

Optimizing teaching conditions for efficient development of translation skills within postgraduate study programs

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Abstract—The paper outlines didactic conditions of organizing foreign language training courses within postgraduate programs of non-linguistic training fields. Based on theoretical and empirical research, the authors offer methodological recommendations for developing translation skills within the structure of the foreign language communicative competence of masters (MSc) and postgraduate (PhD) students. The need to develop translation skills within the foreign language communicative competence was established by surveying MSc and PhD students at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. The authors establish the theoretical background for this need, and make methodological recommendations regarding fundamental and instrumental training components of the Foreign Language course. On the basis of the proposed algorithms of the proper formation of translation skills, graduates of MSc and PhD programs will be able to competently and more accurately extract practically and professionally relevant information from foreign language sources, fully understand, process and present it in different formats, and apply it for their own scientific and professional purposes.

Keywords—*translation skills; foreign language communicative competence; foreign language; non-linguistic university; MSc training programs; PhD training programs; LSP teaching methodology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern conditions of globalization and the internationalization of postgraduate education and research activities, foreign language learning and sectoral (specific, or industry-focused) translation have become integral parts of many postgraduate training programs. The main purpose of teaching foreign language to postgraduate students at Masters and Doctoral level (hereinafter referred to as MSc and PhD students) in non-linguistic universities is to develop their ability to read foreign language academic and professional literature independently, in order to extract the necessary theoretically, practically, and professionally relevant information and apply it in their own academic research. At the same time, learning how to deal with specialized texts from specific professional and research areas should include not only acquiring standard techniques of translation into Russian, but also mastering various ways to pragmatically adapt foreign sources. Students should be able to translate a broad range of texts, making the necessary linguistic and semantic adjustments to suit the communicative context and the purpose, for which the text is being translated. These transformations imply the use of specific translation techniques determined by the communicative context and the purpose of the translation.

The importance of this training component is evident, given that according to modern approaches to MSc and PhD training, graduates of such programs should be able to resolve

various professional challenges. In particular, they should be able to:

- analyze international development trends of the industries they specialize in (their field of study and research) and systematize scientific and technical data and facts;
- prepare scientific and technical reviews and publications based on research results;
- apply modern research methods and search for innovative solutions to various problems.

All these skills/tasks can be mastered through the proper implementation of the competence potential of academic subjects offered by university curricula [1].

All the above-mentioned activities involve working with original sources in a foreign language. In order to achieve the requisite level of translation skills within the structure of the foreign language communicative competence of MSc and PhD students, particular teaching conditions must be met.

The purpose of this study is to provide theoretical grounds for the effective formation of translation skills within the structure of the foreign language communicative competence of MSc and PhD students through their purposeful familiarization with translation techniques – specifically linguistic and semantic transformations. It also makes methodological recommendations on developing adequate translation skills using the current experience of the Department of Foreign and Russian Languages of Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

As the study is aimed at searching for solutions to theoretical and practical methodological problems, use was made of the following research methods:

- theoretical methods – analyzing translation teaching recommendations and expert opinions of practicing translators, Federal state educational standards, MSc and PhD training curricula and course assessment materials, and other sources related to the problem under consideration;
- empirical methods – analyzing and generalizing the pedagogical experience of foreign languages departments in non-linguistic universities providing classes to MSc and PhD students; monitoring and analyzing class activities, interviewing MSc and PhD students.

The study is of some theoretical and practical value as the given recommendations can be further implemented when specifying and diversifying the content of the Foreign Language courses taught within MSc and PhD programs. Optimized training content is expected to increase the motivation of MSc and PhD students to learn a foreign language and use it for solving practical translation problems.

Though there are already a large number of works on translation didactics, i.e. specific methods and techniques of teaching, available, many researchers have observed the inconsistency of the translation teaching system. V.V. Sdobnikov [2] highlights insufficient attention to the

development of student autonomy in research activities. In addition, a number of researchers point out problems of limited vocabulary, lack of knowledge in the field of practical grammar, poor common background knowledge, and a low-level proficiency in the native language [3; 4].

The problem of developing translation skills as part of foreign language communicative competence is still insufficiently studied in relation to teaching foreign languages within MSc and PhD programs. Translation skills as an integrative component can be defined as knowledge of the rules, and mastery of the use of various linguistic and semantic transformations. These transformations are used to find convergence in the lexical and grammatical structure of foreign and translating languages, as well as to provide the most appropriate form of rendering the practically and professionally relevant content of translated materials.

Experience shows that translation is typically carried out by students either intuitively, based on their background knowledge in the field of study, or by trying to somehow edit a machine translation output. However, since mastery of translating skills is one of the factors ensuring the adequacy of translation, it should be given particular attention within MSc and PhD training programs.

To check this assumption, a survey was conducted among thirty MSc and PhD students of the Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy. The survey included the following questions:

- What goals do you pursue when studying a foreign language in a MSc or PhD training program?
- Does the quality of foreign language teaching in MSc and PhD training programs meet your expectations? Provide sound reasons for your opinion.
- How often do you translate texts in a foreign language (as part of your scientific research)?
- Describe a step-by-step algorithm of your work with a foreign language text if your goal is to achieve a detailed understanding of it?
- What difficulties do you have to overcome when conducting translation tasks?
- What difficulties do you face when editing texts that were translated using an online translation engine?
- Do you know any translation transformations? If so, which ones?
- Does the lecturer give any recommendations on the translation techniques? If so, which exactly? Are they adequate?

III. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The survey results show that for 57% of students, the reason for learning a foreign language is to find a job in a large Russian or international company, and for 29% to read literature relevant for their research and professional field. The remaining 14% of respondents clearly expressed their pragmatic goals in terms of the credits acquired by taking a foreign language course. The majority of students (82%) believe that the translation of specialized research- and industry-related texts will help them master professional

vocabulary in a foreign language and learn about the latest development trends and inventions in their research field (68%).

According to the survey results, MSc and PhD students are often given translation tasks as assignments. However, due to insufficient tactical training, and lacking both knowledge of the criteria for assessing the quality and adequacy of translation and recommendations from lecturers regarding linguistic and semantic transformations to be applied in a particular situation, they experience difficulties in translating.

Only two respondents (7%) have no difficulty in performing tasks related to the translation of texts. The rest face difficulties in choosing the meaning of unfamiliar words (56%), translating polysemantic words (63%), with the stylistic editing of translated texts, and with rendering meaning variations caused by the lexical-grammatical structure of Russian and foreign languages (33%).

As for the use of actual translation tactics, the following features are observed. Only two respondents (7%) practice the 'right' algorithm of actions: translation and analysis of the title – scanning through the entire text of an article – oral reading of the text with translation of separate unfamiliar words that hamper complete understanding of the meaning (full translation is done only if required by the task) [6]. The remaining 93% of students use a more "conventional" approach, namely, performing a complete translation with an electronic translating program; logically replacing certain structures (if necessary), specifying terms and interpreting abbreviations (using electronic and printed vocabulary sources) to ensure a logically complete meaning.

The majority of respondents, namely 93% (twenty-eight out of thirty), are unfamiliar with linguistic and semantic transformations. Only two respondents (7%) noted that they are familiar with such translation techniques as modulation, specification, grammatical substitutions, and descriptive translation (explication). In general, the absolute majority of respondents consider it necessary to study the elements of translation techniques within the "Foreign Language" course.

Analysis of these survey results leads to a conclusion that training in translation techniques should be part of a foreign language course in MSc and PhD training programs. There are two main reasons for this. First, texts in foreign and translating languages usually have differences in grammatical and syntactic structure, as well as pragmatic features and specific sectoral usage that must be considered when translating to ensure the required level of adequacy. Second, full translation, rendering (summarizing) and abstract making are checking tools in the intermediate control of learning outcomes, which provide for more objective control of the sufficient development of declared competences.

Since one of the goals of teaching a foreign language is to ensure the mastery of fundamental knowledge, skills and abilities to work with information sources in a foreign language, and gain experience of creative and research activities [7], special attention should be paid to the formation of translation skills within the structure of the foreign language communicative competence.

To improve the efficiency of mastering translation techniques by MSc and PhD students, the necessary conditions are already being provided at the level of curricula

planning. In particular, the analysis of the operating curriculum of B1.B.03 "Professional Foreign Language" course for MSc training in direction 35.04.06 - Agroengineering [5] at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy shows that, according to the curriculum developers, as a result of studying the considered academic course, MSc students are expected to master:

- effective strategies of foreign language scientific and professional-business communication and the design of trajectories of their personal and professional development;
- techniques and methods of writing and presenting the results of the work performed (translations, abstracts, summaries, surveys, reports, etc.);
- methods of self-presentation and participation in dialogue and monologue communication and the use of various communication functions depending on the situation of professional and business communication.

In terms of content, the training program includes the following integral section: "Interpreting. Rendering the content of the studied texts. Practically and professionally relevant background knowledge and skills of linguistic and contextual sense prediction", within the framework of which they are supposed to study and analyze such basic issues as:

- reading and translating scientific and professional texts and summarizing the studied material in various forms (abstract, survey, summary, etc.);
- performing basic lexical, grammatical, lexical-and-grammatical and lexical-and-semantic transformations, taking into consideration the polysemy of words, dictionary and contextual meaning of words, coincidence and divergence of the meanings of international words ("false substitutes", or "confusable words");
- oral at-sight translation, making a plan of the text, a concise (abstract) summarizing of the text material, compensation of lacunas, and contextual substitutions.

The translation skills are also implicitly formed within the framework of a subsection: "Full written translation. Production of "secondary" texts – written reviewing and abstract making of scientific and professional texts", which covers such issues as the translation of scientific and professional texts, linguistic and contextual sense prediction based on practically and professionally relevant background knowledge, translation of international vocabulary, and providing reasons for translation solutions used.

However, due to the fact that interpretation and translation are divided into separated sections, the main practical emphasis is placed on working with simplified and adapted study texts, and there is also some duplication of the studied issues, it seems logical to consider all issues related to scientific and professional translation in a separate section for more purposeful development of relevant skills and the targeted formation of the translation skills within foreign language communicative competence.

The problems of developing skills in working with foreign professional sources are studied today by many experts in the

field of Language-for-Specific-Purpose (LSP) teaching – A.N. Kuznetsov [8], O.V. Takanova [9], I.I. Danilova [10]. An analysis of their works suggests that when teaching MSc and PhD students to use translational techniques – linguistic and semantic transformations, special attention should be paid to the observing the following principles of LSP teaching:

- taking into account the requirements of social and professional environment [8];
- cognitive accessibility and feasibility of translation tasks [11] with gradual complication of the material, through a step-by-step transition from adapted texts of general sectoral character to authentic scientific and professional texts;
- integrativeness (implicitness) of tasks for applying translation techniques within a foreign language course;
- the variability of the content and teaching methods with the general transparency of the process, awareness of the translation goals and the reasons for using a particular transformation [8];
- the adequacy of translated materials and types of exercises.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The performed analysis allows making the following recommendations.

First, it seems reasonable to expand and specify the range of issues studied by including the following subsections (topics) into the curricula content [12]:

- Information reference technology

Rules of work with dictionaries, reference books, databases, and directories. Types of reading. Implementation of information retrieval from various sources. The use of different strategies of reading depending on professional tasks and communication goals.

- Discursive difficulties and ways of their overcoming

Specific features of professional abbreviations, symbols, and formulas; searching for their analogues in the Russian language. Rules for converting the units of measurement and conversion ratios. Choosing the contextual meaning of terms.

- Lexical and phraseological difficulties and ways of their overcoming

Transcribing, transliteration, loan translation when rendering professionally important terms.

- Grammatical difficulties and ways of their overcoming

Basic syntactic (emphatic constructions, ways and degrees of comparison of adjectives and adverbs), morphological (word-formation prefixes, suffixes, differences in the use of conversion in word formation in Russian and foreign languages) and grammatical transformations.

- Lexical-and-grammar techniques

Antonymic translation, explication and compensation as means to avoid literalisms when translating in order to better

render the meaning. Polysemy and homonymy of auxiliary words and methods of translation.

- Pre-translational text analysis

- methods and techniques to achieve semantic and stylistic adequacy;
- determination of the style and genre specificity of the original text;
- determination of the pragmatic goal and the type / target audience / recipients of the translated text.

- Main types of text compression and written translation and their characteristic features

- plan;
- outline;
- abstract;
- summary;
- full translation;
- thematic (analytical) review.

Independent reading and translation should be practiced in close connection with mastering the theory of language, which includes:

1) the analysis of grammatical forms in order to better understand the studied texts;

2) the syntactic and morphological analysis of the most difficult sentences;

3) explication of the meaning of idiomatic expressions;

4) establishing similarities or differences of linguistic structures;

5) the application of certain translation techniques – linguistic and semantic transformations – on the basis of the analysis performed.

Training MSc and PhD students to use translation techniques will help them translate easier and improve the quality of translated materials, as they will realize that translation goes far beyond simple editing of the machine translation results with the choice of the appropriate meaning of words from the dictionary. As the survey results have shown, not all MSc and PhD students are aware of the importance of editing the translation, taking into account its pragmatic goal and target recipients. Not all communicative situations and types of information and analytical activities require full translation. In many cases, such types as abstract making or summarizing are more appropriate, and in some situations it is sufficient only to find answers to specific questions (for example, when stating the relevance of an analyzed text for the research). The task of the language instructor in the process of learning to translate is not only to present and describe certain translation techniques, but also explain their practical use in performing various translation types. Also, when checking the ready translations, a detailed commentary should be given on the correctness of the use of transformations and recommendations for improving the translation quality and the degree of its adequacy. To save time, language instructors can use group feedback instead of individual consultations. Thus, students will be able to

comment on the difficulties they have encountered while performing the translation, and the language instructor, in turn, can explain the reasons for the mistakes made by the students and justify the need for using certain transformations, as well as offer additional translation tasks aimed at practicing the use of translation techniques, which cause the main difficulties.

Translation skills as a complex form of mental activity can be mastered in parallel with developing reading and writing skills in teaching translation and listening and speaking skills in teaching interpretation.

Experts in the field of LSP teaching and postgraduate training emphasize that the main goal for students is to master the strategies for natural live communication [13]. This is achieved by their involvement in a large number of communication tasks designed on the basis of the problem-communicative approach [14]. In addition, when teaching how to translate, it is impossible to perform only study tasks, the purpose of which is to train students in the application of predefined rules of transforming the initial conditions of tasks [15]. It is worth agreeing with the opinion of A.N. Kuznetsov, A.K. Krupchenko, and E.N. Schaveleva that to ensure full realization of the competence potential of academic subjects, a modern textbook should reflect the structure of future professional activity [1].

The proposed system of tasks aimed at developing the necessary skills and abilities to use translation techniques includes six functional and content groups of tasks [12], [16]. These exercises have been and are still being tested in class with the MSc and PhD students at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy.

A group of lexical and grammatical exercises is aimed at learning the rules of word formation, dealing with borrowings, syntactic and grammatical structures characteristic of the language, finding synonyms, antonyms, terminological equivalents, etc.:

- analysis of the translation of international words, incl. “false substitutes”;
- interpretation of abbreviations;
- search for the conversion ratios of the units of measurement;
- determining and selecting the contextually required terminological meaning of a polysemantic word / phrase from the dictionary;
- offering terms for the given definitions and vice versa;
- semantic mapping of a specific concept sphere;
- filling in the gaps using appropriate words from the box or offering them using sense prediction skills;
- rephrasing sentences with a brief explication of the meaning of terms (pragmatic adaptation – text simplification);
- searching for terms and stable phrases in a foreign language basing on the analysis of a similar text in Russian (establishing a terminological base).

Exercises at the text level – singling out the main idea of keywords, logical links and key messages of statements, extracting various types of information through various types of reading, etc.:

- predicting the text content (by title, keywords or by abstract plan) basing on professional and linguistic experience (development of contextual sense prediction skills);
- selecting and proving the text title (from a number of proposed options);
- explaining the title / final sentence of the text;
- searching keywords in the text;
- selecting the most complete and correct definition (from the offered ones);
- defining the meaning of an unfamiliar foreign word in the given context.

Exercises on information structuring form academic skills of independent scientific work with information sources basing on certain rules (commenting, analysis, synthesis, and argumentation):summary

- drawing up a plan of the text in different forms;
- making various types of “secondary” translation (full, abstract, summarizing, thematic review);
- choosing an annotation (out of the several offered ones), which more adequately conveys the content of an article;
- analyzing and filling in tables with incomplete data;
- making an analytical (thematic) review on a specific problem (range of problems);
- completing an “interrupted” news message, instructions, letters, etc. (semantic development).

Exercises to develop the skills of written and oral translation contribute to mastering the basic methods of rendering the content of a source text, which include substitutions, content re-ordering, and translation of non-equivalent vocabulary:

- searching for or determining the type of the applied translation technique basing on an example of translated sentences;
- choosing the best translation technique from several offered options (multiple choice);
- using various types of translational techniques for the interpretation / translation and proving their relevance;
- making translation with the prescribed use of a certain lexical / grammatical / semantic transformation;
- comparing various translation options with the original, identifying differences in the techniques used;
- adaptation of text translation options depending on the context and communication situation;

- making “mirror” translation (from a foreign language to Russian and then back again, with subsequent self-editing and analysis of the mistakes made);
- rendering the meaning of the message containing unfamiliar words or phraseological units (explication or contextual substitution);
- simplified translation with the omission of insignificant details while preserving the main meaning and the communicative function;
- oral consecutive translation of an aural report from the native language to a foreign language and vice versa;
- inserting missing words / expressions / dialogue replies / letter phrases basing on the message goals and the communicative situation, with its subsequent translation into Russian / a foreign language.

Information-analytical and professionally relevant practical exercises allow practicing skills in determining the amount of translation work using technical means, extracting information for translation from documents of different formats and saving translated materials in different formats, practicing skills of using computer translation programs (selection, application, verification, subsequent text editing):

- estimating the amount of a text to be translated;
- using electronic dictionaries and translation databases;
- evaluating the translation performed by other authors, identifying errors and text editing.

Mixed-type exercises aimed at the development of receptive-productive skills (translation of aural text, etc.) contribute to the integral formation of several language and technological skills. Students get familiarized with all kinds of lexical traps, to which, in addition to “false substitutes,” we may also include “rare” meanings of polysemantic words [17]. Analytical exercises are based on parallel texts – fragments from originals and translations with various kinds of errors in content rendering. The task is to find, classify and correct errors. The ability to design the final result in translation is also further developed by exercises aimed at choosing optimal translation solutions [8].

IV. CONCLUSION

Proceeding from the above, we suggest that implementing the proposed recommendations in Foreign Language course teaching will help improve the quality of translations performed by MSc and PhD students. This can be done through deeper understanding of the translation process itself, the main translation techniques used to make relevant transformations, and such important factors as translation goals, target audience and practical and professional relevance.

Graduates of MSc and PhD programs demonstrating high rates of the development of strategic, research and communication competences – and their implicit component represented by actual translation skills – are more sought after in the labor market. Moreover, they are able to adapt to the real conditions of professional life and navigate freely in various communication situations.

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