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Translation and Own-language Activities



Philip Kerr

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107645783

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First published 2014

Printed in Italy by Rotolito Lombarda S.p.A.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Kerr, Philip, 1959-

Translation and own-language activities / Philip Kerr.

pages cm. -- (Cambridge handbooks for language teachers)

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-107-64578-3 (pbk.)

1. English language--Study and teaching--Foreign speakers. 2. Second language acquisition. 3. Translating and interpreting--Study and teaching.

I. Title.

PE1128.A2K417 2014

428.2'4--dc23

2013040424

ISBN 978-1-107-64578-3 Paperback

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Contents

	Thanks	viii
	Acknowledgements	ix
1	Introduction	1
	Why this book?	1
	Translation and translating	2
	Traditional reasons against using the learner's own language	2
	The role of the learner's own language	5
	A brief history of own-language use in language teaching	8
	Own-language and other language policies	9
	Multilingual contexts	10
	Translation and teacher education	11
	Suggestions for using this book	12
	Suggestions for further reading	12
2	Techniques	17
	2.1 Sandwiching	21
	2.2 Giving instructions	22
	2.3 Own-language moments	26
	2.4 Language monitoring	30
	2.5 Recasting	32
	2.6 Own-language mirroring	34
	2.7 Wall displays	36
3	Attitudes	37
	3.1 Questionnaire: own-language use in the classroom	39
	3.2 Language rules	41
	3.3 Same but different	44
	3.4 Learn my language	46
4	Tools	47
	4.1 Using online dictionaries 1 (editing students' own work)	50
	4.2 Using online dictionaries 2 (talking about news stories)	51
	4.3 Using online translation tools 1 (word lists)	53
	4.4 Using online translation tools 2 (texts)	55
	4.5 Comparing online translation tools	57
	4.6 Comparing dictionaries 1	59
	4.7 Dictionary cross-checking	62

Translation and Own-language Activities

4.8	Comparing dictionaries 2	64
4.9	Using word processor tools	65
4.10	Using a search engine as a corpus check	67
4.11	Word cards	69
4.12	Using monolingual tools: making a glossary	71
4.13	Dual language resources exchange	72
5	Reverse translation	75
5.1	Broken telephone reverse translation	77
5.2	Fold-over reverse translations	78
5.3	Delayed reverse translations	80
5.4	Gapped reverse translation	82
5.5	Model texts	84
5.6	Grammar or vocabulary revision with reverse translation	86
5.7	Reverse translating using an online translation tool	87
5.8	Reverse translating English as a Lingua Franca	90
6	Language skills	93
6.1	Preparing students for a text (content)	96
6.2	Preparing students for a text (vocabulary)	98
6.3	Bilingual word clouds	99
6.4	Bilingual parallel texts (reading and listening)	101
6.5	Note taking and summarising	102
6.6	Jumbled glossaries	103
6.7	Selecting appropriate translations for words or phrases in a text	104
6.8	Translation problems	106
6.9	Intensive reading (or listening) with translation	107
6.10	Mixed language listening	109
6.11	Text expansion	110
6.12	Watching videos with English and own-language subtitles	112
6.13	Translations and dubbed videos	113
6.14	Writing subtitles	114
6.15	Bilingual role plays	115
6.16	Assisted listening	117
6.17	Assisted translation	118
7	Language focus	121
7.1	Words for free (true friends)	124
7.2	Words for free (international words)	126
7.3	False friends	127
7.4	False friends revision	129
7.5	High-frequency English words	131
7.6	High-frequency English words (collocations)	133
7.7	Translating concordanced words	134
7.8	Street English	136

7.9	Bilingual word associations	138
7.10	Bilingual drilling	139
7.11	Word-for-word translation	140
7.12	Typical mistakes	142
7.13	Homework workshop	143
7.14	Thème d'imitation	145
Appendix		147
1	A seminar for teacher training courses (pre-service)	147
2	A seminar for teacher development courses (in-service)	151
3	Classroom observation task	154
Index		157

by sudden flashes of theoretical insight. For learners, a greater awareness of themselves as learners may lead to a re-evaluation of preferences and learning strategies, and the first three activities in this chapter are intended to bring the question of own-language use to the foreground. At the same time, a more developed understanding of the learning tools that are available to them (e.g. dictionaries, websites) may also result in a shift in attitude. These will be the subject of Chapter 4. Equally importantly, it should not be too difficult to demonstrate that activities which involve the students' own language can provide real learning gains, and that they do not need to be of the dry and dusty 'Who-will-translate-the-next-line?' approach.

The appendix of this book contains three activities which are intended to address the issue of own-language use in the context of teacher training and teacher development contexts. These should be considered as only a starting point. Teachers, like learners, tend to change their practices slowly and incrementally, and it is probably through the process of trying things out, of finding what 'works', that development takes place most lastingly. Alongside such work in the training room, teachers should be encouraged to experiment with techniques and activities in their classrooms piecemeal (especially the basic techniques in Chapter 2).

Institutional constraints and policies cannot, however, be neglected. Senior members of staff, such as department heads, who have spent a lifetime believing that English-only is the only way, will be very resistant to change. Small-scale action research programmes will perhaps be one way of moving towards change, but, at some point, institutional educational policies will need to be examined and revised. There is nothing so hard to change as common-sense, received wisdom, even when it is misinformed!

The last activity in this chapter is rather different from the others, which encourage learners to reflect on the respective uses of English and their own languages in their learning of English. This activity is intended for use in classes where there is no shared language other than English, and provides students with the opportunity to teach a little of their own language to the rest of the class. To do so, they will only be able to use English.

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Translation and Own-language Activities

- Students can use this technique when they have used online translation or when they are checking their own writing.

Example

- *I let myself be surprised* (50,400 hits)
- *if something else is for me* (0 hits)
- *presented after his number one hit* (0 hits)
- *sad to have to leave the show* (7 hits)
- *the casting format show* (0 hits)
- *the written especially for her song* (4 hits)
- *wants to make a musical education* (0 hits)

Multilingual contexts: see page 10

This activity can be used with both Type A and Type B classes. The technique can be demonstrated using examples of language from the students' own work.

5.5 Model texts

Outline	Students study a model text for an examination written task.
Level	B1+
Time	45 minutes (depending on text length)
Preparation	Find or write a model answer for an examination writing task. Translate this into the students' own language. You can find model answers to writing tasks for Cambridge English Language Assessment exams (e.g. FCE, CAE) in many coursebooks that prepare students for these exams, as well as dedicated websites.

Procedure

- 1 Draw students' attention to the task (in the example using German translation on page 85 (Figure 5.4) it is replying to a job advertisement), identify the written genre that is required, and hand out the model answer in English.
- 2 Draw students' attention to the organisation of ideas and paragraphs in the model.
- 3 Draw students' attention to useful phrases in the model. In the example below, these would include *I am writing in response to your ...*, *I am currently working as ...*, *I am interested in the position ...*, *I have included a copy of ...*, etc.
- 4 Take away the English version of the model and hand out the translation. In pairs or small groups, students must translate this into English.
- 5 When the students have finished, or when they have got as far as they can, let them see the original again. They should look for differences between the original and their version. For each version, they should decide (a) if their version was acceptable (b) which version was better.

Notes

Studying a text in this way can help learners to memorise chunks of it. In many exams, it is useful to have sets of useful phrases for particular written genres stored in the memory.

I would like to thank Roger Marshall for this idea.

Original text

Most of us are taught to believe that lying is wrong. But it seems that everybody tells lies – not big lies, but what we call ‘white lies’. If we believe that lying is wrong, why do we do it? Most of the time, people have very good reasons for lying. For example, they might want to protect a friendship or someone’s feelings. So, when do we lie and who to?

Figure 6.4: From Richards, J. C. with Hull, J. & Proctor, S. (2005) *Interchange 2 Third Edition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 111

Variation

A version of this activity provides learners with listening practice.

- 1 Prepare an anecdote or short story that you think would interest the class. It is not necessary to script this, but it would be helpful to make a few notes.
- 2 Tell the class the anecdote or story using the students’ language.
- 3 Tell the class that they will hear the story again, this time in English. Tell them that there will be certain factual differences between this version and the version that they heard previously. Tell the story, but include a small number of factual differences (five or six are usually enough). Speak naturally; use paraphrases if students do not understand any unfamiliar words or phrases, and repeat key sections, if necessary.
- 4 Organise the class into pairs. Give the students time to compare their ideas before conducting feedback with the whole class.

Multilingual contexts: see page 10

This activity cannot be used if the teacher does not share a language, other than English, with the students.

Look at the sentences below. In each sentence, one word looks like a Spanish word, but its meaning in English is very different. Find the words.

- 1 He has to support six children.
- 2 I didn't realise that it was important.
- 3 She was very embarrassed when she made a mistake.
- 4 That centre assists the poor.
- 5 The doctor wanted to know if she was constipated.
- 6 The student went to a lecture about linguistics.
- 7 You can get that book out of a good library.

Key

support ≠ *soportar*; realise (*realize*) ≠ *realizar*; embarrassed ≠ *embarazada*; assist ≠ *asistir*; constipated ≠ *constipado*; lecture ≠ *lectura*; library ≠ *librería*

Figure 7.2: False friends in English and Spanish

Multilingual contexts: see page 10

This activity cannot be used with Type A classes. It can be used in Type B classes if there is a language which all the students share, even if the teacher does not speak this language. It is usually very easy to research false friends.

- seminar for teacher training courses (pre-service), 147–150
- techniques
 - incorporating into teaching style, 18–19, 38
 - for language skills development, 93
 - teaching styles and, 17–18
 - usefulness of information about, 12
- techniques, explanations of
 - giving instructions, 22–25, 93, 122
 - language monitoring, 30–31, 93
 - own-language mirroring, 34–35, 122
 - own-language moments, 26–29, 93
 - recasting, 15, 30, 32–33, 122
 - sandwiching, 15, 21, 22–23, 93, 122
 - wall displays and posters, 23–24, 36, 122
- technology, 7 *see also* online tools; online tools activities
- Text expansion, 110–11
- Thème d’imitation, 145–46
- thinking in another language, 3–4, 5, 149, 152
- tools
 - dictionaries, 2, 7, 47–49
 - digital literacy, 14, 47
 - free language learning programmes, 7
 - glossaries, 93–94, 103
 - monolingual, bilingual or bilingualized tools, 7, 14, 47–48, 122
 - online tools, 2, 7, 47–49
 - print resources, 47–48, 49
 - projectors and slide shows, 49
 - smartphone apps, 2, 7, 47
 - translation tools, online, 2, 7, 48, 87–89
 - usefulness of information about, 12
 - video and multimedia, 94
 - whiteboards, interactive, 49
- tools activities
 - Comparing dictionaries, 59–61, 64
 - Comparing online translation tools, 57–58
 - Dictionary cross-checking, 62–63
 - Dual language resources exchange, 72–74
 - Using a search engine as a corpus check, 67–68
 - Using monolingual tools: making a glossary, 71
 - Using online dictionaries, 50–52