

Translation in the language classroom: Multilingualism, diversity, collaboration

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ABSTRACT

EN The aim of this article is to discuss the ways in which translation can be used to foster multilingual competence and intercultural awareness in the foreign language classroom. While translation was described as a vital skill for foreign language learners in a European Commission study (2013), it has also been criticised for hindering the objectives of communicative approaches. This article draws on a number of examples and strategies to examine the potential of translation and, ultimately, to demonstrate how translation can play a key role in language teaching. The translation activities that have been selected place emphasis on collaboration and are designed to challenge cultural stereotypes, as well as monolingual and monocultural assumptions. Translation is presented both as a skill in itself and as a versatile pedagogical tool to improve learners' confidence, critical thinking, and intercultural competence, both in curricular and in extra-curricular settings.

Key words: TRANSLATION, MULTILINGUALISM, COLLABORATION, ITALIAN PEDAGOGY

ES El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo la traducción puede fomentar la competencia multilingüe y el conocimiento intercultural en el aula de lenguas extranjeras. En un estudio de la Comisión Europea (2013), se ha descrito la traducción como una herramienta vital para los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras, aunque también se le ha criticado por interferir con los objetivos de una enseñanza comunicativa de la lengua. Este artículo recurre a numerosos ejemplos y estrategias para examinar el potencial pedagógico de la traducción y demostrar que puede tener un papel central en la enseñanza de lenguas. Las actividades de traducción seleccionadas se centran en la colaboración y han sido diseñadas para cuestionar los estereotipos culturales y las suposiciones monolingües y monoculturales. De este modo, la traducción se presenta tanto como una habilidad en sí y también como una herramienta pedagógica versátil que permite mejorar la confianza de los alumnos, su razonamiento analítico y su competencia intercultural en ambientes escolares y extracurriculares.

Palabras clave: TRADUCCIÓN, MULTILINGÜISMO, COLABORACIÓN, PEDAGOGÍA ITALIANA

IT L'obiettivo di questo articolo è discutere i modi in cui la traduzione può essere impiegata per favorire la competenza multilingue e la consapevolezza interculturale nella classe di lingua straniera. Sebbene in uno studio della Commissione Europea del 2013 la traduzione sia stata definita come un'abilità essenziale per i discenti di una lingua straniera, è stata anche criticata perché contrasterebbe gli obiettivi dell'approccio comunicativo. In questo articolo, oltre ad esaminare il potenziale della traduzione attraverso numerosi esempi e strategie, si vuole dimostrare come la traduzione può ricoprire un ruolo chiave nell'insegnamento della lingua straniera. Le attività di traduzione che sono state selezionate enfatizzano la collaborazione e sono state create per mettere in discussione gli stereotipi culturali, così come assunti monolingue e monoculturali. La traduzione è presentata sia come abilità in sé sia come strumento pedagogico versatile che migliora la sicurezza, il pensiero critico e la competenza interculturale degli studenti in ambiti curriculari ed extra-curriculari.

Parole chiave: TRADUZIONE, MULTILINGUISMO, COLLABORAZIONE, PEDAGOGIA ITALIANA

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1. Introduction

How can translation be used to foster multilingualism? What do we mean by *translation* in the language classroom? What kind of strategies and activities can be employed to build on and enhance students' multilingual competence in the globalised world? By attempting to overcome the dichotomy between grammar-based and communicative approaches, this article explores the three-way relationship between translation, language teaching, and multilingualism, in a perspective that encourages intercultural competences.

The translation-based activities proposed in the present article place translation at the centre of the language classroom and highlight its potential to develop (inter)cultural and linguistic competences. By arguing for the specific pedagogical value of translation in the language classroom, we stress the importance of challenging negative attitudes toward the use of the students' first language in foreign language teaching. Furthermore, when engaging with some uses of translation in the language classroom through specific examples (see Sections 3 and 4), we shift the focus from the acquisition of the target language through a strictly monolingual model to the broader linguistic competences that students can acquire through multilingual practices.

The multilingual nature of translation is particularly relevant to our discussion; far from being limited to the relationship between source and target language, the translation process can encompass translanguaging practices including code-switching, code-mixing, and crossing, which are used to create meaning across and beyond languages (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). Our discussion will show how, as a translanguaging and trans-cultural communicative act, translation is an effective pedagogical tool which should play a key role in the contemporary foreign language classroom.

In order to demonstrate this role, it is important to define what we mean by translation, and which uses of translation we chose to focus on for the purposes of this article. Throughout history, the understanding of translation has evolved from a purely linguistic phenomenon to a process which is deeply embedded in a socio-cultural context. With the so-called cultural turn in Translation Studies (Bassnett & Lefevre, 1990), the emphasis shifted from translation as a product, to the historical, economic, social, cultural and political conditions in which translation is performed. As Even-Zohar (1990) explained in his groundbreaking work: "Translation is no longer a phenomenon whose nature and borders are given once and for all, but an activity dependant on the relations within a certain cultural system" (p. 51). In the present article, we refer to translation not as a practice aiming to achieve equivalence between two monolingual systems, but rather as a process which creates a productive, dynamic environment and which encourages movement among languages, within and beyond the source language and the target language. Among the many "modes and variety" of translation, as Pym (2015, p. 1) puts it, this article will focus on some meaningful examples that show the intrinsic multilingual value that translation can add to the language classroom in two different contexts. In particular, we will show how translation is vital for fostering multilingual competence in learners. As a highly flexible pedagogical tool, translation promotes collaboration by giving students an opportunity to brainstorm, to select and rank ideas, and to evaluate and negotiate meanings. These activities, which are traditionally referred to as being suitable for advanced-level students, are here described as applicable to a diverse range of levels and teaching settings which draw on students' own linguistic resources and critical thinking. The concept of cognition, which we borrow from the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2005), helps to highlight the importance of such activities: translating is in itself a highly cognitively engaging practice and one which facilitates unique learning processes. Whilst the central task in translation-centred teaching is often the quest for language equivalence, we argue that shifting the focus on broader issues—such as register and style—shows how translation activities can benefit language learners at all levels and in different settings.

Consequently, a study by the European Commission (2013) lamented translation's "marginal status in language learning at present" since translation is a valuable skill that should be fostered in language learners. In this collection of essays, translating is described "as a mode of language use that can and should be learned in addition to the other four" (pp. 1-2), therefore equating translation to the traditional language skills of reading, speaking, writing, and listening. The document also highlights the strong connection between multilingualism and translation, drawing attention to "how learners will use their language skills in a multilingual world" (p. 2). In particular, it points out that translation should be seen as one of the mediating activities that are mentioned in the CEFR and that learners should develop (p. 2). A central research question that this publication asks is: Can translation contribute to effective language learning? In our article, we would like to expand on this question by further investigating the relationship between translation and

multilingualism, which we argue is key to understanding the value and the potential of using translation in language learning. Accordingly, our research question is the following: How can we effectively use translation in the language classroom to foster multilingual competence?

Section 2 of this article offers an overview of the presence of translation in language teaching. In discussing different pedagogical models and uses of translation, we refer to some of the critical contributions that challenged a view of translation as a means for acquiring grammatical rules. This section shows that whilst translation has often been associated with grammar-based methods – which are seen as irreconcilable with the communicative approach – this association has been challenged by scholars who discussed its potential for encouraging language interaction, multilingualism, diversity, and collaborative learning.

In this perspective, the two following sections illustrate a range of activities revolving around translation which can be used in language teaching. In Section 3 of this article, a collaborative translation workshop is presented as a learning context which overturns the power dynamics traditionally in place in the language classroom. Whilst the teacher is normally perceived as the figure in charge of a knowledge and the student as a passive recipient, in the collaborative translation classroom the student is in charge of negotiating the meaning and the interpretation of the text. Similarly, collaborative translation challenges the idea of translation as a solitary act, as well as a solitary learning experience, to be carried out in silence with a dictionary. The aim of such activities is to reflect on a text collaboratively in order to develop a set of skills that refer to a wider, cross-linguistic competence.

Section 4 presents a number of classroom activities aiming to challenge stereotypical representations of nation states and languages, and encouraging students to question the relationship between dominant languages and cultures versus minority languages, dialects, and translingual speakers. These examples show that translation is a skill that in turn fosters a wide range of competences, going beyond grammar and linguistic accuracy and building a broader linguistic awareness. The activities that are described centre on exercises of manipulation and transformation, which we argue to be key to promoting critical thinking while moving across languages and cultures.

The selection of examples has been guided by the intention to show a wide range of possible uses of translation in language teaching. Whilst the activities described were originally designed for university-level students of Italian in a British university, it is crucial to stress that that these translation-based activities may be adapted or to other curricula or teaching contexts. Moreover, as we discuss in the following pages, the teaching settings were not homogenous. The collaborative translation workshops were optional classes open to students from all faculties, while the classroom activities described in Section 4 were embedded in the Italian language modules of Modern Languages students. In this regard, this article opens up further questions about how to include translation in university-level language teaching. On the one hand, the presence of formal assessments measuring intended learning outcomes, among other things, needs to be considered when incorporating translation activities into a language curriculum. On the other hand, extra-curricular settings such as the collaborative translation workshops should be planned in such a way that they provide students with an opportunity for deeper reflection on the language learning process.

Finally, an underlying, recurring theme of this article concerns the role of the teacher in translation-based language teaching. We argue that while acting as facilitators, when engaging students in translation activities teachers also create a multilingual environment in which students are encouraged to make the most of their linguistic competence.

2. Translation in language teaching: an argument for multilingualism

Before offering some practical examples of how translation can be effectively used in language teaching to promote multilingualism, it is important to provide a brief overview of the changing attitudes towards translation in foreign language pedagogy. We will also outline some of the critical contributions which are relevant to our discussion, and which shape our definition of translation.

Translation has played a key role in foreign language teaching and learning throughout history. One of the earliest language teaching methods is commonly identified in the Grammar-translation method, an eighteenth-century adaptation of the Classical Method, which was used for teaching Greek and Latin. At a time when foreign language acquisition was seen as an intellectual discipline, the main goal of the Grammar-translation method was not communication but translation between L1 and L2 as a way to learn grammar through a contrastive approach (Byram & Hu, 2013, p. 288). Although it should be noted that the Grammar-translation method was not the only language teaching method to be used in the eighteenth century (Pym &

Ayvazyan, 2017), it is undeniable that translation and grammar were taught in combination as an essential component of language learning.

From the 1970s, the prominence of accuracy over fluency and the focus on structural elements of the language (i.e. grammar and vocabulary) are called into question by the communicative approach to language teaching. This new approach shifted the emphasis to the functional aspects of the language which were seen as crucial for developing communicative competence in learners (Littlewood, 1981). Over the course of the twentieth century, foreign language teaching methodologies promoting the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom such as the Direct Method and, later on, the Audio-lingual Method, also gained considerable popularity (Richard & Rogers, 2001).

As a result, the grammar-translation method has been dismissed and translation itself has been highly criticised. The main argument used against translation was that, by keeping the focus on their first language, learners would not experience the consistent exposure the target language that was crucial to the communicative approach. Not only was language interference perceived as a potential risk for learners who were engaged in translation activities, but translation was also seen as having little relevance to the main four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Malmkjær, 2010a, p. 185).

Some scholars, however, believe that translation can and should still play a role in foreign language acquisition. Carreres (2014) explores the validity of using translation both as a means and as an end in the language classroom, challenging the “belief that learning to translate and learning a foreign language are significantly different activities” (p. 123)². According to Venuti (2016), both translation as an activity and the academic discipline of Translation Studies are still largely misunderstood in academic and educational circles, and “prevalent notions of translatability conceive of translation as a one-to-one correspondence with the source text, reducing it to a process of mechanical substitution” (p. 5). This is particularly true in language teaching. Although the focus nowadays is less on linguistic and grammatical equivalence and more on translation as a skill in itself, there is still a need to stress the effectiveness of translation to develop broader inter-linguistic and intercultural skills beyond the contrastive dimension that is emphasised in language teaching. Guy Cook (2010) describes translation as an act that happens naturally in the brains of language learners and that should not be repressed, but rather understood. In his reassessment of translation as a useful pedagogical tool, Cook maintains that learning to cope with first-language interferences and code-switching are vital skills for language learners. In our globalised world, and in an increasingly multilingual society, Cook argues that being able to move between languages and cultures is of vital importance, and that language learners should be trained to be competent translators. Similarly, González-Davies (2017) proposes an Integrated Plurilingual Approach (IPA), in which translation is implemented “to advance [...] plurilingual communicative competence (PCC), defined as “an appropriate use of natural plurilingual practices (e.g., translation, code-switching or an informed use of the L1) to advance inter-linguistic and intercultural communication” (p. 125).

Promoting multilingualism is arguably one of the founding principles of foreign language teaching, as well as a strategic priority for the European Union, which, soon after its establishment in 1993, listed “proficiency in three Community Languages” as one of the core educational objectives (European Commission, 1995, pp. 47–49). However, a number of scholars have highlighted that the monolingual ethos of many university language programmes might work against this (Kelly, 2015). The target-language only approach has the effect of discouraging contact between different languages, including translation activities, thus turning the classroom into a monolingual space where only the target language is used. In his critique of monolingual pedagogies and practices, May (2014) refers to the “pathologizing of language transfer, mixed systems, convergence, and the interpenetration of systems, which are all central to language interaction in the ecology of multilingualism” (p. 8). The goal of a communicative approach to language teaching is to develop fluency in learners through extensive exposure to the target language from a reliable source, embodied by the teacher. In this context, the teacher becomes the source of an ideal authentic language to which learners should aspire. The *native speaker ideal* in foreign language teaching has been criticised both from a political and a pedagogical point of view. For instance, Holliday (2005) talks about the ideology of *native-speakerism* as the “established belief that ‘native-speaker’ teachers represent a ‘Western culture’ from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology” (p. 5). Chavez (2003) also suggested that “one of the paradoxes of a strictly monolingual classroom is the idea that the goal of

² In the recent *Mundos en Palabras* (2018), Carreres, Noriega-Sánchez, and Caldach have designed a textbook that integrates the theory and practice of translation with activities for advanced learners of Spanish.

bilingualism is to be achieved via monolingualism” (p. 166), and spoke about the “inevitability of diglossia in the classroom” (p. 194) due to the fact that language learners use their first language in mental speech and self-talk.

Furthermore, various scholars have pointed out that the native speaker model is discouraging for language learners, since it relies on unrealistic expectations which can generate frustration and a sense of failure (Kelly, 2015). The notion that in order to empower language learners we need to place emphasis on their multilingual competence, rather than on their target-language inadequacy, is not new. Already in 1999 Cook suggested that language learners should be viewed as “multicompetent language users rather than as deficient native speakers” (p. 185) and that language teaching should use methods that acknowledge the students’ native language as a resource rather than an obstacle. However, recent surveys of the literature on language teaching reveal predominantly negative attitudes toward the use of translation as a pedagogical tool, mainly due to the notion that, when engaging in translation activities, learners are constrained by their native language and therefore unable to develop communicative fluency (Kelly & Bruen, 2014).

Although translation is normally seen as the opposite of spontaneous, creative language use, we can argue that translation activities have the potential to foster learners’ independent use of the language while enhancing their perceived self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) first described the concept of self-efficacy as a fundamental motivator of human action: “Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs of personal efficacy” (p. 2). Applying this notion to the context of language learning, Conti (2015) argues that, despite being a “powerful catalyst of learner motivation and resilience” (n.p.n.) self-efficacy remains the most neglected motivational factor in the foreign language classroom. Going back to Venuti’s discussion of current attitudes to teaching translation, the author explains that while translation implies the inevitable loss of the relations between source-language features and source-culture contexts, it also brings “a gain of comparable relations between translating-language features and translating-culture contexts” (p. 8). In working towards reconstructing those relations between source and target languages and cultures, learners can develop skills and abilities that go beyond grammatical equivalence and acquire confidence in their multilingual and multicultural competence.

Finally, as illustrated in the next section, although translation is commonly perceived as a solitary activity, recent studies emphasise its collaborative nature and the different forms of negotiation that are involved in the process (Cordingley & Frigau Manning, 2017). The collaborative dimension of translation and its pedagogical value for the foreign language classroom are particularly evident if we consider Vygotsky’s (1978) early definition of the *zone of proximal development* as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). By engaging in translation activities as collaborative practices, language students can work within their zone of proximal development and draw on their collective knowledge to enhance their awareness of the forms and functions of language.

3. Collaborative translation workshops as a tool for language education

A series of workshops of Italian and English language using collaborative translation are presented here as an example of how translation may be employed in the language classroom in a perspective that encourages multilingualism (Panzarella & Wall, 2016; Wall & Panzarella, 2017).³ The element of collaboration is key to emphasizing dynamics of negotiation present when moving across languages. In particular, the central activity of each session—the conversation translation—reveals itself as a space for reflection in which students are invited to build on their global knowledge as well as their (multi)language background. Interaction is a key element of this activity, encouraging “students’ participation and dialogue” (González-Davies, 2004, p. 2). Collaborative translation should therefore be regarded as a process-oriented practice in which the contribution provided by each student is essential, as well as the negotiation between them.

³ These workshops were organized as part of the “Collaborative Translation: a Model for Inclusion” one-year project, which was co-lead by researchers at the University of Warwick (UK) and Monash University (Australia) and funded by the Monash-Warwick Alliance. Two series of workshops—one for learners for Italian and one for learners of English—were conceived and delivered by Gioia Panzarella and Georgia Wall (University of Warwick). As part of the research, the students’ feedback was collected, and students consented for it to be used as part of the research. Further details on the workshops can be found in Panzarella and Wall (2016) and Wall and Panzarella (2017).

In this context, defining the role and prerogatives of the instructor of the session is of critical importance. The moment of translation is shaped as an occasion in which learners can brainstorm, select and rank proposals, and evaluate options on the basis of their own competence and experience. In this sense, whilst considering that the instructor and students are collaborators who both contribute to the conversation translation, the central task of the instructor is to mobilize the above-mentioned practices. The teacher is therefore a facilitator of the session, instigating practices of collaborative translation with a range of verbal, but also visual and mimic aids. Among the questions collected during the workshops are the following: “Would you use this term in this context?”, “I feel that I would not use this term in this context, what would you say?”, “What would you call the person whose job is to...”, “What would you say works best, this term or that term?” For example, teachers may guide students by suggesting parallels or highlighting significant elements provided by the text, but not anticipating possible answers unless it is clear that it is only as a suggestion. All in all, as a facilitator, the teacher’s main task is to help students develop a broad language sensitivity.

Among the collaborators, students are given a role of responsibility: they are in charge of making translation decisions, and are designated as the collaborator who has the ultimate linguistic competence: in a collaboration perspective that values the competence of each collaborator, the instructor covers the language that the students are learning, which is the source language of the text to be translated, whilst students master the target language of the translation. In other words, students are asked to play a role in the class setting that traditionally is expected to be played by the teacher, that of the authority figure. For example, Balboni (2013) states that translation “should be carried out under the supervision of an expert, i.e., the teacher, who intervenes when necessary by filling in the gaps in students’ knowledge, thus acting like a resource that they can draw on” (p. 182).⁴ The collaborative translation workshops emphasize that the teacher is certainly an expert and a tool that students will use, because of their role of facilitator of the session, but also that the teacher’s role is not to fill in the gaps in the students’ knowledge, as Balboni would put it (p. 182). On the contrary, the role of the teacher is to make students aware of their ability to provide results and to train students to explore their own strategies. Students’ questions or doubts should not be seen as gaps that the instructor is responsible for filling, simply because the instructor is not the collaborator who is asked to contribute as far as the target language of the translation is concerned.

However, referring to the languages that are used in class as two separate and defined entities—one source language and one target language—would be misleading. Although students work on a text in the language that they are learning, they are encouraged to conduct the conversation translation in their vehicular language(s), to make sure that they can work as much as possible on issues such as register, nuances of meaning, and idioms. First, this is central to the aims of collaborative translation: the aim is not to reach a final and definite version of the text, but to train the students’ ability to negotiate meaning and reflect on the text collaboratively. Second, this choice challenges the necessity of using the student talking time uniquely in the target language, as the conversation translation activity prioritizes a negotiation among collaborators that can be achieved by communicating in the linguistic code that suits the students the most. There should not be overlapping with a speaking activity: the aim of the collaborative translation is to negotiate a meaning, which according to the Framework is a far too advanced task to be conducted in the language that students are learning, especially at beginner level (Council of Europe, 2001).

For this reason, working with a group of beginners has shown that students with a more advanced level of the language are not necessarily more at ease at translating collaboratively. In this sense, the selection of materials is in itself a tool that helps beginner students to approach texts that would not be suitable for translation at their level. Graphic elements guide students to identify key aspects such as the text typology and the register. Student are asked to use a set of skills that are not necessarily acquired in the language classroom, or at least at beginner level: for example, in the workshops, a song, a newspaper article, and a literary text were chosen. Students are encouraged not to focus on a final output but instead to consider, evaluate and discuss various options. In terms of learners’ needs, such skills cross the learning of a specific language and provide levels of awareness that can be applied to the learning not only of modern languages, but awareness of their own language. This is what Balboni would define *language education*, which transcends the specific objectives of a single foreign language class by developing a set of skills that can be

⁴ “avviene condotta sotto la guida di un esperto, il docente, che quindi sopperisce laddove necessario alle lacune degli studenti diventando uno ‘strumento’ a loro disposizione” (our translation).

applied to other learning contexts—such as the students' first language or classical languages—as well as to real life.

The collaborative translation class becomes therefore a multilingual context, in which two—or more—languages are in dialogue and subject to comparisons and reflections by students. The emphasis is placed on acquiring awareness and the tools that can be applicable to language learning, as well as on raising the students' awareness of their translanguaging and intercultural being (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004). When negotiation of the translation has taken place within smaller groups, the sessions of the workshop conclude with a recap of the most controversial points of the translation, and by asking each group to identify some interesting points to be reported to the whole class. This practice allows students to demonstrate—and teachers to assess—the ability to navigate in multiple languages. This set of competences is central to the class; thus, developing such competences becomes a priority.

Finally, considering the way in which this workshop has been conceived, it is crucial to establish that students are not requested to produce a written translation, which would force them to make a definitive choice of the words and phrasing. An output that would suit more the aims of the activity would be a commentary that highlights problematic word choices, or issues that students have discussed by exploring the various options considered and the positions of the collaborators on various proposals. This exercise—which would also function as a means of assessment—would therefore reflect the aim of the session: not a final output of translation (or grammatically accurate output, as it is often the case in more traditional uses of translation in language learning), but a reflective practice on elements of the text such as register, format, idioms, synonyms, and most importantly in what ways the negotiation between the collaborators has contributed to the development of ideas, highlighting the input of various collaborators and the necessity of asking for the expertise of the other members. In this sense, a further step towards an assessment would be to establish descriptors that may illustrate the depth and breadth of reflexivity that emerges from the students' conversations, both with the teacher and among themselves.

4. Using translation in the language classroom: multilingual competence and intercultural awareness

While the translation workshops described above place emphasis on translation as a process, rather than a final output, when translation is taught as part of a university language course, there are other considerations at play. First and foremost, students taking part in language modules are assessed through formative and summative tasks, therefore their learning outcomes need to be measured. This section aims to show several ways in which translation can be used as an effective and versatile pedagogical tool in the language classroom, by illustrating how several activities can enhance students' overall language proficiency, their reading comprehension and writing skills, as well as their critical skills and intercultural awareness.

The following translation activities that took place in language classes aimed at beginners, intermediate or advanced students studying Italian as part of their degree in a British university. While there is an existing body of scholarship focusing on the pedagogical value of translation (e.g., Cook, 1999; González-Davies, 2004; Källkvist, 2013; Laviosa, 1997; Leonardi, 2010; Malmkjær, 2010b), a limited number of studies deal specifically with the use of translation in Modern Languages degrees (Malmkjær, 2010b; Pym 2015; Venuti, 2016). Existing studies tend to focus either on Translation Studies as an academic discipline, or on translation as a professional skill. It is worth clarifying that, in designing the following activities, translation was understood both as a language skill in itself and as a practice which, in turn, fosters a number of other fundamental skills. For this reason, these activities do not focus solely on developing grammar accuracy, nor are they intended to train professional translators. Rather, they promote overall fluency as well as inter-linguistic and intercultural competence, and therefore include translation both into and out of the first language of the students.

The studies dealing specifically with translation in foreign language teaching (e.g., Källkvist, 2013; Pym, 2017) are mostly aimed at measuring the efficacy of translation as a language learning tool, against other methods where only the target language is used. Our intention, on the contrary, is not to evaluate the opportunities and limitations of using translation to develop language accuracy, or to assess the effectiveness of specific translation activities. Rather, our objective is to illustrate the potential of translation to develop a broad range of skills that are fundamental to language graduates in the twenty-first century, and to stimulate further discussion around two key questions: how can we use translation to promote language students' multilingual sensitivity and challenge monolingual assumptions that may hinder the learning process?, and

how can translation contribute to the core objectives of a Modern Languages degree, such as fostering intercultural awareness and critical thinking?

One way in which translation activities can be used to challenge monolithic assumptions about languages, as well as notions of one-to-one equivalence in translation, is by presenting students with texts that problematize and interrogate the boundaries between languages. The author Jhumpa Lahiri is a good case in point. Born in London to Bengali Indian parents and raised in the United States, Lahiri gained literary recognition as an American fiction writer and was awarded the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. It was only in 2015, after having studied Italian only for a few years, that she made the conscious decision of continuing to write fiction exclusively in a language she unexpectedly fell in love with. Her first novel written in Italian, *In altre parole*, was published in 2015 and translated into English by Ann Goldstein in 2016. In it, Lahiri describes the paradoxically liberating experience of writing in a foreign language without the boundaries and limitations of English (the language in which she grew up) and Bengali (the language of her family). At the same time, in an extract published in *The New Yorker* (2015) she refers to the experience of writing in Italian as a form of “exile” and a “state of separation ... Italian belongs mainly to Italy, and I live on another continent, where one does not readily encounter it.”

We can see how this kind of material would be an excellent resource for intermediate to advanced language students in helping them to reflect on their own experience of moving between languages and cultures. As part of this activity, students would start by watching her interview with *La Repubblica*, an Italian new site, where the author speaks slowly in Italian and chooses her words carefully when describing what she calls her “love story” with the language⁵.

Students would then be presented with extracts from the Italian novel, which includes Lahiri’s (2016) questions and reflections on writing in a foreign language, such as: “What does it mean to give up a palace to live practically on the street, in a shelter so fragile? Maybe because from the creative point of view there is nothing so dangerous as security” (p. 85). When translating these extracts from Italian into English, students are effectively back-translating the text into the author’s native language. They can then compare their versions with the published English translation, and identify the differences and similarities in translation choices, with special attention to the differences between American English (the language of the translator) and British English. The experience of translating a text in which the author talks about her multilingual experience can foster debates on the broader implications of Lahiri’s writing, which challenges the traditional notion of the native speaker. For students at a lower level of proficiency, the translation of a whole extract can be replaced with other activities which break down the text in smaller chunks in order to build subject-specific vocabulary or focus on particular language structures. For instance, beginner students could be presented with simple sentences from the Italian original and a multiple choice of English translations, among which they would have to identify the published version and detect the differences in the other options.

Lahiri’s writing testifies to the fact that non-native speakers can achieve sufficient proficiency to express themselves creatively in the target language and can bring their unique contribution to it. This is an inspiring message for language learners, particularly multilingual ones, since Lahiri is clear about the fact that her pre-existing languages are not an obstacle to her language learning process; rather, they all contribute to her overall linguistic and literary competence. It follows that choosing this material for a translation class contributes to challenging what Kelly (2015) refers to as “the inherent monolingualism of language teaching” (p. 73), which is often complemented by monoculturalism. According to Kelly, this is reflected in the selection of teaching materials that are “commonly chosen to reject traditional or distinctive aspects of a target culture and in some cases may be purged of references to other cultures” (p. 73). As shown above, translation can be used to challenge this approach, particularly through the choice of texts that promote multilingualism and, in some cases, go even further by challenging the boundaries between languages.

In this regard, the concept of translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2013; Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012) can be helpful in providing an additional layer of linguistic and cultural diversity to translation activities. The majority of existing studies discussing the theoretical and practical implications of translanguaging in education focus on the specific context of bilingual or multilingual classrooms. However, as will be demonstrated in the following example, translanguaging can also be used in the foreign language classroom as a useful pedagogical tool (Cenoz, 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016). One definition which is particularly relevant

⁵ See interview in *La Repubblica*, 16/02/2015: <https://video.repubblica.it/rubriche/posto-che/reptv-news-jhumpa-lahiri-la-mia-storia-d-amore-con-l-italiano/192271/191233>

to our discussion refers to translanguaging as “the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy et al., 2015, p. 281). A clear example of this can be found in the work of Gabriella Kuruvilla, an author born in Milan in 1969 from Indian father and Italian mother. Let us consider an extract from her 2012 novel, *Milano, fin qui tutto bene*:

Mi a-go lef inna di morrows: io me ne vado domani. Ormai ho fatto il mio tempo, in questo spazio. Devo schiodarmi da qui. Qui è tutto e niente. Pure i confini di questa zona stanno dint o' core e dint a' cap da gent: no dint o' munno. (p. 141)

These are the words of Tony, a character born in Jamaica who moved from Naples to Milan and who speaks a mixture of Jamaican slang, standard Italian, and Neapolitan dialect. The novel is divided into four chapters, each introducing the reader to a different area of Milan through the eyes of different characters who inhabit the city. The urban space is portrayed as dynamic and multicultural, and the boundaries between languages and nations are intentionally blurred to reflect the complex identities of the characters. While there are noticeable challenges in translating this text into English, it is also a valuable resource to stimulate students' creativity and make them focus on the transcultural elements of translation.

From a linguistic point of view, this activity would be more suitable for advanced learners of Italian, who can work towards decoding the original language, identifying regional variations, and trying to extract the meaning from idiomatic expressions they might not be familiar with. Initially, students would be asked to think about the image of Italy which is portrayed in the novel, and on how this image can be conveyed to an English-speaking reader. Specifically, from the point of view of language and translation, the discussion would focus on how to recreate the original voice of the characters in English, thus developing specific translation competence going beyond language learning (González-Davies, 2004, p. 11). What translation strategies would they employ? Can we translate a foreign dialect with a corresponding regional variation of English? And if so, how do we ensure that the same relationships and power dynamics between the different languages of the original novel are reproduced? Looking at the extract above, we can identify a foreign dialect (Jamaican), and Italian dialect with a long-standing history and pre-existing connotations (Neapolitan) and standard Italian. Would students consider using footnotes to make English readers aware of the different connotations of these languages in the Italian context?

This discussion would precede the translation exercise and frame it in such a way that translation becomes a tool for understanding the diversity of Italian language and society. When translating this passage into English, students would be asked to pay special attention to the role of translanguaging. Why is the author using different languages, and what is she trying to achieve? Can we preserve this multilingualism in the English translation? Students would be encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire by employing any languages or regional variations they already know, thus relying on their multilingual competence. After having completed their translations, students would reflect on which features of the source text have been reproduced in their English versions, and which have been lost. By doing so, they would interrogate the process of selection and manipulation involved in translation, while also reflecting on the relationships between the languages, nations and cultures involved. Tymoczko (1999) uses the expression “metonymics of translation” when arguing that “translation is always a partial process” (p. 282), because it implies the selection of aspects of a source text which can never be reproduced in its entirety. Moreover, she highlights how “translated texts are written and read as representations of their source cultures” (p. 282). It follows that language teachers have a responsibility in how they represent the languages and the nations to which our students are exposed. The translation activity described above aims to engage students as critical and creative learners, by making them aware of the political and ideological implications of translanguaging, while also presenting them with a non-stereotypical image of a contemporary Italian city.

A last example of how translation can be used as a tool for promoting linguistic and intercultural awareness, also suitable for students at lower level, can be found in the graphic novel *Sotto il velo* (2016) (literally, “under the headscarf”) by Italian-Tunisian artist, Takoua Ben Mohamed. A young Muslim woman living in Italy, the protagonist talks about her experience navigating life in Italy in a headscarf. Her thoughts and feelings, often in response to the questions she receives from Italians who know very little about Islam, are revealed to the reader in an ironic yet critical way. The relationship between visual and verbal elements makes this text particularly suitable for students at different levels of proficiency, and can form the basis for a number of translation activities. For instance, in one activity students would be given a selection of cartoons without the speech bubbles and would have to write their own captions in English. They would then be

presented with the original cartoons and would compare them with their own version. Group discussion would centre around questions such as, “How have you interpreted the emotions displayed by the protagonist?” and, “Do you notice any differences or similarities compared to the original?” Students would then translate their own captions into Italian (thus producing an alternative version of the original), always making sure that they are working within the constraints of the speech bubbles and not exceeding their size. A similar activity would involve students translating the Italian captions into English, and then back-translating them into Italian without looking at the original.



Figure 2. Ben Mohamed (2016). *Sotto il velo*.

From the linguistic point of view, the recurrent format of the captions, divided into a question and an answer, is particularly useful in showing students how to form questions in Italian as opposed to English. This leads us to consider how translation can play a very important role in fostering what is known as *noticing*, a concept proposed by Schmidt, who described the process of noticing as a prerequisite to language learning or, in his own words, a “necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake” (Schmidt, 1990, p. 129).

According to Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis, in order to learn the structure of a foreign languages, students need to consciously notice them. The level of consciousness that is necessary for acquiring foreign language structures is still open to debate and remains the most controversial aspect of the Noticing Hypothesis (Ellis, 2003; Ortega, 2009). However, as argued by Conti (2016), when used as part of an eclectic syllabus, translation can effectively focus students’ attention on noticing specific features of the foreign language. If we consider the graphic novel described above, we can see how noticing can apply to cultural elements, as well as linguistic ones. When learning about the experience of a young Italian Muslim, and particularly when having to translate that experience into English, students are presented with an image of contemporary Italy which stimulates further discussion around different models of multicultural society, in Europe and beyond. They are also given the opportunity to engage with topical issues, such as cultural attitudes towards the headscarf, which vary across time and space.

To conclude, the activities described above show how translation can enhance students’ overall language proficiency while also contributing to their broader intercultural competence, which is an essential aspect of a Modern Languages degree. By providing students with an image of contemporary Italy which challenges generalisations and stereotypes, students are engaged in the language learning process as critical agents, whose multilingual voices are valued and recognised.

5. Conclusion

Multilingualism has been a strategic priority for the European Union since its inception, and the aforementioned 2013 publication by the European Commission refers to the importance of translation as a key language skill. Yet the use of translation in language teaching is often still associated with the teaching of grammar and has been subject to criticism over the twentieth century. While in recent years a number of scholars have devoted more attention to the pedagogical value of translation (Cook, 2010; Pym, 2015; Venuti, 2016), we believe that the relationship between language teaching, translation and multilingualism has the potential of offering new avenues of investigation.

The examples that have been discussed in this article do not exhaust the wide range of applications that translation may find in the language classroom. However, we hope to have demonstrated that translation can effectively enhance some of the core skills of language learning. In particular, by placing emphasis on translation as a process rather than a final output, collaborative translation workshops stimulate in-depth reflections on the forms and functions of the source and target language (such as register, style, and idioms). Moreover, when using translation in more traditional classroom settings, the choice of texts can provide students with an opportunity for problematizing the boundaries between languages and stimulating critical reflection on issues of national identity and belonging. As North and Piccardo (2016) point out, the “social dimension in language” is also crucial to developing skills that go beyond “reception and production” and, in this sense, translation is a tool to facilitate the “co-construction of meaning” (p. 455). Finally, by encouraging students to go beyond a *word-by-word equivalence* model, translation can stimulate learners’ agency and foster intercultural understanding, which is a key competence for language students.

In conclusion, nourishing a *multilingual sense of self*, as we read in the abstract of a recently-created journal on translation and translanguaging⁶, should be a key objective of language teaching and learning. At a time when higher education is becoming more internationalized, and students working toward Modern Languages degrees are often learning two or three languages, the present article has argued that translation can foster valuable pedagogical practices. Although further research would be required to determine the impact of the strategies presented, we hope to have demonstrated that translation has the potential of fostering multilingual competence, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. We also identified several issues for further research, particularly around multilingualism as a resource for language teaching in the specific context of higher education, where multiple foreign languages are taught to an international student body.

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⁶ *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*: <https://benjamins.com/catalog/ttmc>

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