

MERITS OF ON-SITE ORAL TRANSLATION AS AN ESP TEACHING STRATEGY APPLIED IN 2 SUCCESSIVE ESP COURSES FOR STUDENTS OF MEDICAL OPTICS WITH AN A2/B1 ENTRY LEVEL OF GENERAL ENGLISH (2019/2020; 2020/2021)

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Abstract. The research presented in this paper was carried out based on the observed results from the application of on-site oral translation as a teaching strategy in both the facultative and the obligatory courses of English for Specific Purposes of a total of 6 groups of Medical Optics students at the Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov – Varna during the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 academic years.

Both the facultative and the obligatory ESP courses for Medical Optics students during the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 academic years were designed with the aim to develop the students’ 4 basic receptive and productive language skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing in English, while introducing them to specialized optics and ophthalmology topics related to their future profession.

In all 6 discussed groups of Medical Optics students, the main challenge encountered by the lecturer was the fact that most students’ entry level of proficiency in General English did not exceed the A2/B1 level according to the CEFR. This fact inevitably created an obstacle for these students’ proper comprehension and interpretation of the specialized reading and listening ESP course materials. Therefore, the lecturer had to adapt her reading and listening teaching strategies, so as to ensure that all students comprehended the specialized course materials properly.

The most appropriate teaching strategical methods for achieving this purpose proved to include the practice of each student reading out loud and translating (with increasingly less needed help from the lecturer as the courses progressed) parts of the provided specialized materials for reading, as well as the practice of the students attempting to formulate their own answers to specific questions compiled by the lecturer in relation to the provided specialized materials for listening and reading.

The current paper, however, is focused and aims to outline and draw conclusions about the established merits and the success of the applied reading-out-loud-and-translation teaching strategy for improving the reading comprehension skills of ESP students whose entry level of proficiency in General English did not exceed the A2/B1 level according to the CEFR.

Keywords: translation, ESP teaching strategy, merits, practical results, Medical Optics students

INTRODUCTION

For quite a long time since the Grammar Translation language teaching method was deemed to be inefficient for developing the students’ speaking and communicative skills around the

mid-20th century, the use of translation in the language teaching classrooms had come to be regarded as “uncommunicative, boring, pointless, difficult and irrelevant” (Duff, 1994), and translation had, therefore, been practically abandoned as a language teaching strategy.

More recent research, however, has restored the interest in translation as a language teaching strategy, as recent theorists and researchers have proven repeatedly that translation has a value as a language teaching strategy “if used pertinently and efficiently, and if (the translation exercises are) prepared with specific goals in mind” (Chirobocea, 2018).

Multiple recent case studies (Kavaliauskiene and Kaminskiene, 2007; Rushwan, 2017; Chirobocea, 2018; Mazeikiene, 2019; etc.) have confirmed that translation as a language teaching strategy helps to develop the following 3 essential qualities of language learning: “accuracy, clarity and flexibility” (Duff, 1994), and that the “translation-based activities are useful for ESP learners and that translation is an efficient ESP teaching and learning method if the amount of translation done is well-balanced, the activities are well-planned and the learner profile and needs in each specific course are well-analyzed” (Mazeikiene, 2019). Therefore, these recent case studies have come to prove that “translation can serve as a tool for improving language skills” (Kavaliauskiene and Kaminskiene, 2007), and they have managed to reestablish translation as a valid language teaching strategy for both the General English FLT and the ESP classrooms.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current case study of the application of on-site oral translation as a teaching strategy in the ESP classes of the 6 groups of Medical Optics students presented in this article aims to confirm or refute the cited researchers’ findings about the usefulness and suitability of translation as a language teaching strategy for the ESP classroom and to present some established merits of the applied on-site oral translation teaching strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The applied methodology for development of the Medical Optics students’ reading comprehension skill under discussion in this article involved the following components: selection of reading materials related to the fields of Medical Optics and Ophthalmology that were also suitable to build on the students’ entry A2/B1 level of General English; compiling detailed English-Bulgarian glossaries containing the most essential specialized and non-specialized vocabulary from the selected reading materials; asking each student from the 6 groups to read out loud passages from the selected reading materials; correcting each student’s detected mispronunciations while reading out loud their respective passage; asking each student to perform an on-site oral translation of the passage they had read out loud with the help of the respective glossary; correcting each student’s suggested translation version for their respective passage and clarifying why the corrections were needed; asking if there was anything unclear left after the performed oral translation exercise.

The aims of employing each of these methodological components are indicated below:

- the selection of reading materials related to the fields of Medical Optics and Ophthalmology that are also suitable to build on the students’ entry A2/B1 level of General English aims to consolidate the need to build on the students’ particular entry level of General English with the need to also introduce them to specialized optics and ophthalmology topics related to their future profession;
- the compilation of detailed English-Bulgarian glossaries containing the most essential specialized and non-specialized vocabulary from the selected reading materials aims

to provide the students with a useful teaching aid to assist them for the proper comprehension of the selected reading materials;

- the strategy to ask each student from the 6 groups to read out loud passages from the selected reading materials and correct each student's detected mispronunciations while reading out loud their respective passage aims to allow the lecturer to detect some individual pronunciation weaknesses for each student and address these weaknesses by teaching the students how to pronounce their problematic words correctly;
- the strategy to ask each student to perform an on-site oral translation of the passage they had read out loud with the help of the respective glossary and then correct each student's suggested translation version for their respective passage aims to allow the lecturer to identify some individual comprehension problems for each student on site and address these problems by correcting the students' translation versions and clarifying why each correction is needed, thereby ensuring the students' ultimate proper comprehension of the selected reading materials;
- the final strategy of the lecturer to ask the students if there is anything unclear left after the performed oral translation exercise aims to ensure that at end of their ESP seminar, the students have acquired everything properly and if there is still something unclear left, the students may ask the lecturer to clarify this problematic issue, as well.

The observed results from the application of the presented methodology, as well as its established merits, are presented in the following sections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the application of the discussed on-site oral translation methodology are presented in the form of the students' grades on the final exam in each of the two courses they were taught by the author Tsvetelina Vateva as their lecturer during the 2019/2020 and the 2020/2021 academic years at the Medical University Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov – Varna.

The final exam for the facultative course was conducted in the form of a written test consisting of the following components: Listening Comprehension Exercise, Reading Comprehension Exercise, Gap-Filling Exercise, Term-Definition Matching Exercise and 2 Grammar Exercises (as most of the students started their facultative course with the A2/B1 entry level of General English and it was necessary for the course to include some teaching of General Grammar in addition to the discussion of the Optics and Ophthalmology-related specialized topics).

The final exam for the obligatory course was also conducted in the form of a written test consisting of the following components: Listening Comprehension Exercise, Reading Comprehension Exercise, Gap-Filling Exercise, Term-Definition Matching Exercise and Filling-In Missing Lines in a Dialogue Exercise (as the obligatory course is taught after the students have taken the facultative course and it aims to build on the students' achieved results in the facultative course).

Tables 1,2, 3 and 4 that are presented below contain the summarized final exam results of the 6 groups of Medical Optics students in the facultative and the obligatory ESP courses, respectively. These results come to reflect the fact that the on-site oral translation methodology applied in class definitely improved the students' reading and listening comprehension skills to an extent that was sufficient to achieve the mostly excellent results on the respective tasks in their final exams.

Table 1**2019/2020 Medical Optics Students' Facultative Course Final Exam Results – Groups 1 and 2**

Total Number of Students (Groups 1 and 2)	Total Number of Excellent Grades	Total Number of Very Good Grades	Total Number of Good Grades	Total Number of Average Grades	Total Number of Poor Grades
17	16	0	1	0	0

Table 2**2019/2020 Medical Optics Students' Facultative Course Final Exam Results – Groups 3 and 4**

Total Number of Students (Groups 3 and 4)	Total Number of Excellent Grades	Total Number of Very Good Grades	Total Number of Good Grades	Total Number of Average Grades	Total Number of Poor Grades
17	13	3	1	0	0

Table 3**2020/2021 Medical Optics Students' Obligatory Course Final Exam Results – Groups 3 and 4**

Total Number of Students (Groups 3 and 4)	Total Number of Excellent Grades	Total Number of Very Good Grades	Total Number of Good Grades	Total Number of Average Grades	Total Number of Poor Grades
17	14	2	0	1	0

Table 4**2020/2021 Medical Optics Students' Facultative Course Final Exam Results – Groups 5 and 6**

Total Number of Students (Groups 5 and 6)	Total Number of Excellent Grades	Total Number of Very Good Grades	Total Number of Good Grades	Total Number of Average Grades	Total Number of Poor Grades
15	11	4	0	0	0

CONCLUSION

The mostly excellent final exam results presented in the 4 tables above confirm the other herein-cited researchers' general findings about the usefulness and suitability of translation as a language teaching strategy for the ESP classroom, while they also reveal the following merits of the specific type of on-site oral translation applied as a teaching strategy in the discussed ESP courses:

- as a teaching strategy applied in the ESP classroom, on-site oral translation allows the lecturer to identify and get a real idea about each student's English language strengths, weaknesses and problems; this merit provides the lecturer with an opportunity to address these problems instantly, as opposed to the lack of this opportunity if, for example, the translation task is assigned as a written homework task, in which some individual students' problems may remain unresolved even if the students have translated their homework correctly (because of the numerous online free-access sources of information at the students' disposal in the homework environment);
- another merit of the on-site oral translation strategy is that once the lecturer identifies certain students' language weaknesses and problems, they may continue to address them, if needed, and check occasionally if the problems have been resolved;
- by applying the on-site oral translation strategy, the lecturer has the chance to pay attention to the non-literal meanings of certain phrasal verbs and collocational expressions that may otherwise remain improperly learned by the students;
- the students' overall text comprehension is improved, as by the end of the courses, the lecturer noticed significant improvement and progress in all students' reading comprehension skills – there was a decreased need for help with the translations from the lecturer as the courses progressed;
- finally, the application of the on-site oral translation teaching strategy by the lecturer achieves a consolidation between the students' reading, listening, writing and speaking skills development in the following ways: the students' reading, listening and speaking skills development is consolidated through the out-loud reading by 1 student while the others and the lecturer listen, and the other way around – while the lecturer corrects the students' mispronunciations and incorrect information comprehension; then, the students' writing skills development is also improved when the lecturer pays attention to the correct spelling of certain words.

In conclusion, as the researcher Yolanda Sanchez de Mateo has pointed out in her article entitled "English for Optics: A Challenge or an Impossible Dream?", there is a general "need to be up-to-date in teaching trends, which entails including what new technologies offer us, and the need to find texts and teaching aids for English for Optical Sciences" (Sanchez Mateo, Y., 1994). The current research presented above adds to this statement the conclusion that besides the needs outlined by Yolanda Sanchez de Mateo, there is also a constant need to find suitable and efficient teaching approaches for the students of Medical Optics, who attend courses in ESP, since in many cases, they would start these ESP courses with a comparatively low entry level of General English that also needs to be built on simultaneously. The results from the application of the on-site oral translation teaching strategy presented above suggest that this is one such suitable teaching approach for the students of Medical Optics, who start

their courses in ESP with an entry level of General English as low as A2/B1 according to the CEFR.

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