

The Philosophy of Foreign Language Teaching and Teacher Training with special reference to translation

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Abstract

The aims of teaching a foreign language is for communication and bringing nations and cultures closer to each other. This is needed for globalism and reducing bias and prejudice, solving religious and racial differences. It is also needed for academic purposes as well as commercial, political and cultural relations. Globalism is inevitable, changes take place. History has repeatedly proven that changes which have taken place by force have not last long while lots of changes which took place in all countries by translation, literature and friendly contacts are like carving on stone! Language is the most powerful weapon! Suggestions for revision and updating university curricula and texts for preparing better language teachers with cultural understanding will be given in this paper.

Keywords: globalism, international understanding, translation, language teacher education and training, different Intelligences.

1. Introduction

For the aims and objectives of teaching a foreign language it has repeatedly been explained that the main aim is for communication and bringing nations and cultures closer to each other. For reaching these aims proper texts and good command on the foreign language is necessary. Foreign languages have been taught in almost all countries for centuries. To what extent have they fulfilled these aims? Only translation which is one of the outcomes of proper FL learning has been successful in this field.

Expansion of 'globalism' is inevitable. The world of today has a great need for cultural, political, social relations, personal contacts and an increasing need for rapid exchange of information. This makes the learning of other languages and/or an international language an urgent need for better understanding and bringing people of the world closer together, reducing bias and prejudice, solving religious and racial differences which are becoming more severe day by day. It is also needed for academic purposes. Unfortunately, the world of today is engaged in so many fierce footless fighting among different countries and followers of different religions and even between the sects of the same religion and with so many problems which can destroy life, if not solved somehow.

Today, in the third millennium billions of dollars is spent every day in wars for imposing our own ideas to others. There is no doubt that war always adds to problems, while positive effects of direct contacts are undeniable.

History has repeatedly proven that changes which have taken place by force have not last long while lots of changes which took place in all countries by friendly contacts, exchange of ideas and translations of literature, science, technology, etc. are like carving on stone!

During the past three or four centuries, in the colonial age, many European countries occupied Asian and African territories actually for their economic profits, but they also tried to modernize the occupied lands. They were not much successful in places where they used force and the result was resistance. Language is the most powerful weapon with no cost! (Toossi, 2005)

International differences can be solved by debate and friendly exchange of ideas.

Proper learning of other languages can be considered as the most useful remedy for many problems of the world of today which are related to misunderstandings and lack of information about other nations, other religions, beliefs, traits and customs, etc. We should find ways which can make nations familiar with the cultures, needs and feelings of other nations, the needs and feelings which are not much different in many cases and many places.

The fact is that Human beings are social creatures and in need of interaction. Lack of contact keeps nations in isolation. Learning the language of other people or a common language is one of the best peaceful ways of interacting that helps us convey our thoughts and knowledge to other people and/or share them with others peacefully. This can happen by learning other languages properly for communication, debate and translation.

Translation, which is the result of mastering another language, has always been making changes in societies, in science, technology and techniques peacefully and in addition to progress and development, it has always been working as a very valuable factor for strengthening the pillars of international peace and friendship. Ironically, almost all effective translations have been created by translators who were not graduates of our universities!

Jeremy Munday explains, "During the course of history, written and spoken [language] and translation have played a crucial role in inter-human communication, not least in providing access to important texts for scholarship and religious purposes". If this is true, we need proper teaching and learning of languages.

History embraces lots of examples of penetrating of language into closed societies. In Iran the graduate returnees from Europe mainly, from France and Belgium (around one hundred years ago) translated books, texts and articles from the European countries. These translations were the main cause of modernization and Constitutional Revolution, establishment of parliament and complete change of the system of government. (Toossi, 1391)

When the British occupied India, the official language of that country was Persian and Persian poetry and literature was quite wide spread in India and a part of Persian literature which is called the 'Indian style' was at its peak!

Familiarity of some educated British officers like Sir Williams Jones and others with Persian language transferred the treasure of Persian literature into French and English and was the cause of many changes in Europe.

At the same time, peaceful contacts between Iran and Europe during the past three or four hundred years, is also a good example. During this time many translation of Persian poetry and literature into European languages took place, mainly by European orientalists which had deep effects on the European literature and European societies

Professor Tuda, head of academy of Georgia, insists that the breeze of Renaissance started to blow by the translations of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh in Europe. (MagaliTudoa). Renaissance was one of the greatest events in the history that changed Europe.

John D. Yuhannan, the British writer, believes that, "Almost all literary works in Europe in the past three centuries were under the influence of Persian literature which took place by translations of European orientalists like Sir Williams Jones, Cavell, Mathew Arnold and affected great writers and poets like Gautier, Tennyson, Fitz Gerald, Voltaire, Fitz Gerald, Voltaire and Emerson in the United States and in many others in other countries. (Toossi,2012, quoted from Yuhanan).

He adds that after the Renaissance and during the 16 to twentieth century, the influence of Persian culture and literature in European countries and translations of Ferdowsi, Saadi, Mowlana, Jami, Hafiz and Khayyam's poetry and prose like 'One Thousand and One Nights' are good examples.

'One Thousand and One Nights' originally is "panjatantara", an Indian collection of stories which was translated into Persian during the reign of Sassanid Empire (c 16 centuries ago). This book along with many other scientific and literary works was translated from Sassanid Persian into Arabic after occupation of Iran by Moslem Arabs (c 600 AD) and later from Arabic into modern Persian and also French by Gautier (1822 to 1827 in seven volumes). This book was translated in other European languages repeatedly. Buckner Travick in "The World's Literature" explains that 'in the 18th century this book had an influence close to the influence of the Holy Bible in Europe.

Many Hollywood pictures like Ali Baba and the 40 thieves of Baghdad, Sindbad the Sailor, Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, The Arabian Nights (Shahrazad story) are also stories from this book. He adds that in the 18th century around seven hundred books were published in Europe under its influence. Cinderella, too, is from another Persian folk story, 'Mashady Galin Khanom' collected by: L. P. Elwel Satin. I have to confess that all these translations took place by European orientalists and Iranians have very little share in it!

The establishment of Omar Khayyam Clubs in 1805 in Britain and later in The United States of America influenced the poetry and literature of the West. The members of the club resisted against the Volstead Act in the USA which had forbidden alcoholic drinks.

The Devine Comedy by Dante which is one of the three greatest literary works in Europe is almost the exact translation of 'Artaviraf Namak', the story of a Zoroastrian

clergyman, the masterpiece which survived from the Sassanid Dynasty's era of Iran before Islam. Hundreds of other examples are in Hadidi, 1373, Esmail Azar, 1387, Toossi, 1391 and John D. Yuhannan, etc.).

These and many other examples show the power of language in peaceful relations between people of different countries with different religions and different cultures. One Thousand and One Nights is the best example which proves that language is the most powerful weapon! Which emperor, conqueror or war do you know in the history that occupied other continents peacefully like "One Thousand and One Nights" and lasted for centuries, while giving enjoyment and entertainment to the defeated people?

If this is the power of language, why should we not use it for a kind of peaceful 'jihad' against 'terrorism', solving cultural and religious differences and for establishment of peace and friendship in the world? This is really possible!

In this case, we need proper texts free from bias and prejudice. We need able and trained teachers and we need to modify and up-to-date our teaching curricula. We need to train our learners with good command on oral and written language for communication and translation. This is due to increasing the number of teaching hours along with lots of practice!

English as a foreign language is taught in many countries in the world including in Iran. In English speaking countries French, Russian, German, Italian and Spanish (Especially in the USA) are main foreign languages which are taught at high-schools. I have some studies in the United States, Britain India (where Persian is also among other languages taught at schools). Foreign language teaching is not successful all together! One reason is lack of application of the target language outside the classroom and lack of practice. Another reason is the shortage of able language teachers.

The question of defining good teaching has concerned educationalists and academics for some considerable time. (Middlewood 2001: 2)

2. What can we do for having adequate able teachers in this field?

Almost all teacher education and teacher training programs emphasize on theories and techniques of teaching. But this is not all the story about good and able teachers. Teaching needs enthusiasm, love and the sense of responsibility. These are the essence of teaching which should be added to technical awareness and abilities.

What happens that learners remember some of their teachers, years after they have terminated their studies? Clark (1995) suggests, "Our best teachers stand out because they were inspiring, caring, forgiving, supportive, indeed, 'thoughtful' in the widest sense of the word". These teachers can help to improve universal peace and friendship!

Sugrue Ciaran, (2001) explains that if you want to improve learning, improve teaching.

A fundamental reform is needed to improve the quality of teaching programs. "Training teachers in the skills and strategies of 'effective' pedagogy, setting and applying

professional standards of what teachers should know and be able to do, even testing teachers periodically on their basic, subject-matter knowledge – these are the sorts of methods that reformers have employed to try and raise standards in teachers.” (Ibid, p. 4)

In addition to the above mentioned skills, programs should help to improve teachers’ thinking, planning, behavior, class management and professional knowledge.

Ciaran adds setting standards of what teachers should know and be able to do, can certainly help insure the profession against truly awful teaching, against ignorance and incompetence in our classrooms (Ibid).

In order to reach the heart of teaching profession, general understanding and professional intelligence will help a lot. This is why emphasis should be put upon selecting students for the teaching profession. Cultural intelligence is also needed for language teachers specifically.

According to Mortimore et al (1988) “...emotion is integral to all teaching, not just the best or worst of it. ...policy strategies designed to improve or raise standards in teaching and learning rarely acknowledge this vital emotional dimension. Often emotions are excluded from professional standards’ frameworks, teacher evaluation schemes, standard learning targets and even from the basic idea of ‘reflective practice’ in teaching. (p. 4)

Teachers to be should be taught to know “a safe and orderly climate is needed for learning to take place”. They should be aware that emotional and personal problems affect learning. Teaching is working with human feelings. Some experts believe that being aware of human senses and feelings is more useful for teachers than technical teaching theories.

Language improvement should focus on personal language skills and Professional language skills....The link between personal/professional language improvement and development of methodological expertise is a recurrent theme, with attention both to opportunities (Barnes, Cullen, Ferguson, Wright) and to potential difficulties (Ferguson,, O’Donoghue & Hales, Levender).

In teacher education and training courses we cannot suffice on theories only. Brigit &Hulstijn suggest: Language awareness activity should involve doing rather than just expert input (Wright), working with examples of authentic language including corpus data (O’Donoghue& Hales), and going beyond knowledge already in mind to the development of new knowledge, or more refined knowledge (Wright). The range of such awareness activity is very wide indeed, embracing language in general as well as particular language, both learner language and teacher language, and teaching materials. (pp.6-7).

Full command on L 1 and L 2 is necessary for a foreign language teacher. This can be taught and learned at universities and other educational institutes with existing curricula. But this is not all the story as proper command on a language is a complex activity which requires competence in different aspects. It is a multi-componential activity which draws

on diverse knowledge and skills. It involves linguistic competence which needs to be aware of language differences in relation with culture.

In this case, cultural intelligence, creativity and other innate abilities are also important for language teachers and for teachers of other disciplines related to Arts and related areas such as music, painting, literature, poetry.

Full command on a foreign language “involves the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group, entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and encoding which are not separable from the concept of culture. ... There are so many cultural words, proverbs, idiomatic expressions, etc... which are specific to that culture (Karamanian, 2011). So, foreign language teachers, as well as translators, are called upon to do a cross-cultural activity in such a way that they can be considered not only bilinguals but also bicultural, if not multicultural. (Ibid)

Presas (2000) believes that cultural competence is different from other competences.

Nida explaining the problem of correspondence while giving equal importance to both linguistic and cultural differences between L1 and L2 explains that the difference between cultures may cause more severe complications for the transfer (Nida, 1969) and communication.

Ability in understanding culture of other people needs special talent and intelligence, because human beings are bound to their beliefs and captured by bias.

Even in one culture, it is true that people will usually feel and understand what they hear or read according to their own knowledge and level of understanding. And in many cases we understand what we hear according to the way that we want to! That is why one utterance can be interpreted differently by different hearers simultaneously!

Creativity is also crucial for language teachers. According to Torrance (1969) creativity is “the process of sensing a problem, searching for possible solutions, drawing hypotheses, testing and evaluating and communicating the results to others.” He adds that the process includes the original idea, a different point of view, breaking out of the mold and recognizing ideas.

For cultural intelligence Early & Ang, (2003) explain, “Having a high level of cultural intelligence means that individuals are more able to extract and logically interpret information gathered from cross cultural interactions, and are more flexible in adjusting to different settings.” (Ghasemipour, 2013).

If we want to teach a foreign language for debate, teachers should also have training courses for reducing bias and learn how to convince their audience by friendly talks. Is this not better than war, fighting and killing? In this case the language learners should have the ability of bringing themselves into the mood and atmosphere of the situation in which they are using the other language. “This can be considered as emotional understanding which is related to emotional intelligence. The term Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to identify, express and understand emotions to thought; and to

regulate both positive and negative emotions in oneself and others” (Goldman, 1995& ‘98).

Evidences show that related training with proper courses for making the inner abilities stronger can be a positive factor for better language teachers, as it is in other arts. So, revising of university programs is needed.

Present university education is based on theories for leading to obtaining a higher education document. This is not enough for training good teachers. A pile of theories cannot produce good experts. University programs need more practice and even short courses in the target language countries.

Unfortunately this is the situation for many other disciplines, too. But for training able language teachers there is a need for a fundamental revision and up-to-date making of the curricula and revising the present programs for training students in intelligence, creativity, self-efficacy and other innate abilities. Various studies, including, one study based on Pearson correlation coefficient have shown that there is positive relationship between these factors and academic achievements. (Esgandari, 2013: 84). These revisions can also make a revolution in all fields of education if they are applied.

3. Suggestions

Cultural intelligence and creativity are the factors in individuals which can affect teaching and learning quality. Although these factors have a complex nature, but many studies show that these abilities can be developed by the implementation of related techniques. (See Mansfield, Busse and Krepelka 1978, Parnes and Brunelle 1967, Rose and Lin 1984, and Taylor 1972. In Esgandari, 2013).

For effective revision of University teacher education curricula attention should be paid to adding creativity supporting techniques including computer-based support tools (artificial intelligence models, computer software idea processors, information system, etc.) which are developed to promote and generate creativity to break fixed ideas, to stimulate imagination, as well as to define the conditions in which creativity and other abilities take place. (Esgandari: 86; Toossi, 2014).

As teaching a foreign language in places where there is no application outside the classroom (English as a foreign language), the outcome is usually disappointing because learners have little chance of practice. This reduces motivation for learning.

One way is to make arrangements for increasing tourism. This is good for both the economy of the country and for communication practice and international better understanding and it will add to the willingness of learners for better learning of the other languages.

I believe that we are able to be heralds of international peace and friendship, provided we prepare proper texts, without bias and teach our teachers to walk on the path of language teaching philosophy.

David Middlewood mentions that “all education is political,...all schools are sites of cultural policies”. (p. 10)

Members of today’s teaching professions [should be] highly sensitized, perhaps more so than ever before, to the social and cultural implications of their professional choices, and to the ways in which these do, or should, take account of change in the environment of LTE, both global and local (Ibid, as quoted in Davies 1999:28).

In any case, better teachers should have good command on the second language, to the extent of bilinguals, and good ability on teaching techniques in the first place. They also need to be familiar with and have much better understanding of the foreign cultures and act as advocates of peace and global friendship. Teachers should be free from bias and prejudice. Teacher training courses should teach them while keeping their own beliefs and ideas firmly, they should teach their students to care and respect those of others.

Is it not the time for paying more attention to the philosophy and long-term aims of education and language teaching which emphasizes making different nations and cultures closer to each other, as I explained before, and teach our students to move towards more humanistic goals, for peace, friendship, democracy which are the panacea of all problems that all nations are engaged in these days? Language teachers along with proper texts can help in this area better than other teachers, military troupes, bombs and missiles!

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