

Translation and Knowledge Transfer. Transforming Perspectives in Foreign Language Education?

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Abstract

The paper aims to investigate whether the transfer of knowledge has taken place from Translation Studies (TS) to L2 teaching with regards to the current conceptualisation of translation. Firstly, it analyses the definition of translation in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the Companion Volume (CV), and its portrayal in connection to language mediation. Then, it turns to the TS in order to examine whether prevailing translation theories and approaches are being reflected in the current definition of translation in Foreign Language Education (FLE), or if there is still “room for improvement”, presuming that knowledge exchange and collaborative research are highly coveted attributes of the two disciplines.

Key Words

Translation, Language Mediation, L2 Teaching/Foreign Language Education (FLE), Translation Studies, Knowledge Transfer.



Introduction

The concept of linguistic and cultural mediation was brought to the fore of attention in Foreign Language Education (FLE) at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Following a series of socio-political phenomena, such as immigration and human mobility, and the subsequent transformation of countries into multilingual and multicultural societies, several European countries adopted overall political choices in order to accommodate the integration of the immigrant population. The critical point in all these policies

was the acknowledgment of the learners' right to the development of their language and cultural backgrounds alongside their second/foreign languages, leading to the shift from language isolation policies towards more holistic approaches that promote the use of the learners' linguistic repertoire. One of said approaches that facilitates bilingual education is language mediation (Olmedo, 2003), which in the current L2 teaching context comprises both intra- and interlingual mediation.

The concept of language mediation was first introduced in FLE in 2001, in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and was further expanded and illustrated with descriptors in the CV, in 2018/2020. At the same time, it has been inextricably interwoven with the concept of translation/interpreting, to a higher or lesser degree. Since both concepts of interlingual mediation and translation assume by default the existence of two different languages and cultures and the communication process between them, the explicit inclusion of translation activities as language mediation in the language teaching context should come as no surprise. Following this line of thought, one could reasonably expect that the current conceptualisation of translation in the L2 teaching deviates from older assumptions and misconceptions (Malmkjaer, 1998) and is informed by more recent developments within the discipline of Translation Studies (TS), thus, exemplifying how the transfer of knowledge could, and should, take place within the academic field.

The paper aims to investigate whether a transfer of knowledge has taken place from TS to L2 teaching with regards to the current conceptualisation of translation. First, it analyses the definition of translation in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the Companion Volume, and its portrayal in connection to language mediation. Then, it turns to the TS in order to examine whether prevailing translation theories and approaches are being reflected in the current definition of translation in L2 teaching, or if there is still room for improvement, presuming that knowledge exchange and collaborative research are highly coveted attributes of the two disciplines.

1. Translation in the L2 Teaching - The Case of the CEFR

The first document to officially introduce translation in the context of language education in the twenty-first century is the CEFR (2001). In the CEFR, translation is considered a type of language mediation, which is viewed as one of the various communicative activities the language users/learners can engage with in order to develop communicative competence. More precisely, it is argued, that:

In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. Mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies. (Council of Europe, 2001: 14)

The creators of the Framework further argue that language learners can be asked “to mediate, whether as an educational activity or in order to assist another pupil” (ibid: 57), thus acknowledging the reality of modern linguistically heterogeneous classrooms, where students very often assume the role of mediator/interpreter themselves. A definition of “mediating activities” (section 4.4.4 in CEFR) – both oral and written mediation – explains that “[i]n mediating activities, the language user is not concerned to express his/her own meanings, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages” (ibid: 87–88). Concrete examples of “oral mediation activities” include the acts of simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, as well as informal interpretation “in social and transactional situations for friends, family, clients, foreign guests, etc.” (ibid: 87–88). Examples of “written mediation activities” refer explicitly to use of “exact translation (e.g. of contracts, legal and scientific texts, etc.)” and literary translation, alongside the use of “summarising gist (newspaper and magazine articles, etc.)” and “paraphrasing (specialised texts for lay persons, etc.) within L2 or between L1 and L2” (ibid: 87–88).

Therefore, based on the examples, mediation appears to cover both activities of translation and interpreting. According to the authors of the CEFR, in the case of translation, “[t]he user/learner receives a text from a speaker or writer, who is not present, in one language or code (L_x) and produces a parallel text in

a different language or code (Ly) to be received by another person as listener or reader at a distance” (ibid: 99). In the case of interpreting, “[t]he user/learner acts as an intermediary in a face-to-face interaction between two interlocutors who do not share the same language or code, receiving a text in one language (Lx) and producing a corresponding text in the other (Ly)” (ibid: 99).

In a specific reference to the profiling abilities in the European Language Portofolio (ELP), the CEFR (section 8.4.2) concludes:

Translating (or summarising) a second foreign language into a first foreign language, participating in an oral discussion involving several languages, interpreting a cultural phenomenon in relation to another culture, are examples of mediation (as defined in this document) which have their place to play in assessing and rewarding the ability to manage a plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire. (2001: 175)

In other words, if one of the innovating features of the CEFR – in order to account for personal plurilingualism – is its introduction of ways of communicating in the presence of more than one language at the same time, then the activity of mediation, as defined above, seems to meet the standards. However, up until 2018, CEFR did not include illustrative scales with can-do statements for mediation whereas the outlining of mediation strategies has been described as “done in brief and with the language and resources focus only” (Atabekova et al. 2012: 6). North and Piccardo (2016) “rectified” this absence in the *Developing Illustrative Descriptors of Aspects of Mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*, which was followed by the official and long-anticipated *Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (2018), published by the Council of Europe.

2. Translation in the L2 Teaching -The Case of the Companion Volume (CV)

Acknowledging that there was a level of confusion among teachers and researchers created by the initial lack of illustrative descriptors for the activity of mediation, and responding to the criticism against it, North and Piccardo (2016) published the report *Developing Illustrative Descriptors of Aspects of Mediation for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*. In a rather apologetic tone, the authors admit from the outset that “unfortunately, [...], the concepts of interaction and mediation were not greatly developed in the CEFR” (2016: 5). As a result of this, “in interpretation of the CEFR, mediation has tended to

be reduced to interpretation and translation”, whereas the focus of the new document is to provide “a wider view of mediation” (ibid). More precisely, the authors criticise the fact that “many people appear to associate mediation in the CEFR solely as cross-linguistic mediation – usually conveying the information given in a text, and to reduce it to some form of (more or less professional) translation and interpretation” (2016: 6). Hypothesising the reasons behind this prevailing view, the authors mention, first, the initial bullet-pointed examples that have been used in the CEFR (2001) to explain mediation and, second, the fact that this view can implement a concept of plurilingualism which is reduced to information gap communication. In the last instance, they also refer to the fact that “perhaps [...] this interpretation provides an ‘up-to-date,’ communicative version of a traditional translation test task” (2016: 7).

Steering away from a strict association of mediation to translation, the publication of Companion Volume, in 2018, states that the document “does not change the status of that 2001 publication” (2018: 23) but it adopts a wider approach to mediation:

Mediation may be within one language or across languages, varieties or registers (or any combination of these) and that the user may wish to state the specific languages concerned. Equally the user may wish to provide examples relevant to their context, perhaps inspired by those presented in Appendix 6 for the four domains of language use: public, personal, occupational and educational. (2018: 52)

This is explicitly stated in the introduction of the most recent publication of the Companion Volume (2020), which summarises the changes to the illustrative descriptors, and argues that:

The approach taken to mediation is broader than that presented in the CEFR 2001. In addition to a focus on activities to mediate a text, scales are provided for mediating concepts and for mediating communication, giving a total of 19 scales for mediation activities. Mediation strategies (5 scales) are concerned with strategies employed during the mediation process, rather than in preparation for it. (2020: 24)

After establishing a view of mediation as both intralinguistic and interlinguistic, and in order to determine the place of translation/interpreting in the recent document, one should look at the scales that stand under the general umbrella of “Mediation Activities”. These are categorised in the three groups of “mediating a text”, “mediating concepts” and “mediating communication”. “Translating a written text – in speech and in writing” falls

under the first category, and is found amongst other activities, such as “Relaying specific information”, “Explaining data”, “Processing text”, “Note-taking”, “Expressing a personal response to creative texts”, and “Analysis and criticism of creative texts” (2020: 90).

It is the first category that comes really close to the sense of mediation as it was mainly perceived in 2001, namely as cross-linguistic mediation. According to Stathopoulou (2019), mediating a text “involves passing on to another person the content of a text to which they do not have access, often because of linguistic, cultural, semantic or technical barriers” (Stathopoulou, 2019). The CEFR CV authors also stress the difference between the translator/interpreter’s professional competence, which usually exceeds the CEFR Level C2, and the intention of the Companion’s scales and is different to abiding by the professional standards. The latter can be seen as an attempt to distinguish from a view of mediation closely related to professional translation, as it has often been interpreted in the CEFR. Therefore, translation is described as a more flexible, communicative activity, which could be implemented in various teaching scenarios and at different levels. That also resembles Pym et al.’s view (2013: 135), that translation can be introduced “as scaffolding in initial L2 learning and as a complex multi-skill communicative activity at higher levels”.

Another interesting point in the new document involves the descriptor of processing a text, which refers to the reformulation of the original information and arguments included in the source text. “The key word of the processing information scales in both speaking and writing is ‘summarising’” (Council of Europe 2020: 98). It is pointed out that, in this case, the learner is expected to demonstrate full comprehension of all the main points in the source text, whereas the presentation of the information to the recipient might occur “*in a completely different order, depending on the goal of the communicative encounter*” [my emphasis] (ibid 2020: 98).

Moving into the only descriptor scale that relates mediation explicitly to translation, the opening sentences of “translating a written text” state that:

Translating a written text in speech is a largely informal activity that is by no means uncommon in everyday personal and professional life. It is the process of spontaneously giving a spoken translation of a written text, often a notice, letter, email or other communication. (ibid 2020: 102)

Looking closer at the content and sense of this descriptor scale, the authors maintain their view that “this CEFR descriptor scale is not intended to relate to

the activities of professional translators or to their training. Indeed, translating competences are not addressed in the scale” (2020: 102). As they repeat at this point, the levels of competence for professional translators and professional interpreters are well above the C2 level. Having clarified that, they argue that plurilingual learners/users might be required under certain circumstances in everyday life to provide a written translation of a text. What they are expected to do, according to these new scales, is “to reproduce the substantive message of the source text, rather than necessarily interpret the style and tone of the original into an appropriate style and tone in the translation, as a professional translator would be expected to do” (2020: 102).

Further elaborating on their views on professional and non-professional translation, the authors stress that in the new document, translating a written text in writing is considered “by its very nature a more formal process than providing a spoken translation” (2020: 102). Implications of that involve, in general, progressively more complex texts and an increasing level of accuracy and reflection of the original (2020: 102). Examining the translating scales in detail, however, reveals that terms such as fluency and accuracy, which have been traditionally associated with the translating process, do not appear very often here. Conversely, “fluent spoken translation in Language B” of texts written in Language A are expected only at the end top level (C2). Similarly, accuracy is stressed as a factor in translating a written text in writing, but only in terms of checking “subject matter accuracy” at C2 level, and “conveying the main points of the source text accurately” at level B2 (2020: 102). At the same level (B2), the user is expected to produce a translation that only “closely follow[s] the sentence and paragraph structure of the original text in (Language A)”, fully aware that the end result “may read awkwardly” (2020: 102). Indeed, although most of the scales stress that the translation in Language B should be comprehensible, they also acknowledge factors such as errors that may occur, use of simple language in the translations, producing of approximate translations, as well as translation products that “may be over-influenced by the order, paragraphing, punctuation and particular formulations of the original” (2020: 102).

Equally interesting is the choice of vocabulary that describes the translating scale of a written text in speech. Especially with regards to the beginners’ level (A1 and A2), the user is expected to provide a “*simple, rough* spoken translation into (Language B) of either short, simple words and routine information on everyday subjects, or of short, simple everyday texts written in (Language A)” [my emphasis] (2020: 104). Moving to the intermediate levels (B1 and B2), the

expectation of producing a rough translation becomes simply producing “a spoken translation into (Language A)” (2020: 104). Although some details are provided considering the structure, the complexity and the content of the texts in Language A, no details are provided with regards to the expectations of such translations as end products or of the translating process per se. As far as the next scale of mediating a text is concerned, “Note-taking” involves mediating a text for oneself, whereas the last two scales, “expressing a personal response to creative texts” and “analysis and criticism of creative texts”, involve the learner’s reaction to a text. The last scales in this group, which do not include, at this point, any reference to cross-linguistic mediation (Language A and Language B), also highlight the intralingual direction of mediation, which did not prevail in the CEFR (2001).

The third group of descriptor scales refers to “Mediating communication” and aims to “facilitate understanding and shape successful communication between users/learners who may have individual, sociocultural, sociolinguistic or intellectual differences in standpoint” (Stathopoulou, 2019). It involves three different scales. Amongst them, only the second one includes a specification of different languages (A and B) and is defined as “acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)” (Companion Volume, 2020: 115). Looking at its general description, this scale “is intended for situations in which the user/learner as a plurilingual individual mediates across languages and cultures to the best of his/her ability in an informal situation in the public, private, occupational or educational domain” (ibid). Interestingly, nowhere in this scale features the term interpreter, apart from the authors’ claim, that this scale “is therefore not concerned with the activities of professional interpreters” (ibid). Moreover, the new document – as opposed to the CEFR 2001 – does not seem to explicitly stress the mediator’s “invisibility” but revolves mostly around the informal character of the everyday case scenarios and the non- professional aspects of mediation.

The new Companion Volume includes also a category devoted to “mediation strategies”, in order to “exploit a new concept” and to “simplify a text”. It comprises five new scales in total, according to which the L2 learner can make use of “linking to previous knowledge”, “breaking down complicated information”, “adapting language”, as well as “amplifying dense text” and “streamlining a text” (2020: 117–122). Last but not least, the CV expanding on its original introduction of plurilingual competence in CEFR 2001 and taking into consideration current scholarship, has included an additional part in connection to mediation: “plurilingual and pluricultural competence”. An

analysis of the concept is found under the three new scales of “building on pluricultural repertoire”, “plurilingual comprehension”, and “building on plurilingual repertoire” (2020: 123). In accordance with recent literature, these underline that the aim of language education is to move from the “ideal native speaker” and compartmentalisation of one’s different languages and cultures into “develop[ing] a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place” (2020:123).

All in all, it appears that the focus of the CV is shed on elaborating on the concept of language mediation and its place in L2 education. Referring specifically to what has previously been perceived as a close relationship between mediation and translation in CEFR, the authors of the descriptors feel that it is “reductionist to see mediation as solely interpretation and translation”, as well as limit it to information transfer from one language to another (2016: 8). This view is reaffirmed in the 2020 publication, in which the authors explain that “[i]t is for this reason that the 2014-2017 project to develop descriptors for mediation was set up” (2020: 34). Their view has been echoed by other critics of the relationship between translation and mediation, who argue that “[l]anguage [m]ediation [is] [m]ore than [c]onventional [t]ranslation and [i]nterpreting” (Reimann, 2018), or that translation in the CEFR:

restrict[s] the activity [of mediation] under study to the language usage field, thus shadowing those challenges that emerge in the course of intercultural communication due to partner’s different values, beliefs, social practices, etc. (Atabekova, Gorbatenko and Gorbatenko, 2012: 6).

Moreover, according to Dendrinos (2013: 1):

Usually, when people in real life mediate – [...] – they may resort to certain translation and interpretation techniques, but their job is *not* to produce a text or speech *equivalent in meaning and similar in form* as when translation and interpretation are at work. The very purpose of translation and interpretation is the production of configurations which are as close as possible to the original, i.e. to the source text. The task of translators and interpreters is to establish corresponding meanings between source and target text, with perfect respect for the source text [emphasis on the original]

Expanding on the connection between translation and language mediation, Dendrinos (ibid) maintains that “the translator’s and interpreter’s ‘loyalties’ lie with the source text, whereas mediators’ loyalties lie first and foremost with the interlocutor”. Although her arguments are construed in the context of FLE, they bring to the foreground issues highly relevant to the field of translation,

relating to the translator's voice and ethics, as well as matters of linguistic and cultural correspondence and relevance.

Considering the aforementioned definitions on translation and language mediation in the current FLE, the paper examines, next, the degree of knowledge transfer that has taken place between L2 teaching and Translation Studies. It is argued that theories and approaches stemming from the latter, primarily on *equivalence*, *communication* and *cultural* issues, advocate, or should advocate, a more positive and modern reconceptualization of translation as language mediation than the one currently described in FLE literature.

3. Translation into FLE - A Different Perspective?

In the recent past, several voices have defended the pedagogical role of translation in the L2 teaching context and practically link the above reconceptualization of translation to the current FLE. The following section explores this link from the point of view of TS. It focuses on those aspects of translation that have been specifically targeted by critical arguments in the last two decades, aiming to provide a more informed and comprehensive understanding of translation theories and approaches, and their potential impact on FLE. That, admittedly, excludes several other aspects which can also support the role of translation in the contemporary L2 teaching, but their analysis would go beyond the aim of this paper.

3.1 Translation and Equivalence

The notion of equivalence has preoccupied theorists of translation, sparked debates and dichotomies, and posed similar questions in the field of translation as the ones raised in the field of L2 teaching. In fact, at the centre of the debate stood for many years what Cook portrays as one of the “perennial preoccupations” of translation theory (2012: 245), namely the nature of equivalence between an original and its translation. Describing translation as a form of equivalence, Koller (1995) asserts that “between the resultant text in L2 [...] and the source text in L1 [...] there exists a relationship, which can be designated as a translational, or equivalence relation” (cited in House 2016: 9). Referring to the role of translator, Koller argues that they find themselves in the paradoxical position of formulating their own utterance through the

translation, but at the same time not, since the translator has no autonomy on themselves but is rather “bound in a particular way to the autonomy of the source text” (cited in House, 2016: 9). House (2016) also speaks highly of the concept of equivalence, arguing that creating equivalence is what distinguishes translation from other text-processing activities, whereas “basing translation on the criterion of equivalence makes it possible to arrive at an understanding of what translation is” (2016: 9). Pym (2014: 28) agrees with House, that the term “equivalent” is what distinguishes translation from other forms of interlingual mediation. However, his comment refers only to those definitions that describe translation based on the concept of equivalence – as, perhaps, in the case of L2 teaching – implying that there are other definitions of translation which do not put equivalence at the centre of their description.

Approaching translation through the concept of equivalence has often been defined as a form of antithesis. Whether it consisted of two ends, such as the “word for word” translation against the “sense for sense” by Cicero and Horace (first century BC), or of various degrees/types, such as Dryden’s typology of metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation (1680), the principle remained the same, underlining the relative gain and/or loss at the end result, depending on the degree of “closeness” to, or departure, from the original. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) hold the view that translation is an equivalence-oriented process, which “replicates the same situation as in the original, whilst using completely different wording”. Jakobson (1959) agrees that in the case of interlingual translation, the process “involves two equivalent messages in two different codes” (1959: 233), whereas it is the translator’s role to find translation equivalents by choosing an appropriate translation strategy, making the translation always possible. Catford’s (1965) definition of translation was also based on equivalence, since he regarded it as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (1965: 20).

Nida’s (1964) semiotic distinction between formal equivalence – or formal correspondence (Nida and Taber 1982) – and dynamic equivalence has been another linguistic theory of translation capitalising on the concept of equivalence. Nida distinguished between formal equivalence, where a TL item is chosen as the closest equivalent of an SL word or phrase, and dynamic equivalence, which is a more sociolinguistic approach to translation. Nida and Taber underline the limitations of formal equivalence, claiming that there are not always equivalents between language pairs, and that insisting on this approach might lead to distortion of TL grammatical/syntactical features and

misunderstandings. Along the same lines moves Newmark's (1988) dichotomy between "semantic" and "communicative" translation, with the former kind favouring preserving the values of the ST, and the latter the adapting to the needs of the new target audience. Newmark (1988) himself, as opposed to Nida, preferred the semantic type (cited in Pym, 2014: 31), but as Pym puts it, at least in theory, it is open to the translators to choose which aspect they will render, since in Newmark's theory there are no "natural" equivalents between languages (ibid). As a result, both Nida and Newmark are considered amongst the first well-known translation theorists who approached the communicative dimension of translation within the equivalence paradigm.

Approaching equivalence not as a static equivalent to lexical/grammatical replacement between languages, but rather as a range of possibilities which may embark from the strictest adherence to every ST feature before it moves towards "bolder" and more flexible choices, were also various scholars of the Leipzig school. Amongst them is Kade (1968), who considered translation as an act of bilingual communication, "consisting of three phases, with the translator being the man or woman in the middle mediating between a sender and a receiver who do not speak the same concept" (House, 2016: 14). Jäger (1975), another Leipzig scholar, stressed the importance of "communicative equivalence", which exists whenever the communicative value can be maintained in a translation (1975: 36), and also talked about the role of "functional equivalence" (cited in House, 2016: 14). Further stressing the significance of functional equivalence was Neubert (1973), who believed that the text type plays a major role in the translator's decision to be "faithful to the original" or "appropriately adapted to the conventionalized text types in the target language community", a modern and, at the time, "truly innovative view" (House, 2016: 15).

In later years, Pym has separated the theories of "natural" equivalence from the theories of "directional equivalence". In what he calls a list of "polarities of directional equivalence" (2014: 32), Pym includes Levy (1963/2011) who distinguishes between "illusory" translation – a translation so well adapted to the target culture it could be regarded as a new text – and "anti-illusory" translation as the one which maintains features of the ST. Also, in Pym's list appears House (1997) and her "overt" translation (being aware that the TT is a translation) as opposed to "covert" translation. Further in the same list features Nord (1997) and her terms "documentary" vs. "instrumental" translation, depending on whether a translation works as an explicit representation (a document) of the previous text or "re-enact the communicative function (as an

instrument)” (Pym, 2014: 32). Toury (1995/2012) has used instead the terms “adequate” (to the ST) and “acceptable” (by the receptive culture). Venuti (1995), influenced by Schleiermacher’s distinction, proposes “fluent” for the domesticating type of translation and “resistant” for the foreignizing translations.

As Pym further comments, all these terms and dichotomies, which work within the paradigm of equivalence, model a choice made by the translator, and it is “a choice not necessarily determined by the text translated” (2014: 32). Assuming one admits the limitations of the “natural” equivalence in translating and discussing the potential of the “directional” equivalence, Pym raises the same question coming from the L2 teaching field as well, namely how far the translator can stretch the line between the two poles, and still claim the result as a translation. The author wonders if, and up to which degree, cultural explanations and additions in the TT, resulting in an obviously longer version, can be still claimed in the various types of directional equivalence. Pym, however, does not reach the same conclusion as the one portrayed in the L2 teaching, namely that the translation process is strictly governed by equivalence in all aspects. On the contrary, in his opinion, there is no consensus or “clear agreement” on this issue, it is not even a “question that the equivalence paradigm was never really designed to address – it merely assumed an answer” (2014: 33). Stressing the matter even further, Pym argues that “[e]quivalence is always ‘presumed’ equivalence, and nothing more” (2014: 37), and alongside Toury, concludes that “equivalence is a *belief structure*” (ibid, effect in the original).

Paradoxically, accepting equivalence as no more than a belief could put an end to this concept as a *central* issue in TS. Consequently, assuming that a transfer of knowledge from TS into the L2 teaching could, therefore, prevent equivalence from being a central and determining factor in the definition of translation in the L2 teaching context. In theory, this could also prevent translation from being compared to other mediating activities, such as summarising, taking notes, processing a text and relaying information from one text to another.

3.2 Translation and Communication

Looking at the translation process, and the role the communicative purpose has been playing in it, one inevitably turns to the discipline of TS. From the

1970s, the relocation of the emphasis on the communication part of translation has been evident in the development of various diverse perspectives and different approaches to translation. The main idea that the way one translates depends on the function of the text one translates inspired several theorists, who became known for their functional approaches. Pym (2014: 44) speaks of “a paradigm shift in translation theory [which] can be dated from 1984, at least as a symbolic point”. This shift was mainly prompted by Reiss and Vermeer’s *Foundation for a General Theory of Translation* (1984), as well as Holz-Mänttari’s *Translational Action* (1984).

Taking as a starting point the concept of functional equivalence, the German scholar Reiss (1976) proposed a methodical text typology, a practical approach to text examination and a functional viewpoint regarding translation. Considering the text, and not the level of word or sentence as the level of communication, she linked the functional characteristics of text types to translation methods. Translation, or in her terms a written form of communication, required the classification of certain text types which she distinguished as the informative text, the expressive text, the operative text and the multi-medial text (Pym 2014: 16–46). Whereas Reiss also expounded on the notion of appropriate translational methods for each text category, Dolz & Schneuwly (2001) adopted, later, the text genre as a point of reference in language teaching, in order to develop the notion of Didactic Sequence. Defined as an organized series of teaching, learning and assessment activities centred on a precise task of oral or written output, the notion has been also transferred by Camps (2003) in the field of additional language teaching and learning and by González Davies (2020) in the context of translation in FLE. Indicating how transference of notions can occur between TS and Education, the latter argues that it is the “focus on translinguistic conceptualisation” that “informs the didactic sequences in IPA [Integrated Plurilingual Approach], where verbal, non-verbal, and multimodal model texts guide the learner to create their own texts through meaningful plurilingual tasks and reflective questions” (González Davies 2020: 439).

In the same book in which Reiss developed her text typology, Vermeer published his prominent skopos theory (Reiss and Vermeer 1984). Vermeer’s theory “places the focus on the prospective function or skopos of the target text, which is largely constrained by the target text user, their needs and their cultural background” (Baker, 1998: 236). According to Vermeer, the skopos of the text (Greek word for purpose) is the purpose for which a translator designs a translation, in agreement with their commissioner. This fact “expands the

possibilities of translation, increases the range of possible translation strategies, and releases the translator from the corset of an enforced – and often meaningless – literalness” (Vermeer, 1989: 42). In other words, the translator is free and obliged to use any translation strategies that are most appropriate to achieve the purpose for which the target text is intended, which accordingly allows the possibility of the same text being translated in different ways, according to the purpose of the target text (Munday, 2001: 80). Although skopos theory is a translation approach, and one of the most acclaimed ones within TS, paradoxically, in the L2 teaching it corresponds a lot more to the concept of language mediation – and not of translation – as the latter is defined within the contemporary L2 teaching context, since the needs of the target group determine the skopos of the *mediation activity* each time, and accordingly the *mediation strategies* that best serve the purpose of the task.

Within TS, Pym praises the skopos theory as a “more radical version[s] of target-side functionalism” which “justified the creation of a new academic discipline” (Pym, 2014: 49), involving applied sociology, ethics of communication, cultural studies, etc.” (ibid). His criticism that “[s]tart-text functionalism cannot really discuss the reasons why a translator might want to change the function of the text. But Vermeer’s concept of Skopos can” (Pym, 2014: 48) can better inform current definitions of translation in the L2 teaching, which assert that translator’s and interpreter’s ‘loyalties’ lie with the source text (see section 1.2).

Alongside Gentzler (2001) who supported the allowance of multiple translations as a result of throwing attention on what makes a good translation given certain purposes in a specific context, lies another influential target-side functional approach by Holz-Mänttärri (1984). The “translational action” theory views translation as a purpose-driven, action-oriented human interaction, a definition which adds to the dispute between translation and language mediation in the L2 teaching. The theory stresses the importance of producing a target text that is functionally communicative for the receiver whereas, as Schäffner mentions, the ST is viewed as “a mere tool for the realization of the communication functions”, and “may undergo radical modification in the interest of the target reader, by the translator who should enable a functionally adequate intercultural transfer” (cited in Baker, 1998: 3). Ironically, this description appears to have informed the main principle which underlines the development of the current mediation tasks in the L2 teaching, as opposed to the translation activity.

By putting the translator in the position of an expert in cross-cultural communication, and by effectively arguing that a translator “could actually write a new text and still be called a translator” (Pym, 2014: 50), Holz-Mänttari has persuasively stretched definitions of the term “translator”, challenging, at the same time, the transfer of knowledge from the TS into the L2 teaching context. Snell-Hornby (1988) has also stressed that “translation is a complex act of communication in which the SL-author, the reader as translator, and the translator as TL-author and the TL-reader interact” (1988: 81) whereas Carbonell (2006), whose work is also influenced by skopos theory, defines translation as a form of communication and “a means of achieving things. However, in translation the original communicative act is relocated to a different setting, where different actors perform for different purposes: there is a mediation mechanics which qualifies the whole act at different levels” (cited in Kupske, 2015: 53).

Nord (2007), still drawing on skopos theory, argues that the functional translational approach should be complemented by the “loyalty” principle. According to it:

Translators, in their role as mediators between two cultures, have a special responsibility, both with regard to their partners [...], and towards themselves, precisely in those cases, where there are different views as to what a “good” translation is or should be (2007: 3).

By being loyal, however, translators are not expected to be faithful to the source text and the target text, but rather respect “the intentions and expectations of all the partners in the communicative interaction called translation” (ibid). In other words, Nord claims that there is no right or wrong approach, as long as the translators explain and justify their translation choices. Moreover, Nord’s views provide the L2 teaching field with a better insight on translation as a decision-making process. The dynamic and flexible relationship between the translator, the parties involved in the translation process and the communicative aim (or skopos) of the translation task highlight a different concept of translation than the one currently prevailing in the L2 teaching classroom. Finally, by arguing that “mediation [between the two cultures] can never mean the imposition of the concept of one culture to the members of the other” (2007: 3), not only does she highlight the communicative-functional aspect of translation, but she also brings forward the implications of cultural studies in translation, as well as the role of translator as a mediator in- between.

3.3 Translation and Culture

Alongside the concept of equivalence and functional approaches, a third area that has been of pivotal significance in TS – and could better inform and enhance the conceptualisation of translation in the L2 teaching – is the notion of culture. As earlier discussed, the CEFR has tried to establish the links between intercultural competence and cross-lingual mediation, whereas the Companion Volume (2020) appears to have upgraded this relationship, by insisting on a view of mediation from both an intra- and an interlingual aspect. L2 learners, acting as mediators in communication, are not simply expected to assist with overcoming the problems arisen from different languages but are also expected to intervene and resolve problems and conflicts due to misunderstandings and cultural differences. However, applying this understanding only to the concept of mediation, which “should not be reduced to translation” (see section 2), prompted Pym et al. to comment that:

Not by chance, this extremely reductive view of translation comes in a 251-page report that includes no bibliographical reference to Translation Studies of any kind – the opinion that translation is a simple, neutral, technical, culture-free activity is based on no more than assumption and a lack of interdisciplinarity (2013: 29).

Pym et al.’s counter-criticism is profoundly entrenched on long-established research within TS, considering the bidirectional relationship between culture and translation. Nord has not been the first scholar to acknowledge translation as intercultural mediation based on the view that “it is the task of a translator to mediate between the two cultures” (2007: 3). In recent decades, several academics have offered their views on the question of whether and under which circumstances a translator should assume the role of a language and cultural mediator, assuming effectively the significance of the “cultural” aspect in the process of translating.

In fact, referring to Cultural Studies and its close association with the discipline of TS, Pym describes it as “[a] diffuse set of academic studies [...]” (2014: 144). Next to Cultural Studies, and the cultural turn, Pym lists cultural translation as a fluid process where “there is no start text and usually no fixed target text [and] [t]he focus is on cultural processes rather than products” (2014: 138). The origins stem first from Benjamin’s idea (1923/1992) – analysed in his essay “The Task of Translator” (1923/1992) – that neither the original nor the translation are “fixed and enduring categories. They do not have an essential

quality and are constantly transformed in space and time” (Buden and Nowotny, 2009: 200).

Bhabha (2004) proposes instead the concept of the “third space” in translation, resembling Byram’s notion of “critical cultural awareness” (1997) and Kramsch’s idea of “third space” (1993/2009) which are currently adopted in L2 teaching to support an elaborative view of social mediation (cited in Piccardo and North, 2016: 10). As Pym further explains, this conceptualisation of cultural translation moves beyond “the hermeneutics of texts” to a “way of talking about the world” (2014: 142). More importantly, this view of translation comes “from the perspective of a (figurative) translator, not translations” (ibid). In tune with skopos theory, cultural translation positions the translator in the space between at least two languages and cultures, which effectively grants them the role of a language mediator.

Next to the concept of cultural translation, other theorists have also expanded on the notion of a translator being in-between languages and cultures. Hatim and Mason (1990) suggest that “the notion of mediation is a useful way of looking at translator’s decisions regarding the transfer of intertextual reference” (1990: 128). Bassnet (1999) has utilised

the metaphor of translation as a bridge between two linguistic and cultural contexts in order to envision translation as an act of mediation. Metaphors of hybridity and territorial crossing have long depicted the complex work of the translator as “someone who occupies the liminal space in between cultures” (cited in Federici, 2007: 5).

Along the same lines, Pym queries Schleiermacher’s famous conclusion that the translator either brings the text to the reader (domestication) or the reader to the text (foreignizing), calling this view a basic “binarism” which has always divided translation theory (cited in Chesterman, 1997: 55). However, his words should not be construed as support to L2 teaching views on translators being preoccupied with the ST and having no voice in the translation process (see section 2). On the contrary, throughout history, according to Chesterman, translators:

have been people living astride cultures and languages, refusing to be categorised, imprisoned, within just one. They have been people of “both-and”, not those of “either- or”. They have lived and worked on the borders, on the peripheries, with loyalties on both sides. (1997: 54)

Chesterman’s insight that translators, by their very existence, live between and rewrite and mediate between languages and cultures, highlights the ethical

aspects of such communication – across linguistic or cultural boundaries. Pym, who is inspired by that, argues that the goal of cross-cultural communication is the mutual benefit deriving from it, thus, the ethical goal of translation is to further intercultural cooperation between parties who are “other” to each other (cited in Chesterman, 2001: 141). So, from the point of view of communication, the ethical translator, according to Pym, is “a mediator working to achieve cross-cultural understanding of each other” (ibid). Pym’s proposals for an ethics of translation built upon the concept of “mediation” align with Federici’s belief on mediation as a title, or a “metaphor for the translator’s activity today” (2007: 4), an idea that has yet to be transferred into the L2 teaching context. Better reflecting on a lack of knowledge transfer from TS to other fields, are Toury’s beliefs that “being a translator cannot be reduced to the mere generation of utterances which could be considered ‘translations’ within any of these disciplines” (2000: 198), referring to disciplines such as Linguistics, Text-Linguistics, Contrastive Textology, Pragmatics – and evidently the field of L2 teaching as well.

Conclusions

The paper sought to establish whether the current remapping of translation in the field of language education has been informed by the discipline of TS. Contextualised in the twenty-first century and within super-diverse societies, L2 teaching has been gradually acknowledging the potential and benefits of interlingual communication in classroom settings by developing a variety of language approaches to accommodate plurilingual learners.

Despite its long and negative association with the Grammar-Translation Method, translation has resurfaced as an interlingual activity in education, although not as a separate and self-contained notion but as an activity for practicing language mediation. As the paper identified through an analysis of the CEFR and the Companion Volume, the prevailing concept in L2 teaching is currently that of mediation, with translation retaining a much lower profile.

Examining this recent profile of translation, the paper attempted to determine the degree of knowledge transfer that has taken place from the TS in L2 teaching and has potentially transformed the concept of translation. The paper explored specifically the three notions of equivalence, communication and culture which appear to have shaped the L2 teaching translation definition and

then, analysed them from the perspective of TS. Finally, it concludes that the list of translation theories, approaches and beliefs developed in the TS – which is by no means exhaustive here – has not yet fully informed the definition of translation in an L2 teaching context that features a narrower, more static and limited view of translation and does not capitalise on its full potential as an intercultural mediated activity.

More specifically, concerns to distinguish mediation from translation and its association with accuracy, fluency and equivalence, as well as a professional status, albeit understandable in the context of L2 teaching, may lead to limited interdisciplinary research between the fields of TS and FLE. Additionally, a predominant focus on everyday language mediation may overshadow TS, portrayed as the discipline for professional translators, interpreters and their training. Consequently, developments such as the PETRA-E Framework of Reference for The Education and Training of Literary Translations (2016) could be easily dismissed as irrelevant for L2 learners, although “transfer competence” and “language competence” are the first two competences to be included in the framework and described for levels ranging from beginners and advanced to an expert level. Despite the fact, that PETRA-E is clearly intended for students in translation classes, the paper argues that the foundations for these competences are laid earlier on, in the language classrooms and it, therefore, concludes that acknowledging and capitalising on the profound connections between the two fields is only one of the examples that could benefit both TS and FLE.

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