A Plea to Redefine the Contours of Translation Pedagogy in Pakistan: Towards a Translation Performativity Paradigm

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Abstract

The paper looks into the possibilities as well as challenges of moving the translation pedagogy in Pakistan away from its traditional methodological stasis and putting it on more self-reflective and communicative grounds. The researchers advance a critique of the mainstream translation teaching in Pakistan and, alternatively, propose what they call communicative performativities of translation. The issues of equivalence, correspondence, corrective/prescriptive feedback, acontextuality and teacher-directed drilling are assessed and found not merely wanting but positively counterproductive. The researchers propose that manipulating linguistic structures from the source language to the target language, or vice versa, should be more appropriately called transcoding than translation. This manipulation usually takes place in a rather mechanical way with the help of dictionary meanings and unproblematic, decontextualized equivalents. This approach prevents students from achieving inter-lingual communicative adequacy and pragmatic competence in translation. On the other hand, the researchers present alternative ways of conceptualizing and practicing translation in classrooms and for this purpose they propose four tasks which are located in the larger framework of Donald Kiraly's Activity Theory-Based Social Constructivist Model (ATSM).

Keywords: Translation pedagogy, Pakistan, language, ELT, communicative, GTM.

1. Introduction

The advent of the Direct Method (DM) in the beginning of the 20th century threw a major challenge to the acceptability and practice of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The most common reservation against the GTM is its overemphasis upon formal accuracy and its prescriptivist focus on grammatical rules (Danesi, 2012). As a result, the Direct Method became the most widely advocated method of second/foreign language teaching and

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any use of student's first language in the classroom was censured. To Guy Cook, "From the end of the nineteenth century onwards almost all influential theoretical works on language teaching have assumed without argument that a new language (L2) should be taught without reference to the student's first language (L1) (2007, p. 45).

The criticism on the GTM came with such severity and consistency that both the pedagogic reaction and public perception swung against it altogether and translation in classroom became a stereotype. To a considerable extent, the criticism of GTM was reasonable. Such critiques have been incredibly powerful in influencing pedagogic view against the use of translation in an ELT classroom (Asghar, 2009). During these unremitting efforts to discredit the GTM, the positive side of this method got altogether eclipsed:

It is one of the few methods which can be adopted in very large classes and, being structured and predictable, can give students a sense of confidence and attainment. It is also suited to teachers whose own command of the L2 may be limited (Cook, 2007, p. 67).

However, as the GTM fell from grace, the use of translation also came under serious challenge and its viability in any form was radically interrogated. However, after a long period of marginalization and virtual exclusion from EFL/ESL settings, its role is being re-evaluated and its relevance (not just to language learning but also to an inter-cultural and inter-lingual critical pedagogy) is being reasserted (Tsagari & Floros, 2013). In this broader perspective, translation is not conceived just as a linguistic activity. Contrarily, it constitutes the very act of (inter)cultural negotiation, canon-projection, acculturation and identity formation (Bhabha, 2015). It is now being widely accepted that, contrary to the dismissive claims of the detractors of the GTM, translation has tremendous potential to help language teachers/learners in multiple ways (Hall, 2017).

However, with regard to Pakistan, it is particularly noteworthy that in the mainstream public sector schools and colleges, the use/teaching of translation in the language teaching settings never ceased (Irfan, 2018). In these institutions, translation has been firmly located in the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT). Nevertheless, the methodologies and techniques employed to teach it remain open to question and their viability

stands in a dire need of critical (re)assessment. In most of the cases, the rationales for having English-to-Urdu or Urdu-to-English translation in the curricula are not sufficiently realized (Warsi, 2004). At times, it is contended, in a tautological way, that students must be able to translate so that they could gain ability to translate. Alternatively, at times one may argue that the Urdu-to-English translation is aimed at honing the so-called productive skills of the students; whereas, the English-to-Urdu translation is aimed at honing the so-called receptive skills (Shamim, 2008). All these contentions are true to varying degrees, yet they still do not constitute sufficient awareness of the role of translation in language teaching.

In traditional Pakistani classrooms, the ELT courses and syllabi rely heavily on translation and these types of pedagogical translations abound everywhere. However, translation pedagogy in Pakistan is marred by a host of factors which are at once academic, behavioral, pragmatic and procedural. In a vast majority of the cases, the way translation is taught can most appropriately be described only as *transcoding* in which the learners, of necessity, manipulate linguistic structures in two languages in a rather mechanical way relying mostly upon dictionary meanings. To them, meanings are mostly unproblematic direct equivalents. The social, cultural and cognitive complexities associated with translation are not realized adequately. For example, look at the (only) two learning outcomes laid down in the *National Curriculum for English Language* (2006, p. 136) for the teaching of translation at IX and X grades:

- Use the knowledge of literal and figurative meaning, grammatical gender and syntax to translate passages from English to Urdu.
- Understand that most phrases and idioms do not translate literally from one language to another.

As one can clearly see, in these two learning outcomes, the focus is on literal, figurative, grammatical, idiomatic and syntactic aspects of translation. These learning outcomes say nothing of contextual, pragmatic, discursive, and sociocultural aspects which undeniably play a crucial role in any

intercultural/inter-lingual communication. That is all what this 184-page document has to say about translation. There is no rationale, no guideline, no parameters given as to how the actual teaching of translation can materialize in the classroom. Everything is left to the whims of the teacher. As a result, teachers select texts at their discretion. Most of the time there is no consistent use of carefully structured material with defined objectives which could take into account discreet stages of learning. Therefore, from the perspective of translation pedagogy, going through this one of the most authoritative policy documents which deals with national curriculum at secondary school level proves to be an extremely dismaying experience.

Similarly, in the syllabus for English designed by the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE), translation does not have any autonomous status. Instead, it is subsumed under the generic rubric "Writing Skills" whose sub-article XI states its parameters: "Practise the skill of translation from English to Urdu and vice versa, in idiomatic English" — that is it and the matter ends there. Once again, there is no rationale, no guideline and no execution plan. Let us take one more example of this inadequate understanding and placement of translation in our schemes of study and curricula. In the course book, *English Grammar and Composition* prescribed for grades XI and X and published by Punjab Curriculum & Textbook Board Lahore, one encounters the same disappointment (Chishti et al., 2010). This composition book has arguably assigned largest space to translation and as many as ninety pages (58-148) have been dedicated to it. However, unfortunately all over these pages, there are only exercises. The level of these exercises moves from word to sentence and from sentence to paragraph but one does not find even a single line about the rationale, theory, philosophy, principles or protocols of translation. A huge amount of the material given in the exercises comprises isolated, formalistic and de-contextualized sentences. The following bar chart illustrates this lopsided distribution:

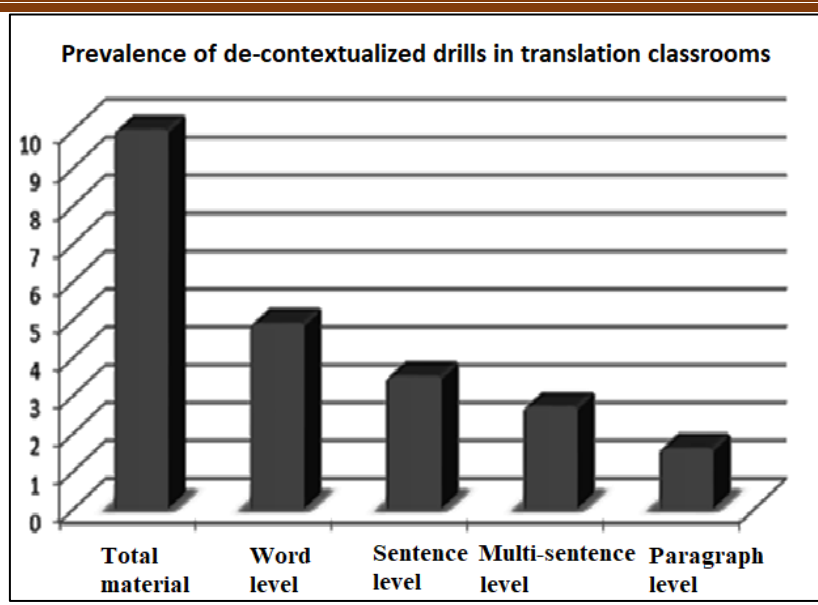

Figure 1

This bar chart shows different levels of translation given in the book and their proportions. The lion's share is occupied by word level translation comprising long lists of English words and there hypothetical, unproblematic and utterly decontextualized equivalents. Exactly the same problem characterizes the sentence level lists of translation—in two parallel columns one finds long cataloging of English-Urdu sentences bearing a direct, one-to-one correspondence. Once again, one finds no context at all. The third level, which the researchers have named as 'multiple sentences', comprises a short assemblage of sentences which are semantically loosely connected with one other. Once again, one finds the problem of decontextualization and formalistic constructedness here as well. The last level comprises passages which too are deprived of context. They just have the co-text but not context.

These are just some specimens and the situation with other boards and curricular bodies is not much different.

2. Traditional Translation Pedagogy Frameworks and Ladmiral's 'Performance Magistrate'

Apart from the syllabi and schemes of studies, the paradigmatic approach which, by and large, governs the translation pedagogy and its evaluation in Pakistan also has some fundamental issues. In most of the cases, translation is taught and evaluated 'objectively' i.e. if a student has "correctly translated" five Urdu sentences into English or vice versa, he/she will be awarded five out of five. This is an evidence as to how translation is taken as a purely objective and quasi-mathematical process. The translation of each sentence, once done, is taken as a monolithic entity as if it had been governed by one single process from start to finish. This fact is conveniently ignored that translational competence comprises various sub-competences as well which are contingent upon varied pragmatic, textual, schematic and discursive considerations (Campbell & Hale, 2003). This exhibits a kind of hyper prescriptivism which can be detected in most of the translation teaching settings in Pakistan.

This kind of pedagogic situation is characterized by Jean-René Ladmiral (2016) as a *performance magistrale* (instructional performance). As per this method, students are assigned a translation task as homework. They translate a text at home and bring their 'faulty' versions to classroom (Kiraly, 2005). The teacher then would dissect and discuss these translations sentence by sentence. In this method, translation is largely taken as a linguistic activity contingent upon the principles of contrastive linguistics/analysis (Lingcha, 2001). This approach is primarily influenced by a transmissionist view of learning/teaching which the present paper proposes to be replaced by a transformational view. The difference between the two is radical and can be illustrated as under (Aguilar, 2015, p. 89):

Transmissionist View	**Transformational View**
Knowledge is transferred	Knowledge is constructed

Knowledge is public	Knowledge is private
Motivation is extrinsic	Motivation is intrinsic
Learning is molecular	Learning is holistic
Learning characteristics are shared	Every learner is unique
Knowledge is content	Knowledge is a process

These are in fact two completely different paradigms of teaching which mutually exclude each other. In this table, the weaknesses of the transmissionist approach are evident; so are the strengths of the transformational view. We can clearly see that the transformational view involves greater challenges and promises of learning for students, whereas the transmissionist view is largely mechanical and conformist. It seems to favour the handed-down nature of learning in a top-down way. The transformational view takes every single student as a unique agent of learning and it seeks to deal with him/her in a customized and individualized way in which he/she is required to mount the ladder of learning and the teacher's role remains mostly that of a scaffolder.

Another problem is the second-rate status of translation in the larger ELT settings in Pakistan. Translation is not taught as an autonomous subject at any level up to intermediate level in Pakistan; nay, not even as an autonomous component. It is largely practiced as an appendage to EFL/ESL programs and invariably translation competence is equated with foreign language competence. This constitutes a fallacy which Donald C. Kiraly ably identified:

There is an urgent need for understanding the role of general L1 and L2 communicative competence within translator competence. Translation students cannot be presumed to have acquired this competence through foreign language classes in secondary school. Instruments to test translation-relevant communicative competence need to be developed and implemented at the beginning of a student's program of studies so that deficiencies can be identified for pedagogical intervention. General L2 communicative competence skills are distinct from the particular skills a translation student needs to apply L2 knowledge to real translation tasks (2010, p. 47).

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, there have been few concerted efforts to develop and define translation pedagogy in a systematic way and in its own right where its central pedagogic premises could be negotiated on its own terms. Add to this the harsh fact that till date there is not a single degree program in the country to train translator educators. However, of late, there are signs of an emerging awareness and some of the notable universities have set up translation departments and are currently offering various degree and non-degree courses. But it will be some time before these universities make some difference in the consciousness which at present prevails in our schools and colleges.

In a vast majority of the cases, in a typical translation classroom in Pakistan the basic pedagogic activity hinges on the verbal "transmission" of an amassed knowledge on the part of the teacher to the students (Asghar & Yousaf, 2016). Students are supposed to internalize this transmitted (handed down) knowledge and call it up at will. Students usually do not discuss anything as they are not allowed to "cheat" from each other. Besides, interaction between students is considered disrupting to the teaching process. Whenever they 'discuss' anything, it is usually to communicate their lack of knowledge.

Nowhere is Ladmiral's notion of *Performance Magistrale* more visible than in the very structuring of a traditional language classroom in the mainstream public sector Pakistani schools and colleges. A typical language classroom very much looks like this:

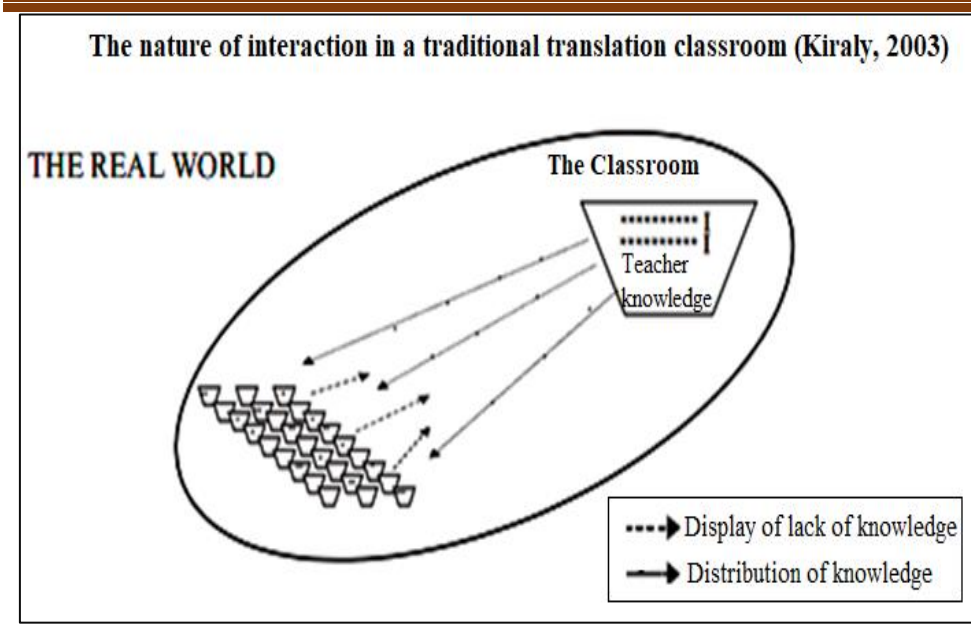

Figure 2

Such a transmissionist classroom is structured on the rigid binary between teacher and students. Such classrooms lay bare the underlying assumption that translation knowledge is smoothly transmitted from teacher to students (Lowe, 2020). The teacher is privy to some sort of 'perfect' translation and it is his/her job to point out students' 'deviations' from the 'norm'. He discharges this duty from the vantage point of his/her podium. Students read from their 'faulty' translations and, in turn, teacher 'corrects' their versions. Eventually, teacher provides 'right' answers to their questions, if any. In this situation, students who have translations which are different from the one with the teacher find it increasingly hard to achieve confidence and self-motivation. Contextual, discursive, social, cultural and pragmatic factors which make the very core of translation usually run the risk of getting ignored due to an overemphasis on such considerations as dictionary meanings and linguistic equivalence.

In such transmissionist classrooms, translation (like any other kind of learning) is conceptualized in an essentialist way; whereas, there is near consensus among the academicians and scholars that translation is a constructive process in which students negotiate their inter-lingual and intercultural communication (Gouanvic, 2014). They do not simply ingest ready-made understanding from teachers or peers; rather, they construct their understanding dialogically and on the basis of their own experiences (Mann & Walsh, 2017). They also achieve this understanding by building internal representations of knowledge which are the corollaries of their personalized interpretation of learning (Duchesne & McMaugh 2018). These representations formulate the basis to which other subsequent knowledge structures are appended. However in transmissionist classes the learning experience cannot be structured this way and students' voices are excluded to an alarming extent:

[T]o the extent that teachers evaluated student texts, the students deferred making judgments about their texts themselves, preferring teacher judgment to peer response or self-assessment. It is as though there is only a certain amount of space for judgment; if the teacher takes that space, students can or will not, as authors or as peer respondents (Calfee & Perfumo 1996: 92).

When the 'judgmental space' is monopolistically occupied by teacher, students' voices are ipso fact silenced. This attitude is extremely counterproductive to the very process of learning as it is always important to make the translator behind the work visible and it is his/her voice in the form of think aloud protocols or running commentaries which really matters (Tanaka, 2015). But when the translator is silenced he/she is simple excluded from the very thought process which goes into the making of the translation at hand. Alternatively, if this thought process is let emerge, it can help us appreciate the following key questions in a considerably more inclusive and synthetic way:

- What real difficulties were encountered by students at the (sub) conscious level?
- How did students evolve the overall trajectory of their translational experience?

- What kind of method is operative behind the madness of mistakes committed by students?
- Why did students intentionally reject certain suggested edits?
- How does the translation produced reveal the individual translator's strengths, insecurities, cognitive configurations, apprehensions, assumptions, etc.?

The answers to such questions can be laid bare only if the students are encouraged to contribute their own voice either by verbal reports, think aloud protocols or by a semi-structured exchanges with teachers/peers. Seeing from this perspective, mental states, (meta)linguistic factors, emotional conditions, contextual considerations and time-space constraints cease to exist as esoteric enigmas and, instead, become overt parameters of an overarching procedure which a student is supposed to control in order to achieve certain inter-lingual communicative objectives (Gutt, 2014). Similarly, this perspective can bridge the gap between the teaching practices and the learning goals by bringing the two into a more viable congruity. The translational experience, in effect, will become more coherent and academically more empowering.

One last feature of a typical Pakistani classroom which the researchers want to mention here is a frantic search for linguistic equivalence on the part of the students which is 'overseen' by teacher. Though computer has assisted the process of translation to some extent, in most of the public sector schools (where translation pedagogy mostly prevails) students do not have access to computers. Therefore, utilizing such facilities as spell-checker, grammar-checker, online dictionaries, thesauruses, collocation lexicons, corpora and dozens of various types of translation software remains a distant dream for majority of the students in the public sector schools and colleges. In order to achieve essential communicative translational competence, however it is important to provide students with these facilities (Beatty 2020). Interestingly, these tools are not expensive and can easily be managed by the school and colleges. Most of them are freely available and one can either download and install them or use them online freely. What is needed is a

computer lab with an internet connection – which most of the schools and colleges already have – and a bit of training on the part of teachers.

3. Breaking the Spell

In this section, the researchers have proposed four tasks based upon the Donald Kiraly's *Activity Theory-Based Social Constructivist Modal* which posits that words are the frames that activate cognitive pictures which are foregrounded in the very process of learning. Kiraly's approach is aimed (2010, p. 94):

- to help students/teachers (re)conceptualize translation as a communicative activity which is extended far beyond its linguistic realizations;
- to undo the effects of formalistic sentence-based approaches to translation;
- to convince teachers/students to conduct reading comprehension activities of the source text before attempting any translation;
- to help teachers and students perceive a direct proportion between reading comprehension and translation quality;
- to help teachers and students perceive a direct proportion between writing ability and translation quality; and
- to help students/teachers appreciate the importance and relevance of schematic knowledge for any kind of translation.

In order to achieve these aims, Kiraly presents the following sub-competences which are in addition to linguistic competence and the former cannot be reduced to the latter: (1) linguistic accuracy, (2) accuracy of the message, (3) knowledge of target reader, (4) intertextual references contained in the ST, and (5) readability/acceptability. This sub-divisional view translational competence is also supported by other scholars and it is conceived as an "underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate" (Orozco 2000, 199). Having set this conceptual background, we proceed to devise tasks.

Task 1: Intra-linguistic and Inter-linguistic Translation

Text/Material

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Objectives

-To teach interlinguistic and intralinguistic translation

-To teach peer editing

-To update a text

-To use resource skills

Level

Intermediate

Grouping

Individual, pairs

Time

1.5 hour

Steps

a. Teacher asks students to read the opening two paragraphs of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

b. Students are instructed to break into pairs and explain the text to one another in English.

c. Students paraphrase the text and rewrite it in a simplified way.

d. Students peer review/edit the paraphrased texts of one another.

e. After peer reviewing/editing, the students sit together and discuss the edited versions.

f. Students put their paraphrased versions aside and, in pairs, translate the original source text (opening two paragraphs) into Urdu.

g. They exchange their translations with one another and carry out an extensive discussion. This is the most crucial stage. Teacher keeps moving around and extending his/her help to students but this is done in a very non-prescriptivist and amiable way. Once the students are done with their discussion, they are engaged in think aloud protocols (TAPs) in order to verbalize their thought processes. Teacher pays close attention to these TAPs and tries to grasp the thought processes of students which went into the making of their translation. Teacher takes notes and does not interrupt students.

h. Finally, students are given some authentic Urdu translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* and they compare their translations with it. The Urdu translations by Shahid Hameed and Ibne Saleem are extremely valuable; especially Hameed's translation is work of great merit and originality. These translations can be used to serve this purpose.

i. Teacher concludes the session by giving some general feedback and guidelines.

Task 2: Inter-semiotic Translation

Text/Material

Different traffic signs printed of A4 papers.

Objectives

-To teach intersemiotic text

Level

Matric

Grouping

Individual, pairs, groups of four

Time

1 hour

Steps

a. The pages bearing traffic signs are distributed among students who, then, are given 5 minutes to interpret the signs by using L2 (English).

b. Teacher breaks up the class into groups of four and asks them to verbalize these signs by writing one complete sentence for each sign.

c. Students are shuffled and new groups are formed and they are asked to cross-compare the sentences they produced.

d. Teacher, then, initiates a discussion in order to take into account such considerations as conventions, registers, grammar, etc. Then the discussion is directed to what happens when one sign system is translated into another. Finally, the teachers will engage the students in think aloud protocols and give minimal, non-prescriptivist feedback.

Task 3: Synthetic Translation

Text/Material

The Urdu short story *Overcoat* by Ghulam Abbas

Objectives

-To teach synthetic translation

-To practice summarizing skills

Level

All

Grouping
Individual, pairs

Time

60 minutes

Steps

a. The class is instructed to break up into groups and given the copies of the story *Overcoat* in original Urdu text.

b. Students are instructed to summarize the story in L1 (Urdu) in groups.

c. Then individually they are asked to translate their summarized version into L2 (English).

d. Teacher starts a discussion and asks the students randomly about the choices they made during the translation and the rationales behind them. In turn, some of the students (randomly selected) are asked to read out their translations aloud while the rest of the class is asked to listen attentively. They students are encouraged to comment, ask questions or give feedback.

e. Teacher sums up the session by passing some concluding remarks and addressing the issues faced by most of the students.

Task 4: Indirect Translation and Back Translation

Text/Material

Different Urdu translations of the short story *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde

Objectives

-To make students aware of fidelity

-To teach indirect translation

Level

Flexible

Grouping

Individual, groups

Time

60 minutes

Steps

a. Teacher brings different translations of the same source text (*The Happy Prince*) which present various kinds of translation issue. The translations have varying degree of fidelity.

b. Students are given the copies of different translations and are asked to read it individually. This will make them aware of the whole context of the excerpts which they will be asked to translate subsequently.

c. Students are asked to break up into groups of three. They are given different translations of the story and asked to back-translate the last two paragraphs.

d. The students exchange their back translations and edit them without looking at the originals.

e. A discussion ensues and the teacher silently records the think aloud protocols in which students are engaged. Special attention is given to the issue of fidelity. Such questions are particularly taken care of as to what extent it is true that if a translation is more faithful to the source text, it bears greater chances of closer back translation. It is also seen how the differences in various Urdu translations of *The Happy Prince* impact upon the back translations made by students.

f. The students are given the actual version of story and are asked to compare their back translations with it. The group which produced the back translation nearest to the actual text of the story is asked to share its think aloud protocols with the rest of the class.

These are some of the tasks which can serve as a good starter for the teachers intended to break away from the traditional methods of teaching translation in Pakistan. These tasks obviously do not claim to furnish any kind of prescriptive recipe to be followed rigidly. They just aim at making teachers realize the possibility of engaging students more productively and communicatively in the translation classrooms.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the researchers have made an effort to diagnose some of the major issues with translation pedagogy in Pakistan and proposed certain tasks which can be utilized in classrooms in order to teach translation as a real inter-lingual dialogue and an act of authentic communication. In conventional Pakistani classrooms, English language teaching relies heavily on translation. However, the ways in which the act of translation is conceptualized and taught are exceedingly counterproductive not just from translational point of view but also from the general perspective of language teaching. There is hardly any real linguistic gap which the students have to bridge or any communicative act to accomplish and most of the time translation is done in a narrowly conceived, decontextualized and mechanical way. As a result, translational competence fails to translate into a larger (socio)linguistic competence.

Contrarily, the researchers have proposed communicative, integrated and more inclusive translation pedagogy and they have proposed four tasks which can serve as the basis for further theorization and practice by teachers. These tasks are easy to accomplish and they do not cost much. It is expected that teachers will take insight from them and construct more of such activities with an even greater promise of truly inter-lingual communicative competence.

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