7. Teaching translation:
Sample tasks & activities
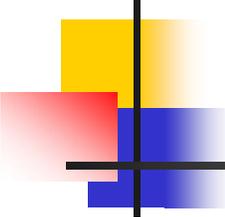
A sample translation course

- Length: 25 weeks at 1h30 per week
- No. of students: 22, divided into 2 groups, 2 teachers
- Workload:
    - 6 x 250-word texts into L1/TL, the same into English/TL
    - one long translation (1000 words) with commentary
- Text-types: legal act, contract, will, court decision, etc.
- Assessment:
    - course-work counts for 15%
    - the long translation and commentary, also 15%
    - 3-hr examination, translate 2 x 250-word texts, one L2, one English (70%)
- Aims:
    To study the theory and practice of translation from and into English, with an emphasis on practical tasks. (Note. The priority is on the study and implementation of translation strategies, rather than on the perfecting of proficiency in L1 & L2!)
- Source book:

Translator's Competence:
Transferable skills and knowledge

- Read accurately
- Operate effectively socio-linguistically: be aware of register, text-type
- Understand a theory of communication and see one's role as a link in a chain of communication
- Use contextual knowledge effectively
- Work to a brief, carry out instructions, i.e. adopt the attitude of a professional
- See when extra research is needed, and do it, i.e. act autonomously
- Prioritise work, pace oneself, manage one's time have work ready early if possible
- Produce reader-friendly documents, work on lay-out
- Step back from one's work and evaluate it with objectivity
- Post-edit one's own and other people's work (requires considerable language-awareness)
- Understand what makes the two languages tick (similar/different)
- Articulate unspoken assumptions (translation strategies, and reasons for translation decisions)
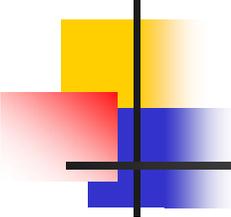
General

- **The aims of the session:**
    - teach translation into and out of the foreign language
    - suggest techniques for shifting the focus of L2>L1 translation onto process and meaning
    - show how language learning tasks can assist L1>L2 translation
- **Learning outcomes**
    - At the end of this session participants should be able to:
    - identify approaches to translation which emphasise the learning process rather than merely the end product
    - employ a range of techniques to support and develop the ability to translate from L2 to L1
    - use parallel texts to help develop L1>L2 translation.
- **For this module you will find:**
    - handout (parallel translated texts: E-CRO; CRO-E)
- **You will need:**
    - sample texts for group work
    - flipchart and pens for feedback from participants
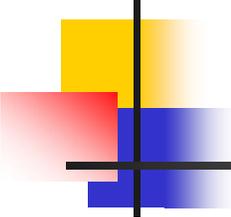
APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

- **TR as a PRODUCT**
- **TR as a PROCESS**
  - **TR as a learning process**
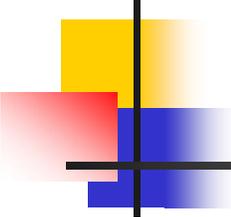
The translation class(es)

1. Introduction
2. Common problems of translation and translation teaching
3. L2>L1 translation as a learning process
   - Other L2>L1 translation issues
   - Approaches to L1>L2 translation
4. L1>L2 translation as a learning process
5. Group exercise
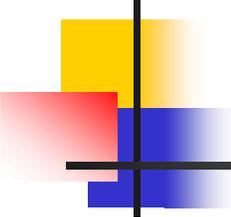
1. Introduction - General approach

- initial tutor input
- participants work in language-specific pairs on a sample text to discuss
  - how to exploit it for translation into their particular target language.
- after approximately 20 minutes each pair shares its ideas with the whole group
- the various approaches and ideas are subsequently typed up and distributed to all participants
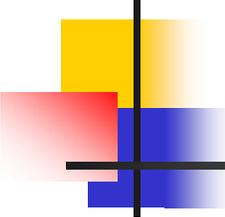
2.
Common problems in translation teaching

Traditional approach:

- students write a translation in their own time,
- hand it in for marking by the lecturer
- who then spends most of the class hour going over the piece, highlighting problems.
  - Translation simply treated as as a vague support to general language learning,
  - the process becomes in effect little more than repeated testing
  - This fails to make clear how students are to learn about translation.

TRADITIONAL:

- translation used to be employed as a way of teaching grammar particularly in translation into the foreign language,
- with the emphasis on morphology, lexis, syntax, register, etc.,
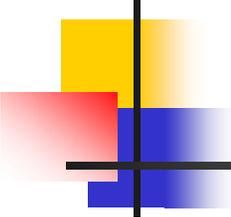
3. L2>L1 translation

3.1 L2>L1 translation – traditional approach (see 2)

3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process

1. Setting, context, audience
2. Reconstruction of meaning
3. Reading phase
4. Reconstruction of meaning
5. Translation dossiers
6. Annotated translations
7. Correcting a translation
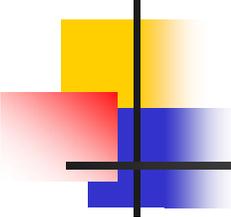
3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.1 Setting, context, audience (a)

- students should never be given a decontextualised piece of writing. They need to be told where the text has come from, i.e.:
    - · if it is part of a larger work
    - · where it comes in the work
    - · what has gone before
    - · what comes after it.
- They also need to have information on the following:
    - · does it introduce something?
    - · is it arguing a specific point in a more complex argument?
    - · is it developing an argument, a character, etc.?
    - · is it seeking to summarise, draw a conclusion, etc.?
- If it is an article, they need to know which publication it is from and if it is:
    - · an editorial
    - · a news report
    - · a feature
    - · a satirical piece, part of a caricature, etc.
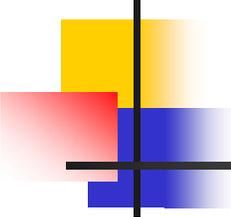
3.2.1　Setting, context, audience (b)

- in the real world of professional translation this sort of information translators will be crucial to the way they will approach the text
- they will want to know the audience for their translation
- Students too should be told the imagined purpose of their translation; there are two aspects to this:
  - · why is the translation needed, what use will it be put to?
  - · who will be using the translation?
- With greater experience of translation, students can be encouraged to seek the above information themselves and to act on what they discover
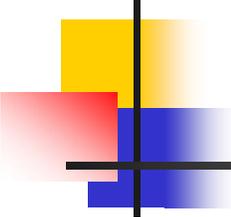
3.2.1   Setting, context, audience (c)

- Many higher education language departments have now begun to show greater interest in translation:
    - as a vocational tool and
    - in the lessons to be learnt from those who earn their living from translation
- Practice is now often based on the questions:
    - How do professional translators go about their job?
    - What does a professional translator do?
- In exploring these issues teachers of translation need to shift the focus of their work
    - from the end product to the process
- 'TR text' should really be seen:
    - as just one text type
    - alongside a whole range of others (journalism, advertising, bureaucratic style, legalese, etc.) and
    - as something that teachers of translation need to help their students to build towards, since it is a task ideally suited to stretch more advanced translators

3. L2>L1 translation
3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.2 Reading phase

- read the whole text thoroughly before embarking on a translation
- students should not just read a text passively, they should be active and critical readers
- When reading the text, students should be asking questions such as the following:
  - why has this been written this way?
  - why does this sentence or paragraph come first?
- is there any reason for having this long sentence in the first paragraph, or these very short sentences?
  - does it matter if I merge sentences in my translation?
  - does it matter if I split long sentences?
  - what will be the effect if I do this?

3. L2>L1 translation
3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.3 Reconstruction of meaning

- Students have to be shown that
  - translation is not about simply transposing items from one language to another at the level of lexis and syntax,
  - but that it is about conveying meaning
- This is the first step in reconstructing meaning
  - they need to see the translator as a mediator between cultural worlds,
  - as someone who helps those unfamiliar with a particular culture to understand and appreciate all the cultural nuances of the original text.
  - It is not just a test of students' ability to decode, but also very much a process of encoding.
  - It is about reconstructing the meaning of a message originally aimed at one audience for consumption by a different audience.
  - For this reason translation is seen by some as the ultimate communicative act
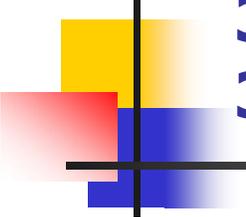
3.　　L2>L1 translation
3.2　　L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.4　Translation dossiers

- novice translators should be encouraged to keep a translation dossier

- in translation there is often little evidence that they are actually learning:
  - similar problems come up repeatedly but they usually do not make a note of them

- to address this problem, students should use a dossier:
  - arranged under alphabetical, structure or key word headings.
  - they can record systematically possible translations of or strategies for coping with expressions/phrases which recur in their translation work

3. L2>L1 translation
3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.5 Annotated translations

- From time to time get students to explain in writing the reasons for their translation.
- This forces them to focus consciously on the act of translation.
  - Not just to put A into B, but to reflect on why they have done it.
  - If they have chosen one of five possibilities in a dictionary, why have they chosen this one?
  - This is a valuable exercise to do occasionally because it makes students realise that they should be reflective translators.
- If they just do translation after translation,
  - hand them in for marking and
  - receive a bit of ad hoc feedback in class,
  - to get any real evidence that students are learning and that they are progressing in their translation work.

3. L2>L1 translation
3.2 L2>L1 translation as a learning process
3.2.6 Correcting a translation

- ask students to correct an inaccurate translation which,
- depending on their proficiency can be
  - at a simple factual level or
  - may include idiom, collocation, metaphor, etc.
- This can be an excellent source of discussion on finer linguistic nuances.
- The task can be varied by using an incorrect translation alongside a 'correct' one, but not telling students which is which.
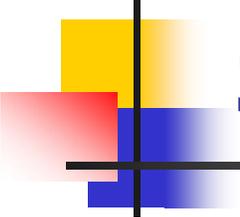
3.3 Other L2>L1 translation issues

- **Translation-task issues**
- **Research tools**
- **Quality of English**
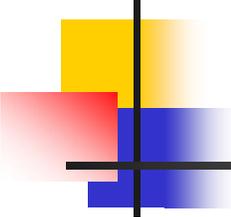
3.3.1 Translation-task issues

- To avoid literal and 'safe' translations, it is important to direct students' attention away from grammar and lexis towards whole-text and translation-task issues.
- Ways to do this include:
  - Get students to provide a summary of a foreign text as a briefing to someone visiting the foreign country for a specific purpose; this helps to focus attention on relevance and appropriateness of material, on the information needs of the target audience, as well as the style of students' English version; this activity might be especially useful for first-year students.
  - Give them a specific brief (e.g. to translate a Croatian article for inclusion in a particular quality British/US newspaper) which requires clear explication of cultural references, foreign figures or events.
  - Ask them to translate a passage for inclusion in a specialist English-language journal and to adapt their translation to the particular 'house style'; this might be a suitable task for final-year students.
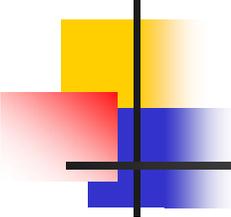
3.3.2 Research tools

- To encourage students to adopt a pro-active approach to translation, teachers should encourage them to consult as wide a range of reference sources as possible in their translation work, including:
  - a monolingual target-language dictionary,
  - bilingual dictionaries,
  - a thesaurus, English dictionaries, and
  - samples or models of writing for the particular genre or text type they are working on
  - parallel texts (TM, software, www)
  - they should get a 'feel' for the appropriate style by reading a few examples of the relevant genre in English).
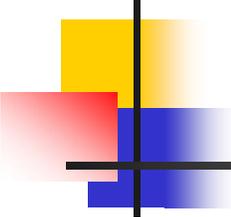
3.3.3 Quality of English

- One of the major challenges for anyone teaching L2>L1 translation is:
  - to help students with poor English,
    - in particular those with little awareness of rhetorical strategies and linguistic register
    - this is likely to be a particular problem for teachers who are non-native speakers of English.
  - Apart from enlisting the help of a native English colleague, teachers can encourage students to employ self-help strategies here:
    - for example, by asking fellow students to read their final draft and to discuss any problematic stylistic features.
  - Students should come to see translation as a process of producing successive drafts, while class time can be fruitfully employed comparing versions and sensitising students to issues of
  - rhetoric and style.

4. L1>L2 translation
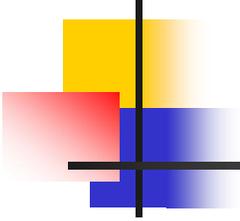
4.1 Traditional approaches

4.2 Translation as a (learning process)
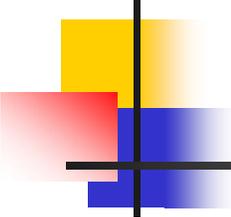
4. TR into L2
4.1 Traditional approaches 1/4

- There is often confusion over the use of translation for language learning, on the one hand, and the teaching of translation skills on the other.
    - In the early stages of learning a language both L1>L2 and L2>L1 translation may be useful ways to focus students' attention on different aspects of morphology and syntax.
    - The important point is to distinguish between this use of translation (most likely involving short phrases and sentences rather than continuous text) and the development of the transferable translation techniques outlined in the previous two sections.
- Text translation, translation into the target language, is the method by which most people in the past learnt classical languages.
    - Learners are given a grammatical rule and some examples, and are then asked to translate them into English.
    - Then they are given some English sentences which focus on the particular grammatical topic and,
    - referring back to the rule, they formulate new sentences in the foreign language.
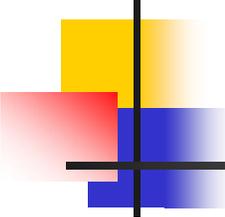
4.1 Traditional approaches 2/4

A deductive way of teaching grammar:

- I give you a rule and you deduce from that how to translate a set of English sentences into the foreign language.
- The inductive way involves encouraging learners to discern pattern, to focus on regularity, rather than giving them a rule with six or seven exceptions or supplements.
- In deductive approaches to text translation, students are usually asked to do a 'cold' translation. They take it home, hand it in; it is marked and they then go through it in class with the teacher who provides generalised feedback and possibly a 'fair' copy or 'model' translation. For average and less able learners this can be a very demotivating experience.
- The weekly dose of 'red pen', with little class time to focus on individual difficulties, is a poor learning experience.
  - The problem is that learners are being asked to do too many tasks simultaneously and there is insufficient focus on individual weaknesses.
  - All too often those who are no good at prose translation at the beginning of the course are no good at the end, while those who are good at the beginning remain good.
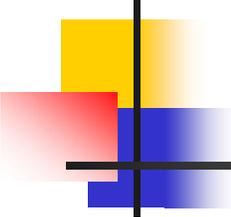
4.1 Traditional approaches 3/4

- Sentence (text) translation is combined with the goal of practising particular grammar points, e.g.:
    - reported speech,
    - attributive adjectives after a definite article,
    - a relative clause,
    - attributive adjectives without a definite article,
    - a pluperfect tense,
    - a time phrase,
    - "was considered" (which is difficult to translate into most languages),
    - a superlative adjective and so on
- and that is all in one sentence!!!
- It is an excellent test of students' knowledge of grammar
- but it is very difficult to make it an effective learning experience,
- because it throws too many different areas of grammar at the learner all at once.
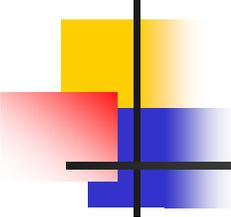
4.1 Traditional approaches 4/4

- It should be noted finally that school leavers are now not generally used to L1>L2 translation
- L1>L2 translation has been removed from most A-level syllabuses
  - since 90% of the modern language curriculum now involves work in the target language,
  - this leaves very little room for text translation
- The implications for university teaching are clear:
  - students need to be introduced gradually to L1>L2 translating,
  - the objectives must be clear and the tasks must be realistic

4. TR into L2
4.2 L1>L2 translation as a learning process

- **4.2.1 Using parallel texts**
- **4.2.2 Using two L2 versions**
- **4.3.3 Using group preparation**.
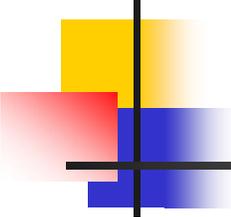
4.2.1 Using parallel texts 1/4

- a basic pedagogical principle - **show** learners how to do something before asking them to do it themselves
- one of the best ways to do this is to give students a **parallel text** which allows a contrastive analysis of the two languages
- It shows **how** the translator has **set** about **his/her task** and reveals interesting discrepancies, even mistakes, which are a source of fascination to students, and prompt questions such as:
  - · why has this been done?
  - · why would a literal translation not have worked?
  - · what is missing?
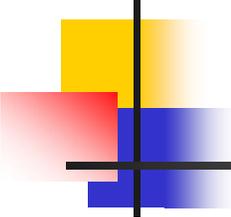
4.2.1 Use parallel texts 2/4

- Apart from lexical and grammatical points, students can look for differences in **tone, style** and **register**
- If the teacher takes the L2 text back in at the end of a class spent working on the parallel texts,
  - students can be asked to translate the English version into the foreign language and to hand it in for marking. This removes some of the worst pitfalls:
    - the things that it is unreasonable to ask learners to do **on their own**
    - Marking involves a lot less **red pen**, the process is less demotivating for everyone, and
    - feedback using the original L2 text can focus on students' **alternative renderings**, thus
    - emphasising that there is always more than one correct version.
  - This reinforces the message that it is meaning translators should be seeking to convey.

4.2.1 Use parallel texts 3/4

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    - feedback using the original L2 text can focus on students' alternative renderings, thus
    - emphasising that there is always more than one correct version.
  - This reinforces the message that it is meaning translators should be seeking to convey.

4.2.1 Use parallel texts 4/4

Alternative approach:

- take the work in to check that it has been done, and give it back to students together with the parallel version

- They discover, of course, that their version is different from the original, and the onus can then be put on them to find out how and why it differs

- This leads to much valuable discussion on a range of language issues
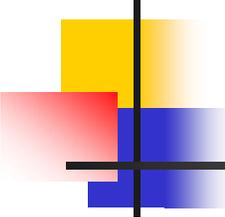
4.2.2 Using two L2 versions

- Students can be asked **to compare two translations of the same text**, focusing on, for example, lexis, grammar or even idiom. This is a demanding task which is probably best suited to final-year students but it offers the opportunity for more sophisticated contrastive analysis and thus has great teaching and learning potential.

- Setting up these tasks is not easy – one way is to build up a bank of texts based on versions produced by two different assistants or exchange students. It is also sometimes possible to find two French/German, etc. translations of English texts, especially plays.

- The exercise can, of course, work well the other way too, with students comparing and contrasting two L1 versions of an L2 text. This is the approach adopted in the **TransIT Tiger** computerised translation materials produced by the TELL Consortium. These allow students the opportunity to work on an L2 text, using on-line notes and a glossary to produce a first draft.

- After being issued with a password they can then access two different

- English versions of the text, one a close, literal translation, the other a slightly freer, more polished version
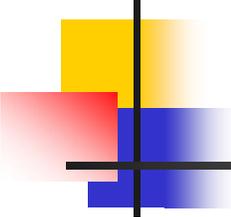
4.2.2 Using two L2 versions, ctd.

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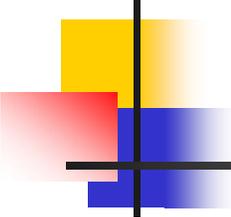
4.2.3 Group preparation 1/3

- As an alternative to 'cold' translation:
  - choose a portion of English text and put students **into pairs**.
  - they underline any structures they think are going to be problematic in the target language and circle any vocabulary they do not know.
  - they then get **into fours** and pool their suggested translations.
  - finally, the groups are brought together for plenary discussion. Vocabulary can be shared on an overhead. If students come up with, say, three acceptable ways of translating a particular expression, they should all be listed.
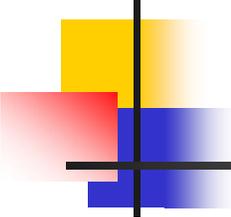
4.2.3 Group preparation 2/3

- The same procedure is followed with structures.

- The text is then set for homework

- When conducted with dictionaries on the table, the exercise can further be used to teach good dictionary skills
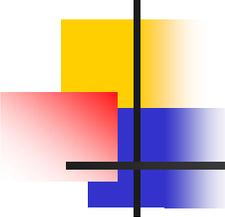
4.2.3 Group preparation 3/3

The advantages of group preparation are:

- knowledge is pooled
- everyone has a chance to produce a decent piece of work, therefore increasing motivation amongst even the weaker ones in the group
- students are faced with alternatives, and selecting the most appropriate is an invaluable learning process
- the weaker benefit from collaboration with their more able peers
- marking time is reduced as the teacher applies less 'red pen'
- lesson preparation allows individual diagnosis of errors: the relative lack of 'red pen' enables both teacher and student to focus on specific areas of weakness.
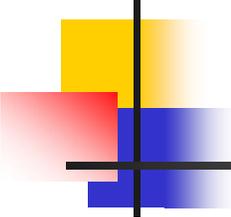
5. Group exercises

1. For BSc students
2. For postgraduate students
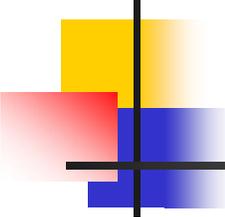
5.1
Group exercise for BSc students

- Provide a Croatian text for translation into English (L2) and put participants into language-specific groups.

- Pick a short paragraph from the text.
  - Tell them to focus on particular difficulties for 'their' target language.
  - They are to imagine a group of students who have just come to university from a school which taught hardly any translation.
  - Now they are faced with doing legal translation for the first time: What are the trainee teachers going to do to make the exercise an effective learning experience for their students?

- After 20 minutes the language sub-groups present their ideas in turn to the whole group.
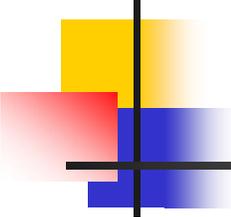
5.2
Group exercise for postgraduate students

- Divide participants into language-specific groups and give each group a text in EFL
- Ask them to consider what issues they would ask a group of final-year students to consider when translating the text into English and what difficulties students might encounter

- After 20 minutes the language sub-groups present their ideas in turn to the whole group/class
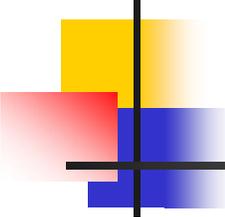
6. Reverse / Back Translation

Level: Pre-intermediate and above

Preparation

Find two short texts (50-100 words each): one in the students'mother tongue and one in English. Make one copy of each text for every two students in the class.

Procedure

1. Divide the class into two groups, A and B. Give the students in group A the text in the mother tongue and the students in group B the text in English.
2. Tell them they have to translate the texts into the other language (English or mother tongue). They can confer among themselves on how they would like to do this. They do not need to all have the same final translated text.
3. When groups have finished, ask them to pair up so that every student A is with a student B.
4. Tell them to swap their translated texts. They must now translate the text **back** into the original language.
5. At the end, tell them to compare with each other, and with the original.
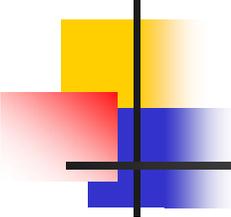
Translation assignment: steps

1. a text (A) is taken from the same source, together with its translation
2. in class, students study and comment on this sensitizing text,
3. they then study in twos the text for translation (B), and its properties are discussed
4. they write a draft of a 5-line extract in class (which is graded),
5. then complete the draft at home and send it in within the week (it is not graded).
6. The next class is spent studying the coded error-indicators,
7. then each pair of students is allocated a section of the text for comment - 15 minutes preparation-time with teacher circulating.
8. Then each pair presents their section and raises the translation issues in their section (strategies, options, wider questions of translatability).
9. The final version is done at home, handed in, graded and returned in a 10-minute slot.
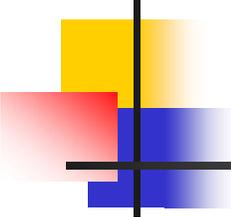
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