

TRANSLATING COMIC: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

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Abstract

The teaching of English in secondary level is based on genre approach. Comic as one of narrative text provides the possibility to be explored in translation activities. Translation process is employed as a mean to enhance the students' skills in English, not merely to get perfect final product. The classroom activities are planned in such a way to avoid excessive linguistic and vocabulary concern which prevent the class from communicative activities.

Key words: *translating comic, classroom activity*

Introduction

My interest in using comic for giving translation exercises began when I was teaching students of language program in secondary level in which I spent eight periods a week, @ 45 minutes. Considering that it would be uninteresting to deal only with academically provided materials, I began looking for some additional. When I searched for additional material which could provide a basis for interactive, creative, and fun activities for my class, I found that comic was one of the best possible choices. Bearing in mind that language used in comic is less rigid compared to other materials for classroom use; I take that it would provide different exposure of a target language to my students.

As what I expected, my class found it interesting to deal with comic. Comic is part of their daily social lives. They search for comics online and share them with friends. However, I estimated that answering comprehension questions only after reading the comic was less challenging. Though some subjective questions would possibly explore their deep understanding of the topic, they still lacked of the exploration of the short and simple language presented in the comic. Consequently, I decided translation as a subsequent activity because I intended on involving my students more on the language than merely on the topic.

However, in my years of teaching I have been often warned that translation is a dangerous area teacher should be aware of. Translation is generally not considered as a communicative activity; therefore it is not suggested for language teaching and learning in secondary level. Though as a strategy they are different, the notion translation is often associated

with the old teaching and learning method, namely Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The method focused on teaching set of grammars of the target language and learners were expected to a deductive understanding of the rules through the process of memorizing. It separated the teaching of grammar from communicative meaning. It urged the learners struggle to bridge their excessive grammatical and vocabulary items investment of a target language to an actual communication (Nunan,1999).

The psychological warning was very useful. It guided me to be very careful in planning and implementing the activity, so that I would not be trapped into the 'forbidden' practice of GTM. The communicative language presentation on comic was an advantage. Furthermore, the positive response of the students was another support. The latest experience had so successfully motivated me to write this paper. The paper would deal with some theoretical basis of comic translation as a classroom activity, the preparation and implementation for translating comic in English to Indonesian, and some practical suggestions.

Why Translating Comic?

Some definitions of translation are variously given by the experts. One given by Nida and Taber (1969) cited in Hariyanto (2003) is closest to the purpose of the present paper. They stated that the process of translating consist of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in language meaning and secondly in terms of style. The definition fits the present study in two points. First, it concerns more on the process of translating. As the purpose of translating in my class is engaging the students in the process of learning English through translation, the emphasis on the process is necessary. Secondly, it places the language meaning before the style. It matches to the students' ability in translating. As the secondary level learners, they are not expected to be expert translators yet.

By having this definition, the purpose of taking translation into the classroom activity is very clear, that is as the process enhancing students' English. The main skill to concern is reading because the language presented to the students in a comic is in a written form. However, in the process of translating some other sub skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and culture gain their proportional attention. So, it forms an integrated approach of teaching English.

Why comic? Comic is often defined as set of sequenced pictures developed into a story. The language used by the characters is presented in callouts accompanied the pictures in such a way that helps its readers understand the story easily. In that way, it is understood that the language used is strictly simple and communicative. The readers do not only relay their understanding of the story on the language presentation, but they also get the meaningful assistance from the performance of the

picture. So, both language and pictures are responsible in developing the readers understanding of the whole comic.

The fact that there are two sources of understanding comic, language in the first part, and pictures on the other, lessens the burden of the learners to deal with the language. This is the reason why comic is considered to be the right choice for translation in secondary level class. Moreover, it may provide a basis for oral discourse while at the same time give the opportunity to teach verbs and other part of speech as the examples of connected speech as well as to illustrate idioms.

Translation as a Learning Strategy

Translation as learning strategy is not commonly used in the communicative foreign/second language classroom. However, as we considered that the ideal translation should be accurate, natural, and communicative there must be great process underlying the outcomes. The accuracy of the translation is obtained only if the students acting as the translators understand exactly the meaning of the source text. To achieve this level of understanding means that students have to study the comic well before attempting to translate it. While for gaining natural result, students have to understand the contexts in which the expressions are used. It provides self-motivation for the students to learn more about language use. To be communicative means that the comic text requires the students to treat it as a communicative unit that is meaningful in its own presentation. It is not merely the representation of grammar and vocabulary items. Consequently, they will be able to find equal communicative expression on their own language.

Further, Larson: 1998 (in <http://www.sil.org/translation/trtheory.htm>) stated that translation, then, consists of studying the lexicon, grammatical structure, communication situation, and cultural context of the source language text, analyzing it in order to determine its meaning, and then reconstructing this same meaning using the lexicon and grammatical structure which are appropriate in the receptor language and its cultural context.

The diagram is actually covered complex process taken in the process of translating. However, the process of the students learning can be traced down from the illustration. Firstly, the students attempt to discover the meaning. In this step, they employ all their linguistic investment such as grammar, vocabulary as well as the cultural context. With the help of the picture accompanying the language, the students discover the meaning. Next, as they have to translate what they already discovered, it is not enough for them to understand the text passively.

OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSLATION TASK

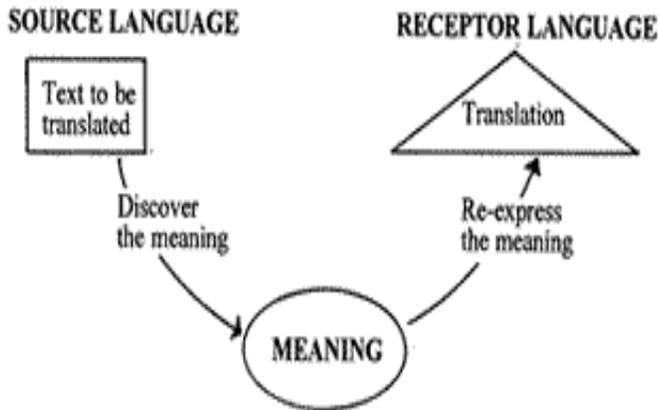


Diagram from Larson 1998, p. 4

They have to find the acceptable expressions in their own language. The internal process is longer, more complicated than merely reading the comic text. As students engaged more deeply in the translating process, it is assumed that they learn the source language (English) more during the process.

Preparation and Implementation for Classroom Activity

As genre-based approach has been adopted in the teaching of English in Indonesian curriculum nowadays. Students are exposed to authentic use of language in some genre types. The types of genre the students of senior high school level deal with are recount, narrative, procedure, descriptive, news item, spoof, report, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, discussion, and review (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional: 2006). They are presented in the domain of the four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

As is it stated previously that translation is not an independent skill stated in the curriculum for English class in secondary level. Therefore, it should be given in collaboration with other language skills. The present study collaborates translation with reading because in reading activities, the exploration of the text in source language is comprehensively done. This step is very important for developing students' understanding of the source language so that it will be easier for them to translate later.

Considering that narrative is one of the genres I have to deal in the eleventh grade, it is rightful for me to take comic as one of additional materials. So, first step of my preparation is developing syllabus in which translating comic is one of the point in dealing with narrative genre. Then, selecting the appropriate comic is necessary. After that, some comprehension questions both for checking the students' understanding and leading to further discussion are provided. It is important to help students discovering the meaning of comic. The discussion can be either linguistic or cultural. Then, assign them to construct the translation in Indonesian.

The detail implementation in the classroom is presented as follows.

1. Present the comic to the students; inform the activity to do and the purpose.
2. Group the students in a group of 4.
3. Students read the comic in limited given time, while noted the problem they may encounter.
4. Answer the provided questions.
5. Discuss the answer and other problems.
6. Translate the comic.
7. Display the result.
8. Discussing and giving feedback.

Practical Suggestion

For secondary level students, translation can be a complicated task. It is suggested that it is conducted in small group, so that they possibly share the burden with their peers in the group. Besides, to minimize their burden, it is also necessary to equip them with linguistic and cultural information of the source text.

Students usually equip themselves with dictionary, printed as well as electronic one, and they usually trusted it a lots. They take what is stated there literary. In this case, teacher has to remind them that translation is not merely finding the word in dictionary and use it. There is contextual meaning that they have to capture in order to be able to translate it well.

Translating is time consuming activity, let alone when it is done in group. The strict time management is exactly needed. It can also be given as homework when the teacher needs to have more elaborated activity for translation such as displaying the result, giving feedback both from peers and from teacher, discussing the feedback and possible correction.

As the purpose of translation is developing the students' mastery in English, the focus of the activity is not mainly on the perfect result, but developing more linguistic and cultural knowledge on the source text, that is the wordings of comic. However, it is advisable that it wouldn't

trap us in boring grammatical and vocabulary exploration. Therefore, the ongoing process is better employed than scoring the final result.

Conclusion

Translating comic can be an appropriate choice for classroom activity. As most students like comic, it is interesting to deal with, provided that it is designed in such a way that prevent the class from excessive linguistic and vocabulary exploration. Moreover, comic translation should focus more on developing students' ability in English, not merely for gaining the perfect result.

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