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## Translation as a Part of School Curriculum in Learning English Language

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### Abstract

In India, the students, who are from mother-tongue medium schools, are well-acquainted with translation which has been a part in the language subjects. It has been an integral element of subject English and also for other language subjects like Hindi, Sanskrit at school. It has been used as an effective tool in learning English, though it has been in debate for the last decades for its use in some countries. This paper will discuss translation as a part of school curriculum in learning English, its limitation, challenges and current research on the same.

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### Introduction

I can think about a topic named, “translation” under a school subject, called English. Those were the school days when I first encountered this phenomenon. Many of us who have schooling in mother-tongue medium could recall the experience of translation from our mother-tongue to English. It has been a part of the curriculum of English language education in primary, middle and high school level. Translation as “Anubaada” is also found in learning Hindi and Sanskrit at high school level. Interestingly, when I visited some high schools to get data on the topic on which I am writing, I found the disappearance of translation as a part of school curriculum in the subject English; but it is highly exercised in the subjects, Hindi and Sanskrit. This paper will deal with translation as a tool in teaching the school subject, English.

### Discussion

The approach towards this translation has been a structural one. At primary level, bilingual competency gets strengthened when the child is asked to memorize the meaning of English words and their mother-tongue equivalents, rules of grammar and various forms of English verbs. In vernacular medium schools, we learn English by memorizing the meaning and various forms of words and the rules of grammar. This way, we learn English which has an everlasting structural impact on our brains. Children have been taught in this approach that one structure can have one and only one equivalent structure in the target language. This can also be seen in relation to define the structure of the source. X is a word in a language and its equivalent x1 in another language means x1 is the only possible equivalent has been the strategy of translation

so far. This is the limitation of a strategy which limits the Chomskian infinite ability of producing sentences. Another important factor is the pressure on the children who are compelled to memorize the structure. They are never allowed to think that they can produce infinite number of sentences. They are never encouraged to think that they are creative being. In mother-tongue medium, these are the socio-psycho-cultural constraints from which they are not free.

Translation as an effective tool in teaching a foreign language has been a thing of past in many countries, whereas it is still in use in some other countries. Translation has been associated with the grammar translation method. It has been considered as a mechanistic approach to foreign language learning. By many scholars, translation is considered as irrelevant in the context of foreign language learning. It was given up in ESL situation, though it has been there in many countries and in state education system. Even if, in France, it was banned from the language curriculum in secondary schools and in specialist language schools and in 1987, the ban was condemned (Harvey, 1996, p. 46). Duff emphasizes that translation is text-bound and confined only to two skills: reading and writing. So it does not have any role in speaking and listening, the most communicative skills of learning a language. But, thanks to the recent researches which are reviving translation as a beneficial tool in foreign language learning. According to Scaffner the translation will benefit to the students for

- 1) Improving verbal ability.
- 2) Expanding students' vocabulary in L2.
- 3) Developing their style.

- 4) Improving their understanding of how languages work.
- 5) Consolidating L2 structures for active use.
- 6) Monitoring and improving the comprehension of L2.

N.J Ross also has the view that the translation is a fifth skill in addition to other four skills and it promotes communication and understanding. Translation is no more an isolated activity. It has become a part of day-to-day life in a multilingual country like India. *Translation is a legitimate pedagogical tool especially in an EFL environment and claim that it deserves to be rehabilitated* (Widdowson, 1978, p.18; Harmer 1991, p. 62; Ellis 1992, p.46, Bowen, 1994, p.93; Ur 1996, p.40)

Translation, in English language learning in classroom context, means to develop the English language skills of the learners. The learners are taught translation not for translation but for developing English language skills. To be skilled in translation is a by-product of learning English language skill. Here, in the classroom, the students are not taught the translation skills which are required for a professional translator. But this learning gives a foundation to the translation skills which can help one to be a professional translator in future.

Students cannot relate a structure with all its possible structures. Language is so infinite; it is difficult to teach the creative ways of language use. The most difficult part is the metaphorical sentences and their translations. In school curriculum, translation task is assigned to the students in the following ways: A. Isolated sentences, B. Text or a Passage, C. Conversation

- 1) Isolated sentences: Individual sentence is given to the student. A number of individual sentences but not related like a paragraph is given for translation. Here the student is not known to what is there before the sentence and after the sentence.
- 2) Text or a passage: A passage is given and the students are asked to translate it to English. There is a context here. All the sentences are in a coherent paragraph. There is a meaning coming out of the passage. It may be part of an essay or prose or from a story.
- 3) Conversation: Conversation between two people in a particular situation with punctuation marks is given to the student for translation. The student has to understand the context and time in which the conversation is on. It may be a part of real conversation. It may be day today conversation between two.

Translation in all these forms is varied. It differs from the translation of a passage to the translation of a conversation or to the translation of an isolated sentence. These varied forms of giving the task of translation test the different levels of competency in the students.

Structural approach to translation as a part of the English language education curriculum has been there in all vernacular medium schools for the last so many years (more than 40yrs) in many Indian states. Technically, it is known as grammar-translation method. Form of the sentences gets emphasized, not the content of the sentences. This method does not involve any speaking or listening skills. Mostly, it involves writing and reading. What does the English teacher do? First, he/she will give the

rules of tense to the students with sentence examples and the students have to memorize those rules. Later, the teacher will ask them to frame sentences based on those rules.

As for example:

If the action is not complete and going on, you have to use present continuous tense. Here after the subject, is/am/are should be used and verb should have an-ing form.

*Ram is eating a mango.*

*They are running on the road.*

*Mr. Joseph is teaching English in the classroom.*

Now, whenever the action is not complete and going on, the student has to use this tense pattern in translation. It has been emphasized that an English sentence structure has only one target language structure (here Indian language structure). These are some sentence structures in English in this tense pattern. But these are not only the structures to mean about an action in continuity. The meaning of this structure can also take a structure which is traditionally meant for simple present action. The following sentence can have more than one structure:

I will not take up the source English structure much, as I will be discussing about the translation. Look at the following example.

Source Language English: I am here.

As per the structural approach, it should have one equivalent structure in a language to which I am translating it. Let's take Hindi and Odia:

Source Language English	Target Language Hindi	Target Language Odia
I am here.	मैं हूँ.	ମୁଁ ଅଛି (mu achhi)
I am here.	मैं यहाँ हूँ.	ମୁଁ ଏଠି ଅଛି. (mu ethi achhi)
I am here.	मैं यहाँ हूँ	ମୁଁ ଏଠି. (mu ethi)
I am here.	मैं आपके लिए खड़ा हूँ	ମୁଁ ଆପଣଙ୍କ ପାଇଁ ଛିଡ଼ା ହୋଇଛି. (mu aapananka paain chhidaa hoichhi)
I am here.	मैं आपकी प्रतीक्षा कर रहा हूँ	ମୁଁ ଆପଣଙ୍କୁ ଅପେକ୍ଷା କରୁଛି/ ମୁଁ ଅପେକ୍ଷା କରୁଛି (mu aapananku apekhyaa karuchhi / mu apekhyaa karuchhi)

This is not only true in Hindi and Odia, but also in many Indian languages. The practice has been to consider one structure as the proxy structure in translation. As far as our experience of speaking our mother tongue goes, we have more than one equivalent structure for an equivalent Source language structure. The structural approach could not fulfill the creative possible need of human beings. Chomsky says, we can produce infinite number of sentences by following a finite set of rules. In traditional school education system, the strategy of giving attention to the creative potential of each student has not been adopted so far. In vernacular medium schools, students' minds are habitually structured to do the translation work. It is also a matter of great sorrow when we see our students mugging up the structures of both SL and TL.

This also happens at the level of learning English words in vernacular medium schools. There has been a practice that each English word has an equivalent in TL. Here there is another far-reaching impact of our so called traditional bilingual dictionaries which

say one English word has only one equivalent. Student's minds cannot think about more than one structure and more than one equivalent as the principle of structural approach to translation limits it.

As far as the observation of the speaking and understanding of mother-tongue goes, we know that a child can produce and understand more than one structure of a structure. As a child is exposed to its mother-tongue in many creative ways, it can produce and understand more than one structure of a structure. But this is not the case with second language learner or speaker. The structural approach has limited the creative ways of its expression. We can call this approach a formal restriction on the part of the students.

### Conclusion

Translation as an effective tool for learning English has not been given due importance. And the traditional structural approach to translation in school curriculum has limitation. If it at all exists as a tool, it should treat language as an open-ended system and

should take the creative potential of students into account. Gradually, it seems to disappear from school curriculum in India. Interestingly, it is used in the subject like Hindi and Sanskrit. Not giving due importance to

translation as a tool for learning English is not because the students are not interested but it is the misconceived notion of the policy makers who could go by assumption only.

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