

PALACIOS MARTÍNEZ, Ignacio M. & SEOANE POSSE, Elena (2000). *Aprendiendo y enseñando a traducir / Learning and Teaching to Translate / Aprendendo e ensinando a traducir*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Servicio de Publicacións e Intercambio Científico. 181 pages. Foreword by Miguel Anxo Santos Rago.

The use of translation in contemporary SLT is, to say the least, controversial. Advocates and detractors seem to have spent endless years discussing the issue, the former praising its virtues and the latter seeking professional agreement against an activity deemed dangerous and anti-communicative. In fact, this second position can be said to have dominated the SLT scene at least during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all, memories of the old-fashioned grammar-translation method were still far too present for experts to even consider including translation activities in L2 curricula, and the rise of the communicative approach, as a side-effect, did not but reinforce this tendency (Snell-Hornby 1985:21; Cervi 1990:39; Sánchez 1997:39).

However, the use of translation as a language teaching technique has been all but exceptional throughout History. In fact, it has been commonly used for more than two thousand years (Weller 1989:39; Pegenaute 1996:113) —and not only for the last two centuries, as Santos Rego rather humbly mentions in the foreword to the work we are dealing with now-, to the extent that it can be traced back to Roman times (Valdeón 1995a:239; Gémar 1996:495; Sánchez 1997:33). Thus, it was used in the teaching of both Latin and Greek only to be later adopted in the teaching of modern languages (Bérard 1995:9-10). The question should therefore be asked of whether the exclusion it suffered —and which, to some extent, is still applicable today— was justified or, as we believe, based on prejudiced views and consequently truly undeserved.

This second opinion finds further support in the fact that the methodological change first brought about by the notional-functional syllabi (Ek 1991) and then by the almighty communicative approach, based on a comprehensive concept of communicative competence, did not exclude any kind of teaching technique, whether written or oral. However, “strong” versions of the communicative approach ended up emphasising oral and aural skills, thus exercising positive discrimination against grammar and written exercises (translation included), which were once again left aside (Larsen-Freeman 1986: 135; Alexander 1990:52).

Fortunately, excess and imbalance seem to be coming to an end as new holistic, “integrated” communicative approaches, as put forward by Sánchez (1993, 1997:196-217), find their due place and recognition in the field. Although never mentioned explicitly, it is in the light of this methodological framework that Palacios and Seoane produce this new work under review. For them, the presence of translation comes so naturally within SLT that they do not even feel the need to justify their position: they simply mention that translation has a place in its own right in both Philology Faculties and *Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas* all across Galicia (13).

It is worth pointing out, however, that translation was never given up altogether in France, either officially or unofficially, undoubtedly due to its strong grammatical tradition (Lavault 1985:15; Besse 1986; Ladmiral 1987:10-11; Strauss 1987; Terrell 1991; Ballard 1995:25). And even a country like the USA, so very much against

traditional methods, seems to have reappraised its role in SLT, thus producing interesting reference works such as Krawutschke (1989).

The situation is now changing in Spain, where—in the light of the integrated approaches— new voices are being raised for the re-introduction of translation exercises in L2 curricula (Mateo 1993; Valdeón 1995a; Pegenaute 1996). However, there still was a gap to be filled given the scarcity of monographs on the subject. In this sense, Palacios & Seoane's work is a truly welcome contribution that may well help turn a wasteland into a land of milk and honey.

The authors are fully conscious of the novelty of their publication and have accordingly devised a book comprising as many areas as possible, which does not imply their being thoroughly treated. In fact, the book addresses both Galician/Spanish-speaking students of English and EFL teachers and professionals in several clear-cut chapters, half of which written in Spanish whereas the other half is written in Galician.

After a short foreword (9-11) and a concise introduction (13-15), Chapter I (*Consejos prácticos sobre la traducción*) mainly addresses students facing translation for the first time. Thus, it provides them with short, useful tips always to be borne in mind before actually tackling the translation of a given text. They range from simple, common-sense pieces of advice (e.g. always read the whole text before translating it), through descriptions of the translator's workbench (dictionaries, grammar books, encyclopaedias, internet...) right to somewhat more technically-oriented questions (such as the concept of *skopos*). Consequently, even though the authors have tried to eliminate any theoretical connotation from the present chapter in order to make it easier for the untrained reader, functionalist translation theories can be found underlyingly. This only backs up our belief that translation, or any other research field, cannot be approached without a certain theoretical framework in mind.

Chapters II and III move on from theory into practice, offering the reader a series of texts for translation. Although still mainly aimed at the EFL student, the variety of texts, the incredible richness of styles and registers dealt with, not forgetting the perceptive comments provided, also make these two chapters compulsory reading for the EFL professional. In this sense, we believe that both in their aim and richness, these two chapters have a clear antecedent in Valdeón (1995b & 1997). Thus, both works provide the reader with an ample number of texts capable of challenging not only the young student but also the skilled translator. However, whereas Valdeón concentrates on service translation exclusively, Palacios and Seoane widen the spectrum by also offering translations into the student's L1, either Spanish or Galician. In fact, Chapter II (21-70) is fully devoted to this latter type and contains six texts to be translated into Spanish plus another five into Galician. On the other hand, Chapter III (71-110) focuses on service translation and contains an equally rich choice of texts, out of which five have Spanish as the source language whereas the remaining six are to be translated from Galician.

As could be expected, both chapters manage to cover most styles and registers due to the enormous range of text genres presented (educational, epistolary, commercial, religious, scientific and technical, literary, journalistic, legal and administrative... not forgetting the language of advertising and cooking recipes). The scheme followed is always the same: first, the authors introduce each text in a section entitled *Preparación para la traducción*, in which they deal with such aspects as the aim of the text,

its division, its main grammatical features, the register and vocabulary it presents, etc., and which could therefore be regarded as a kind of very detailed translation commission. Then, the source text is presented, followed by what the authors consider a possible target text. Lastly, the translational decisions and strategies adopted in the latter are clearly explained under the heading *Notas*. It should be mentioned that such notes are written in Galician whenever the translation takes place either from or into that language. In any case, this section, helpful as it is, would have been much clearer had the source text elements been marked to which the notes refer.

Finally, the reader reaches Chapter IV (*Actividades de carácter práctico para la enseñanza y aprendizaje de la traducción*), addressed not so much to students as to EFL professionals and practitioners who already use (or might consider using) translation as an auxiliary teaching technique in their classes. As could be derived from the title, the authors present the reader with a selection of useful methodological proposals invariably centred around, and based upon, the very concept of translation.

Altogether, sixteen different activities are described and explained in great detail, always specifying aims, level and procedure, complemented with samples showing some of the materials referred to in the actual description. These exercises are of the most various sorts and involve experimenting with texts of almost every genre, type and size (from simple phrases and even film titles up to full-length texts), so that the widest possible perspective on translation could unfold to the inexperienced student while his/her L2 (and, why not, also L1) competence greatly improves. Several comments should, however, be made at this point.

First of all, these activities are ordered somewhat chaotically unless there is some underlying ordering principle that escapes our understanding. Given that the level they apply to is always specified, we believe it would have been quite helpful if they had been ordered following an either decreasing or (more likely) increasing degree of difficulty.

Secondly, we cannot help remarking that the authors, following the balanced and highly diplomatic linguistic policy they have hitherto shown, describe, explain and exemplify the first eight activities in Spanish, whereas Galician is the language chosen in so doing for the remaining eight. Even if we perfectly understand this decision, given the context this work has come out of, we believe that the result would have been equally rich (and would certainly reach a wider readership) had this last chapter been fully written in Spanish, which —needless to say— would not preclude the possibility of adding Galician examples for each activity.

Thirdly, even if we duly acknowledge the value of each and every activity described in this chapter, there are some of them which might be considered more appropriate for a translation-oriented course rather than for an EFL one. More specifically, we are referring to activities No. 2 (*Reflexionando sobre la traducción*, which promotes discussion and debate about the very essence of translation) and No. 9 (*Traduciendo signos*, involving the translation of all kinds of [road, wall...] signs). It is our belief that translation is a great help to be used as an auxiliary technique in foreign language teaching, but under no circumstances should any of these courses be based upon it, unless we want to come back to “the good olden grammar-translation days”. Therefore, translation should always be regarded as a means, not as an end in itself.

Lastly, we believe that the authors do not go far enough in that they seem to undervalue the potentials of oral translation or interpretation. They do include an activity (*Escoitar e traducir*) simply consisting in orally paraphrasing (in L1) the contents of a text someone has just read aloud. Palacios & Seoane mention this could provide good training for further consecutive and simultaneous translation activities, but they never reach this point and therefore miss an area which is, in our view, well worth researching and practising in class.

However, these limitations, perfectly understandable in such a small work (it barely contains 180 pages), are more than made up for with the wide range of topics dealt with (and readers addressed), the rather shockingly (but elegantly) simple language used (which proves that the authors really master teaching) and the useful glossary and list of references contained at the end of the book, which makes this work a real must in every library.

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