

<b>Foreign Language Learning and Translation-Related Approach</b>			<b>Linguistics</b>
		<b>Keywords:</b> code-switching, foreignization, foreign language learning (FLL), inter-lingual transfer, translation-related approach, translation-free approach	
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<b>Abstract</b>			
<p>From the 17-th to the 19-th century grammar-translation approach was the main method of teaching a foreign language. As a result of this method pupils could study English for many years, they knew and were able to apply grammar rules correctly but found it difficult to speak the language fluently. Then in the 70-ies and 80-ies of the 20-th century, there was a shift to communicative approach (translation-free approach). Recently there has been a renewal of the concept that translation is an important skill in learning a foreign language and the translation-related approach has come into use.</p> <p>The goal of this research is focusing on the new trends in teaching English as a second language, where translation is considered as a significant language skill. It provides reasons why and to what extent it should be used in a classroom setting and how it can improve language learning, enhance student comprehension and communication by non-native teachers. In order to achieve this, a questionnaire is conducted with the pupils of a 9-grade school in Albania, who learn English and French as foreign languages. The objective of this questionnaire was to see what the perceptions of the pupils are as regards the use of the skill of translation and language A (mother tongue) in the classroom.</p> <p>The findings of the questionnaire highlight the idea that translation is an important skill that should be used appropriately and proportionately in language learning process and what's more important when the teachers are non-native speakers, it should be used proportionately as a means to develop clarity, accuracy and explain language and culture differences.</p>			

## Introduction

The issue of using translation as a means of teaching a foreign language remains a controversy. Different researchers and practitioners including teachers, translation practitioners, linguists, psycholinguists, sociolinguists, etc. have been involved in this debate during the recent years. This research and its findings intend to provide contribution to this debate and future researches as regards this topic, without jumping into rigid conclusions.

The grammar-translation approach was used extensively for more than two centuries from the 17-th to the 19-th century and still continues to be used in some countries. It was the new term coined for the classical method used to teach Latin and Greek. Until the 1960-ies of the XX-th century, the grammar-translation approach was dominant in foreign language teaching. According to this approach, learners were asked to translate literally entire texts and memorize the grammar rules, exceptions of those rules and also the new words. The objective of this approach was making the students skilful in reading and translating the literary masterpieces. Little attention was devoted to the speaking ability and communication. Learners were given lists of isolated words and were asked to translate them and learn by heart.

The grammar-translation approach was dominant in foreign language teaching in Albania for many decades. It was not successful and this led to the emergence of completely different approaches, from the “direct approaches” to the “audio-communicative” and “audiovisual” approaches of the 60-ies that were completely against any kind of intervention of mother tongue and translation exercises in the foreign language classes. Later in the 70-ies and 80-ies of the XX-the century, there was a tendency to shift towards a new different approach: the communicative approach.

The recent years witnessed a revival of the concept that translation is an important skill in foreign language teaching and has a great impact on enhancing the foreign language learning quality. This concept is closely related to the use of the mother tongue in foreign language classes. In fact, there are controversial opinions as regards the way of including translation in foreign language learning. This debate is very important in Albania and in all those countries where English and other foreign languages are not the mother-tongues and most of the teachers are non-native speakers of the foreign language.

Closely related to the issue of translation-based approach in foreign language learning is the use of some strategies that language learners at the beginning of their learning process like: code-switching, transliteration, “foreignization”, interlingual transfer which are closely related to translation. That is why we have included this issue in our research.

This research and its findings shed light on the positive and negative sides of these approaches and support the idea that translation activity in foreign language teaching lead to the enhancement of the interactive and communicative skills and as such it should be promoted and teachers should be aware of the importance of these activities. Most of the teachers include such activities in foreign language classes, but they are not sure that this is the most appropriate thing to do and sometimes they don't feel at ease while using these activities.

### **The outlining theory**

The grammar-translation approach was based on learning the grammar rules. The translation of grammar was considered as a good method and was based on the traditional learning of Latin and Greek. Students were asked to translate whole texts literally and learn the grammar rules and exceptions to these rules as well as the new words by heart. According to this method, a long list of the words of the vocabulary in language A and language B. The grammar issues came out directly from the texts in the textual context and were explained from the teacher. Grammar served to offer rules and organize words into sentences. In order to reinforce the knowledge acquired, there were many grammar and translation exercises involved in the type of exercises and no attention was devoted to the content of the text. The texts were translated from the foreign language into the mother tongue, and little attention was devoted to the pronunciation and the language communication aspect. The best preferred aspect was reading seen only in the context of translation. The shortcoming of this approach is its communicative aspect, because the students can study the language for many years, know the grammar rules very well, but they have difficulties in speaking the foreign language fluently. This approach achieves a limited number of

objectives. It lacks communication, the active role of the students in the classroom, the speaking skill is limited and the students can't manage to speak freely and even write a letter in the foreign language. It poses some limits on thinking in a foreign language and hampers the acquisition of automatic expressions and can lead to unnecessary interventions of the mother tongue. It is not considered as a natural approach of learning a foreign language because it turns upside down the order of foreign language teaching because it starts with reading and then continues with writing different from the normal order of language teaching that follows this order: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The speaking aspect is disregarded and that is why, this approach causes problems with communication. Students can't communicate freely in the foreign language, because they listen to the mother tongue in the foreign language classes.

This approach does not allow enough space for practice, attention is devoted more to learning the grammar rules rather than using them. Many scholars highlight the idea that it is almost impossible to speak a foreign language being entirely based on rules, because foreign language learning acquires many other skills that are learnt through practice instead of learning rules by heart. What students normally do is translate the ideas from mother tongue into foreign language and this does not encourage creative thinking and the accurate expression of ideas at all.

Then in the 70-ies and 80-ies, there was a shift to communicative method (translation free method) by using only English and teaching "English through English." (Willis 1981).

*This approach was completely against the intervention of mother tongue and focused on the communicative aspect. It came as a necessity of that time, of the increased demand to study foreign languages in Europe and USA. This increased demand imposed a new way of thinking based on the assumption that "active learning is better than passive learning." (Whong 2011).*

According to Nunan (1991), the communicative language teaching approach is based on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language; using authentic texts; an enhancement of the learners own personal experiences as important elements to classroom learning. As a result there was more pair and group work, interviews, role-plays introduced in FL classes. This approach has communication and learners at its focus and motivates the learners. It is successful when the teachers are native speakers of the language and this disadvantage has led to some new thinking about the successful implementation of this approach.

Recently there has been a renewal of the concept that translation is an important skill in learning a foreign language that encourages and upgrades language learning. Translation is now more and more referred to as the fifth language skill alongside with the other four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing): "Translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: in the advanced or final stage of language teaching, translation from A to B and B to A is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers."(Ross 2000)

Being exposed to two completely different approaches, teachers don't know which one to choose and so there is debate about this choice. In order to be part of this debate, let's make a list of the advantages and disadvantages regarding the use of translation-based language teaching approach. Disadvantages are related to these reasons: it may restrain thinking in foreign language, can cause language interference and can prevent pupils from acquiring automatic habits.

As regards advantages, translation-based approach is considered as extremely important for foreign language teaching simply because it allows conscious learning and control of the foreign language, and consequently. Using translation can make learning meaningful because the learner is an active participant in the process. Every person acquires a foreign language after having acquired mother-tongue, which means alongside the language skills you have acquired knowledge about different issues. This knowledge makes the process of foreign language learning more mature and full of variety, comparisons and contributions as compared to mother tongue acquisition. The existence of this prior knowledge and skills make the learner go through a translation process while learning the foreign language. This approach contributes to immediate understanding and helps examine students' perceptions of mother tongue application. Students experience less tension as a result of the use of mother-tongue in the foreign language classes. Robinson (1997) puts forward that translation is actually a language learning process and the translator is always a learner. He suggests that "translation is an intelligent activity, requiring creative problem-solving in novel, textual, social and cultural conditions." He further suggests that translation involves "complex processes of conscious and unconscious learning." Translation method develops three qualities essential to any language learning: accuracy, clarity, and flexibility." (Duff 1996)

This is also true and even more helpful with the advanced learners. For beginners, of course, it is useful simply because it expounds grammar and teaches vocabulary. "Translation is useful in the EFL classroom in order to compare grammar, vocabulary, word order and other language points in English and the students' mother tongue."(Ross 2000)

This depends very much on the teachers and his/her attitude towards use of translation as a means of teaching foreign language. It goes without saying that learners unconsciously use the translation method for learning a language, shifting from one language to the other and making comparisons between two languages, grammar structures, trying to adapt language A words, phrases and structures into foreign language. The strategies they employ are also tackled within the scope of this research.

The use of translation-based approach and bilingualism or multilingualism is closely related with the use of translation strategies by the FL learners.

Code switching is a process when learners use a word or phrase from language A and insert it into language B or vice versa. Most of the pupils state that they use this translation strategy when they start learning a foreign language. In many situations of languages in contact, constituents of one language can be found with the constituents of another language in a number of linguistic phenomena, namely lexical borrowing, transferring, interference, calquing, diffusion, relexification, codeswitching and codemixing, etc. (Annamali 1989).

Traditionally, code-switching has been considered as a strategy to make up for weak language command. The learners switch language codes because of their level of the language. At the beginning of language learning, Albanian learners of English rely mostly on Albanian when they communicate in English. When they reach a good command of language B, than the learners have the tendency to code-switch to Albanian. "Code-switching may be indicative of difficulties in retrieval (access) affected by a combination of closely-related factors such as language use (i.e.,

how often the first language is used) and word frequency (i.e., how much a particular word is used in the language).” (Heredia 1997)

There is another strategy that learners unconsciously use “foreignizing”, namely the invention or creation of words, phrases or structures that do not exist in the learner's A language but that are imported by language B. This strategy is not used at the early stages of language learning, but later when the learner has a good command of Language B and he uses its structures in language A.

*Transliteration as a strategy implies literal rendering of the native language word or phrase into language B. It is used at the early stages of language learning. The learners having a limited knowledge of foreign language, translate expressions or word groups literally in order to express their ideas in speaking or writing. In many cases there can be correct equivalences by using this strategy, but in most of the cases word combinations are meaningless in the foreign language.*

*As regards interlingual transfer, it is a strategy that aims at rewording the text and interpreting verbal signs by means of some other languages. Learners transfer from the mother tongue or other previously learned languages into Language B, because they lack the linguistic means to create complete ideas.*

#### *Problems of Research*

The problems of this research are related to the foreign language teaching approaches, their advantages and disadvantages, thus offering certain alternatives to the contemporary students and teachers nowadays. Another problem of the research is to what extent the translation strategies are used in foreign language classes by the students and by bringing this issue to the attention of the foreign language teachers, these strategies can be identified as part of the FLL process.

The focus of the research is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the use of communicative approach and translation-based approach in foreign language learning and some translation strategies that pupils use either consciously or unconsciously in foreign language classes. The research has at its focus 40 pupils of a 9-th grade school in Tirana, Albania, who study two foreign languages: English and French. There are two different approaches used in foreign language teaching classes with these pupils. English is taught by an Albanian speaking teacher and French is taught by a French speaking teacher and this gives a two-faceted view of the foreign language learning approaches. The teacher of French, having no knowledge of Albanian, is more likely to use the communicative approach because she doesn't speak Albanian at all and grammar and all the new concepts and words will be explained via French. Regarding English, the situation is different because since the teacher is Albanian, it is more likely that she is going to use translation-based approach and mother-tongue as well. Based on this fact, the questionnaire with these pupils is designed in such a way as to draw the differences of the approaches used. Another element that is worth discussing is the foreign language level of the pupils. Their level of English is intermediate whereas that of French is pre-intermediate.

Another issue that is related with the questions of the questionnaire is the translation strategies pupils use in the FLL process. Since the 40 pupils study two foreign languages at the same time but at different levels, it goes without saying that they can be influenced by the

structures and grammar of Albanian and vice versa. There are questions devoted to these strategies: code-switching, foreignization, interlingual transfer and transliteration. The aim of the research is not to go into details about the use of translation strategies, but just to find a linking bridge between translation, use of mother tongue and translation strategies in FLL.

The questions are put in a simple way. The questions are related with: 1. using a word or phrase from language A and inserting it into language B or vice versa (code switching); 2. creating words, phrases or structures that do not exist in A language but that are imported by language B (foreignizing); 3. using word for word language A words or phrases into language B (transliteration); 4. rewording the text and interpreting verbal signs by means of some other languages (interlingual transfer).

## Methodology of Research

*For the purposes of this research, the procedure of questioning the 40 pupils of the 9-th grade of a school in Tirana is used. In the conducted questionnaire there are two sets of similar yes/no questions including a number of questions asked about the two foreign languages (English and French) that these pupils study in this school with two responding options: yes/no. The questions were devised as to see the students perceptions about the use of language A in foreign language classes, if this helped them understand issues related to vocabulary, grammar and culture as well as their perceptions related to using only B language in the classroom. The quantitative data from the questionnaire (Table 1) provide the opportunity to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the two different approaches seen from the learners' perspectives as well as to identify the translation strategies they use in foreign language classes.*

Regarding the second issue of the research, translation strategies used in foreign language learning, the same questioning procedure has been used. There were four yes/no questions asked to the same number of students (40). Questions were asked in a simple way so as to be understandable for this age group. The positive answers were provided in percentages in Table 2.

## Data Analysis

From the data analysis of the 40 questionnaires, students provided their opinions about the use of language A and B in the foreign language classes, most of the students think that using Albanian and translation in their English classes, helps them compare grammar rules in Language A and B (90%), better understand difficult grammar rules (80%); use correctly language and grammar, explain difficult concepts, learn new words (70%). Regarding the rest of the questions (correct choice of words, thinking in foreign language, accurate pronunciation) less than half of the students answered positively about the use of mother-tongue and translation in their English language classes.

As regards the use of language B in French classes, most of the students answered positively about the use of correct pronunciation (90%); thinking in foreign language (80%) and the correct choice of words (70%). Whereas for the rest of the questions, less than 40% of the students answered positively.

**Table 1. Findings related to FLL approaches**

Issues of the questionnaire	Use of translation-based approach in English classes (positive answers % of students)	Use of translation-free approach in French classes (positive answers % of students)
Correct use of language, grammar	70	40
Correct choice of words	34	70
Thinking in foreign language	40	80
Explaining difficult concepts	70	25
Explaining difficult grammar rules	80	30
Introducing new words	70	40
Comparing grammar of L A and B	90	10
Explaining cultural differences	60	20
Accurate pronunciation and intonation patterns	40	90

Regarding the analysis of the data for the second issue of the research (Table 2), it can be said that most of the students answered positively to the questions related to code switching and transliteration (90%), whereas only a few of them answered positively to questions related to foreignizing (30%) and interlingual transfer (20%).

**Table 2: Use of translation strategies in language learning**

Translation Strategies	Positive answers (in % of students)
Code-switching	90
Transliteration	90
Foreignizing	30
Interlingual transfer	20

## Results of research

After the analysis of the data, it resulted that having a language teacher who is a native speaker does have more advantages than disadvantages. The advantages are as follows: pupils have the opportunity of using the skill of translation and the teacher can explain many grammar, vocabulary and cultural issues in language A. Based on the answers of the pupils, the advantages are as follows: explaining difficult concepts and difficult grammar rules, introducing new words and explaining cultural differences and comparing grammar of language A and B. And one of the

disadvantages is considered accurate pronunciation, thinking in a foreign language and mother-tongue intervention in grammar, syntactic structures, intonation patterns etc.

Likewise having a foreign language teacher that is a non-native speaker has more disadvantages than advantages. The two advantages are: accurate pronunciation and intonation patterns and thinking in a foreign language, whereas the rest can be considered as disadvantages because if the pre-intermediate level of the pupils in French is considered, it goes without saying that they do not understand everything when the teacher explains the new concepts, grammar categories or cultural differences in French without using Albanian at all.

From the examination of the quantitative data of the first questionnaire the result is that the translation-based approach has many advantages vis-à-vis translation-free approach.

Despite the controversy that exists between these two approaches, many scholars share the opinion that translation-based approach has many advantages and should be used in foreign language learning within some constraints.

“As a language learning activity, translation has many merits. It invites speculation and discussion, develops clarity, flexibility and accuracy. The teacher can select material to illustrate particular aspects of language and structure with which the students have difficulty.”(Duff 1989)

There is an opinion that according to Mattioli (2004) “rigidly eliminating or limiting the native language does not appear to guarantee better acquisition, nor does it foster the humanistic approach that recognizes learners’ identities.”

Considering all the benefits of translation-based language learning approach versus free-translation approach, it can be said that it really helps the process of language learning if it used proportionately and with the aim of producing an effective result. As Bouton (1974) has stated: “Translation can be like medicine, which, when administered in the right dose and way, has a curative effect, and otherwise, when used injudiciously, it can also prove harmful.”

From the quantitative data of the second questionnaire, the results are that: code-switching, is the most widespread phenomenon especially when it comes to word order, grammar categories, sentence structures, choice of words etc.

Regarding the strategy of “foreignizing”, it is not used very much by the learners because language A is taught prior to language B and the tendency is that the first language interferes more with the second language.

The strategy of transliteration is used by most of the pupils especially at the beginning of foreign language learning. They translate word combinations, idioms, phrasal verbs word for word as they appear in mother tongue or from English into French.

As regards interlingual transfer, it is not widely used since from the pupils and the reason is that they are at the learning process of English and French. They reword the text and transfer words, groups of words from English into French because they took up learning French after having acquired an intermediate level of English.

All these strategies may not produce accurate outputs in language learning, but are important efforts to improve language skills.

## Conclusions

Translation-related approach should be used more and more but always taking into account the level of learners and the percentage of its use in a classroom setting. Translation is now more and more referred to as the fifth language skill alongside with the other four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Foreign language teachers should feel free to use translation in their classes since it poses many advantages and help improve learner's performance in the long run. Students' culture is part of their language and by neglecting their language the teacher, in a monolingual classroom neglects their culture and identity and de-motivates them. Translation as a teaching tool needs to take into account a number of different aspects, such as grammar, syntax, collocation and connotation. Uncritical use of translation may give learners insufficient, confusing, or even inaccurate information about target language. Translation is useful, because it is interactive, learner-centred, it promotes learners' autonomy, and uses authentic materials. Translation is an important skill that should be used appropriately and proportionately in language learning process and what's more important when the teachers are non-native speakers, it should be used as a means to develop clarity, accuracy and explain language and culture differences. Translation strategies are important efforts to improve language skills especially at the beginning of learning a foreign language. Teachers should be aware of the use of these strategies and identify the potential use on the part of foreign language learners bearing in mind that although they do not produce accurate outputs in language learning, they are part of the FLL process.

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