايتها بياض قصر جميل مضروب  
بالشمس، وقف طفل جميل وطازج، مرتديًا ملابس الريف.  
المتعة وعدم الاهتمام للثراء تجعل هؤلاء الأطفال جميلين لدرجة أن الشخص يعتقد أنه مصنوع  
من عجينة مختلفة عن أطفال الرداءة أو الفقراء

**Instead of:**

على طريق، خلف بوابة حديقة شاسعة، ظهر في نهايتها بياض قلعة جميلة اشرفت فيها  
الشمس، وقف طفل جميل ويافع، مرتديًا ملابس الريف المليئة بالغنج.

الفخامة واللامبالاة والمشهد المعتاد للثراء تجعل هؤلاء الأطفال جميلين للغاية لدرجة أن المرء يعتقد أنهم مصنوعون من عجينة مختلفة عن أطفال الفقراء أو الفقراء.

Students have a poor grasp of many grammatical rules when transferring from one language to another, particularly questions relating to numbers and agreement. This calls for the reinforcement of French grammar in other subjects.

### 3.2. Translation errors and techniques

As we've made clear, translation is a complex problem-solving process. Students who engage in translation face difficulties that they must resolve using different strategies. To translate correctly, it is necessary to understand the source text's context and seek equivalent meanings for cultural expressions. However, a literal translation can often not render a cultural equivalence, and failure to consider the cultural context can lead to a meaningless translation. In addition, insufficient knowledge of the source language and culture can compound translation difficulties.

In the following passage, « وقف طفل جميل ووظاج », the student has translated the qualifier "fresh." Another error comes from abandoning the translation of a piece of a sentence or a keyword because of its difficulty. Some students prefer the

avoidance strategy of not translating the whole sentence, such as "dressed in those country clothes so full of coquetry."

### Conclusion

Translation, as a linguistic discipline, is a science comparable to others because it adheres to the epistemological structure of all knowledge recognized as scientific: it has a theory and a method. In practice, it consists of grammatical descriptions and simulations resulting from the systematic application of a theory to certain aspects of the grammar and characteristics of a language.

At the end of the course, insufficient linguistic and cultural skills and translation techniques often lead student translators to make mistakes of various kinds. That said, linguistic and socio-cultural skills are necessary and inescapable to be a successful translator. Students must be able to read and understand the source text and then revise and evaluate it in the target language. In other words, to perform translation tasks effectively, student translators need good reading comprehension and written

expression skills.

In learners' productions, the choice of meaning, whether for a word, phrase, term, or fixed expression, often remains literal when they consult a bilingual dictionary. In other words, they generally choose the first meaning proposed for a lexical entry. However, translation must be geared towards equivalence based on lexical units. Recourse to literal correspondence - including borrowing, semantic tracing, and literal translation - is a source of errors in learners' productions and among novice translators.

At this stage, the teacher's role is nodal: they can precede the activity by explaining the text in the source language, including cultural aspects, and program activities that highlight the differences between languages and cultures and show the particularities of each. In addition, combining several methods by integrating technological tools and online translation software is conceivable, strengthening learners' commitment to learning activities and enabling them to invest themselves effectively and strategically.

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