

## *Special Issue*

# The Future of Translation in Higher Education

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## Introduction to the Special Issue

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This special issue brings together a set of papers which look to the future of translation in higher education. It is a direct response to the flurry of publications which over the last two decades have highlighted and explored the value of translation as a pedagogical tool in modern language learning. In a now oft-cited early example, Cook (2007, p. 396) decried the marginality of translation in “mainstream applied linguistic and English language teaching theory” and called for a return to translation both in the language classroom and as a “major topic for applied linguistic research”. This call echoes through subsequent publications and now, at the start of the third decade of the millennium, there certainly is an ample body of scholarship, theory, and methodology that centers on translation in the language classroom. The changes are so dramatic and the signs so positive that some have gone so far as to speak of a “translation turn” in language teaching (Carreres, Muñoz-Calvo, and Noriega-Sánchez, 2017b, p. 99, our translation). On the ground, however, things are not always so rosy and we are still very far today from a situation in which translation is systematically used in language instruction, especially in the Anglophone countries where translation was long overlooked. Rather than adding to the now numerous calls for the use of translation in the language classroom, the papers in this special issue seek to move the debate forward by exploring what we refer to as the implementation problem and the question of impact. The papers exploring the implementation problem address the gap that can exist between scholarly literature where translation is now valorized and classroom practice where it can often remain marginal. The papers exploring the question of impact, on the other hand, draw attention to the wider effects that the (re-)introduction of translation into the language classroom will have in order to reimagine translation right across higher education.

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## OVERVIEW

This special issue brings together a set of papers which look to the future of translation in higher education. It is a direct response to the flurry of publications which over the last two decades have highlighted and explored the value of translation as a pedagogical tool in modern language learning. In a now oft-cited early example, Cook (2007, p. 396) decried the marginality of translation in “mainstream applied linguistic and English language teaching theory” and called for a return to translation both in the language classroom and as a “major topic for applied linguistic research”. This call echoes through subsequent publications and now, at the start of the third decade of the millennium, there certainly is an ample body of scholarship, theory, and methodology that centers on translation in the language classroom. The changes are so dramatic and the signs so positive that some have gone so far as to speak of a “translation turn” in language teaching (Carreres, Muñoz-Calvo, and Noriega-Sánchez, 2017b, p. 99, our translation). On the ground, however, things are not always so rosy and we are still very far today from a situation in which translation is systematically used in language instruction, especially in the Anglophone countries where translation was long overlooked. Rather

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## TRANSLATION IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

It is a trope of many of the early calls for a return to translation to chart its demise in the late nineteenth century and long absence over the course of the twentieth century in the West. A particularly detailed example comes from the opening chapters of Cook's (2010) book, *Translation in Language Teaching: An Argument for Reassessment*. He explains how the Reform Movement and the Direct Method both emerged in late nineteenth-century Europe and defined themselves against the then dominant approach to language learning which was largely based on grammar translation (Cook, 2010, pp. 3-19). Cook (2010, p. 10) describes a typical lesson or unit from such a course which "revolves around a few new rules, which are first explained to the student in their own language, learnt and committed to memory, and then practiced and tested through exercises involving the translation of single invented sentences exemplifying the rules currently in focus". Successful criticisms of grammar translation from the time, alongside wider changes which disfavored the use of translation in the language classroom, meant that "from the 1900s until very recently there has been virtually no discussion of it in the mainstream language-teaching literature (Cook, 2010, pp. 20-21).<sup>1</sup> Cook (2010, pp. 20-36) charts how and why translation remained absent through what he considers to be the two revolutions of language-teaching theory in the twentieth century: first the shift to intra-lingual teaching associated with the Direct Method of the turn of the century, and second the shift from form-focus to meaning-focus from the 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

The scholarly literature contains a number of other calls for a return to translation that are similar to, if less detailed than, Cook's (2010).<sup>3</sup> Laviosa (2020a), however, offers a slightly different perspective in the article on "Language Teaching" that she contributed to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha, 2020). Although she covers the same period as Cook (2010), she puts the emphasis not on the absence but on the presence of translation. In fact, for Laviosa (2020a, p. 271), there is only one exception to the general statement that translation has been a part of language instruction since the introduction of modern languages into European school curricula in the eighteenth century. That exception is the Berlitz method designed for adult language learners, also discussed by Cook (2010, pp. 6-7). Cook does recognize the continued presence of translation in certain contexts and he also features a number of important voices arguing for the integration of translation towards the end of the twentieth century (Cook 2010, pp. 33-35). The differences between the two perspectives reflect the different contexts in which the scholars were writing and what it was that each scholar had chosen to give prominence to. Cook (2010, pp. 20-21) focuses on what he calls "the mainstream language-teaching literature" and is primarily interested in the Anglophone context because, in his words, "for more than a hundred years the most innovative ideas about language teaching have been developed in relation to the teaching of English" (Cook 2010, pp. xx-xxi); more than a decade later, one suspects that this generalization no longer holds true. In addition, Cook is using the relative absence of translation in the literature on language teaching and second language acquisition in order to argue for translation's return. Laviosa (2020a), on the other hand, is underscoring the importance of translation in language teaching by insisting on its omnipresence. She is also writing at a moment when there is more widespread acceptance, at least in the scholarly

literature, of the idea that translation has a place in the language classroom. I draw attention to these different perspectives for two reasons. First, they underscore how fast the theoretical, scholarly, and pedagogical landscapes have changed. Today, it is no longer rhetorically necessary to highlight translation's lengthy period of invisibility in order to call for its return; translation has regained prominence in the literature on language teaching and second language acquisition. Second, Laviosa's (2020a) perspective in particular underscores the continued presence of translation even when it was not considered a cornerstone of modern language instruction. This reminds us of the complexity of the task of accounting for the theory, methodology and practice of language education since a gap in the literature may not represent a gap in practice, and vice versa.

A range of factors came together to set the stage for translation's gain in visibility in the opening decades of the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> At the highest level are factors such as migration and globalization which led to an increase in the practice of translation across private, community and professional settings. There was more awareness of the multilingualism of language learners many of whom already translated at home or in their community. Similarly, learners, instructors and scholars became increasingly aware of the need for translators in the public, private and non-profit sectors. If learners were practicing translation outside the classroom and might use their language education to become translators, then it was increasingly obvious that translation deserved a place within the classroom. These changes were part of and then reinforced by what is known as the multilingual turn in applied linguistics which upended the monolingual ideology in language education and opened the door for bi- and multilingual methodologies and practices in the language classroom.<sup>5</sup> As Laviosa and González-Davies (2020, pp. 1-2) explain, "[t]he multilingual turn is increasingly endorsed and promoted" at the institutional level with, for example, the Council of Europe and the Modern Language Association of North America now placing the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence at the heart of language learning. The multilingual turn might also be evoked as a partial explanation for an important development in scholarship on language teaching and second language acquisition, namely increased activity at the disciplinary boundary with the inherently multilingual field of translation studies.<sup>6</sup> One obvious effect of work at this boundary is to open up the definition of translation. Even a cursory glance at scholarship on translation and translation pedagogy reveals how problematic it is to restrict the definition of translation to the kind of activity practiced in grammar translation which revolves around the direct translation of standard written language. Translation today is conceptualized much more broadly allowing for a far wider range of texts and of translation practices to be included, which opens up the possibilities for translation serving as a tool, methodology and goal of language education.<sup>7</sup>

If the 2000s can be characterized as a period when attention was being drawn to translation in the language classroom, the 2010s look quite different. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there was a flurry of publications testifying to the growth of work on translation in language education. This is clearly illustrated by the title of a special issue of *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* edited by Laviosa (2014a): *Translation in the Language Classroom: Theory, Research and Practice*. If translation was all but absent from the scholarly literature in the twentieth century, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, enough progress had been made so as to permit Laviosa (2014b, p. 3) to divide scholarship into the three strands featured in the title: theoretical work on translation in language education, research studies on the contributions that translation can make to second language acquisition, and the development of teaching methodologies that feature translation. Further testament both to the continuing interest in translation and to the progress that has been made is a special issue dedicated to translation in the teaching of just one modern language, namely Spanish (Carreres, Muñoz-Calvo and Norriega-Sánchez, 2017a). The title of that special issue *Translation in Spanish Language Teaching: The Fifth Skill / La traducción en la enseñanza del español: la quinta destreza* signals the importance of translation which by now, at least for some, constitutes the fifth skill alongside speaking, listening, writing and reading. In

their introduction to the special issue, Carreres, Muñoz-Calvo and Norriega-Sánchez (2017b, p. 99) cite a whole host of publications in support of their claim that there has been “un verdadero *giro traductológico* en el campo” (original emphasis). The articles in the special issue illustrate some of the main foci of work today which include broadening the definition of translation through the concept of mediation (Colina and Lafford, 2017), exploring the benefits of collaborative translation (Sánchez Cuadrado, 2017; Cerezo, 2017), and integrating the latest translation technology tools (Jiménez-Crespo, 2017). In addition to these special issues, the 2010s also saw the appearance of other types of publications centered on and around translation and language education including monographs (Kerr, 2014; Laviosa, 2014c), edited volumes (Venuti, 2017), handbooks (Laviosa and González-Davies, 2020) and textbooks (Carreres, Norriega-Sánchez and Calduch, 2018; Laviosa, 2020b).

The flourishing and diversification of the literature described above clearly gives the impression that translation has returned to prominence. This idea echoes across a number of recent publications on translation and language education. Laviosa (2014b, p. 1) talks of translation’s “comeback” in language teaching and learning, and Floros (2020, p. 281) talks about a shift “from the if-question to the how-question” regarding the use of translation in schools. However, even a cursory glance at what is happening on the ground reveals a picture that is much more mixed. I teach at a large public university in North America. Although renowned for the range of modern languages that are taught and for the rigor and innovation of its language pedagogical approaches, we are far from being able to claim that translation is systematically present in the language classroom. Even in the absence of empirical evidence—a survey would be very welcome at this juncture—it seems unlikely that UC Berkeley is exceptional in this respect. In fact, the Berkeley Language Center has intentionally supported the development of translation-centered language pedagogy through, for example, instructional research fellowships.<sup>8</sup> When I originally submitted a proposal for this special issue at the invitation of the editors, I received some comments from the editorial board which stand in stark contrast to the relatively rosy picture painted above. The comment that stood out the most suggested that the vast majority of language teachers “would be shocked to learn that this is where the discipline is heading” since they still associate translation with grammar translation.<sup>9</sup> All of this is perhaps inevitable: innovations take place in the literature before being more widely diffused and it is our job as scholar-instructors to build the bridges between theory, research and practice. The underlying objectives of this special issue are therefore to address some of the obstacles that remain while underscoring the impact that the use of translation in the language classroom can have more broadly in order to promote the diffusion of translation-centered pedagogy on the ground.

## THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue on *The Future of Translation in Higher Education* contains five single- or co-authored articles followed by a joint paper where all of the authors share their reflections on the special issue as a whole. Each article addresses translation’s future in higher education by exploring the implementation problem and/or the question of impact. The articles exploring the implementation problem call attention to the obstacles that can be encountered when attempting to integrate translation in language education. These obstacles can exist at a range of levels from macro-level socio-cultural and institutional factors to micro-level situational and individual factors. In probing the tension that can exist between the scholarly literature and classroom practice, these papers reveal some of the difficulties faced on the ground and, crucially, demonstrate how they might be overcome. The articles exploring the question of impact, on the other hand, showcase the types of impact that bringing translation back into language learning can have on higher education in general. The recentering of translation in language education affects fields both related and distant because students

and instructors now have a much better understanding of what is at stake in translation and how it affects the ways in which texts are created, circulated, read and studied. This can be illustrated by one of the major strands of my own research which has been to demonstrate the importance of translation for the field of linguistics where it has been all but neglected. This has included, for example, examining the impact of the translation of news on language variation and change today (McLaughlin, 2011a; 2013) and in the past (McLaughlin, 2021, pp. 299-338), creating a theoretical model of the types of role that translation can play in language change (McLaughlin, 2011b), and exploring how to account for translator style as a sociolinguistic variable (Davidson and McLaughlin, 2021a; 2021b). The articles in this special issue which treat the question of impact clearly demonstrate that linguistics is by no means the only field which stands to be affected by translation's return to prominence.

The special issue opens with an article by Sara Laviosa on "Language Teaching in Higher Education within a Plurilingual Perspective". She begins the article by situating pedagogic translation across a range of key subfields within applied linguistics including both second language acquisition and applied translation studies. This first section helpfully sets up not just her own article but also the special issue as a whole, since it amply demonstrates the multidimensionality of the factors that have come together to lead to translation's return to prominence. The second and third sections of the article explore the most recent developments in language education at the tertiary level in Europe. In the second section, Laviosa explores the language education framework set out by the Council of Europe (2020) in the *CEFR Companion Volume*. She highlights an important development whereby translation is no longer seen just as a tool to be used in language instruction but as a skill to be acquired in its own right. The second section ends with an insightful characterization of translation pedagogy in higher education which is conceived of as a continuum which goes from translation as a form of cross-linguistic mediation in language learning to translator training at the postgraduate level. Laviosa's third and final section illustrates how translation is being used on the ground in European higher education institutions through an analysis of two text books and their deployment in the classroom: Carreres, Noriega-Sánchez and Calduch's (2018) *Mundos en palabras: Learning Advanced Spanish through Translation* and Laviosa's (2020b) own *Linking Wor(l)ds: A Coursebook on Cross-linguistic Mediation*. The activities discussed align with many of the themes of the previous sections including translation promoting the development of plurilinguistic and pluricultural competence; translation as a form of cross-linguistic mediation; and learning as a collaborative activity involving both students and instructors. This first article primarily addresses the implementation question. Its tripartite structure covering research, policy and practice reflects a key point being made, namely that the successful implementation of translation in language education depends on dialogue and harmony across all three of these domains.

The second article in the special issue is a contribution from Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez called "Current Practices in Translation and L2 Learning in Higher Education: Lessons Learned". The article opens with a discussion of the key theoretical and educational frameworks which promote the integration of translation in language learning. This section is testament to the ground that has been gained by translation on both the theoretical and policy fronts over the last two decades. However, as Pintado Gutiérrez explains, the professionals must take responsibility for enacting the pedagogical approaches that are promoted in the scholarly literature and policy documents. The rest of the article therefore presents a case study which shows how theory and practice can be bridged in this way. The case study concerns the design, implementation and evaluation of a module that combines translation and language teaching for first-year students at an Irish university. Pintado Gutiérrez explains that the new module was a response to the wider disciplinary and policy changes discussed above but also to a review of the degree program. It strikes me that program, curricular and course reviews of this sort are just the kind of institutional inflection point which can permit the implementation of translation-centered language pedagogy. Pintado Gutiérrez then sets out the learning objectives of the module

alongside detailed information about its content, the classroom activities and assessment tools in order to show how higher-level objectives are met through specific tasks. The final sections of the article offer reflections on the benefits and challenges of the module, as well as some thoughts on future directions. Firmly focused on implementation, this article makes two main contributions: first, it shows how to bridge theory and practice in this area through a detailed and critical case study, and second, it adds to the literature a case study which makes clear the importance of the institutional context by focusing not just on the integration of specific activities but on the wider curricular and institutional context in which the changes were made.

In the next article in the special issue, Emily Linares explores “The Challenges and Promise of Classroom Translation for Multilingual Minority Students in Monolingual Settings”. Linares presents the results of empirical research that she carried out in a French language class that served Roma learners in Perpignan, France who are L1 speakers of a variety of Catalan called “Gitan”. The study focuses on a classroom activity where the L1 Gitan speakers were asked to translate a Catalan comic book into French. Crucially, however, the comic book was written in Roussillon Catalan, the regional variety of Catalan, rather than in the students’ L1 variety, Gitan. Linares highlights two implementational challenges revolving around first, the complex relationship that the students have with Roussillon Catalan, and second, the role that the instructors (attempt to) play as gatekeepers to the different varieties of Catalan. She then goes on to demonstrate the benefits of such an activity by showing how adapting the activity to have the students translate from Roussillon Catalan into Gitan, their L1, repositioned them as multilingual speakers who can create new versions of a text. At first glance, it is quite surprising to find an article that focuses on a middle school in this special issue on translation in higher education. However, its inclusion is justified by the fact that it is very unusual to see empirical research on translation in the kind of classroom setting studied here. It therefore represents a rare opportunity to open up the literature on translation in the language classroom to include multilingual speakers of minoritized languages in monolingual settings. Moreover, as Linares shows, her findings relating both to the implementation problem and to the question of impact can fairly straightforwardly be applied to higher education. The most important contribution that this article makes is to highlight the central role that translation can play in fostering diversity, equity and inclusion across a range of educational settings through its transformative leveling effect.

The fourth article in the special issue is co-authored by Laurie Postlewate and Layla Roesler and is entitled “Tandem and Translation: A Bilingual Telecollaborative Course in Social Science Translation”. The article presents an advanced-language course called the Transatlantic Translation Workshop which the authors co-teach between their two respective institutions, namely Barnard College in New York, USA and the École Normale Supérieure in Lyon, France. The article starts with a section on the course aims and objectives which explains first, why the students engage in the translation of texts from the social and human sciences and second, the benefits of their etandem approach which involves students working collaboratively online in pairs composed of an L1 English and an L1 French speaker. The next section charts the evolution of the course which reveals the obstacles and opportunities that led them to design the current course around authentic project-based translation tasks. There follows a detailed account of the course as it is currently run which outlines the course structure and logistics, the feedback and assessment, and its focus on the translation of texts from the social and human sciences. The final section of the article underscores the value of collaborative translation as language pedagogy. Postlewate and Roesler’s article is equally interested in the implementation problem and in the question of impact. One of the main lessons for implementation is the need for flexibility and adaptation in response to changing technologies; their account emphasizes the changes and improvements that have come with the advent of new technologies, most recently with the shift to Zoom precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. Their most important contribution to the question of impact is to show how having

students in advanced language courses work on a specialized form of translation, in this case translation for the social and human sciences, can prepare them to participate in a specialist community in the future. In this way, the Transatlantic Translation Workshop promotes the development of linguistic competence in the L2, plurilinguistic and pluricultural competence in translation, but also their readiness for employment in fields outside language and translation at the end of their degree.

Diana Thow contributed the next article in the special issue which is on “Translation Pedagogy in the Comparative Literature Classroom: Close Reading and the Hermeneutic Model of Translation”. This article focuses primarily on impact by exploring how comparative literature and literary studies will benefit from the recentering of translation in language learning. The article starts by exploring the relationship between translation and comparative literature, highlighting some recent signs of progress while underscoring the work that still needs to be done, so that, for example, translation is no longer seen just as a metaphor for thinking through transfer or difference. In the rest of the article, Thow demonstrates how she uses an hermeneutic model of translation to teach a range of types of literature class. She shows first how translation can be used to teach the core skill of close reading in an introductory course. She then demonstrates how translation can be used as a tool to teach students how to carry out literary analysis by having them compare different translations of the same text and/or produce their own translations. Finally, she shows how translation can be used in an advanced literary course where students can only access the text through its published translations. She demonstrates the benefits of foregrounding translation in such a course rather than glossing over it as so often happens. Thow closes the article with a clear outline of the positive and significant impact that a return to translation in the language classroom will have for comparative literature and literary studies. Thow’s article is a clear call for pedagogical change in comparative literature and literary studies on the back of the reintroduction of translation in language learning. In the context of the special issue, it is clear to see that other fields could be affected in similar ways since translated texts are used right across the disciplines.

The sixth and final article in the special issue is a joint article in which all the contributors share their reflections on the special issue as a whole. This article was written after everyone had had a chance to read the final versions of each other’s articles and it was also informed by a conversation that most of us took part in on Zoom in September 2021. The purpose of the article, entitled “Reflections”, is to bring out some of the most important themes and questions which cut across the special issue and to explore how each individual contributor’s take on translation in higher education evolved as a result of reading their work in the context of the rest of the special issue. It is also a place where we were able to come together to highlight some of the obvious gaps in the special issue, thereby drawing attention to other research and future lines of inquiry. It is clearly impossible to sketch in just six articles a full picture of the future of translation in higher education. Nevertheless, we hope that our attempt to do so will represent a positive contribution to the evolution of higher education research, practice and policy by showing where, when, why and, crucially, how, to (re-)introduce translation.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that this does not mean that grammar translation is completely absent from language instruction: Kim (2011, p. 156) makes the point that English is often taught through grammar translation in countries in Asia.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on both of these movements, see Cook (2010, pp. 20-36).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example Malmkjær (2010: 186-187) and Zanettin (2009, pp. 210-212).

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed accounts of the factors involved, see Cook (2010, pp. 37-53) and Laviosa (2014b, pp. 1-2).

<sup>5</sup> The two most cited publications on the multilingual turn are by Conteh and Meier (2014) and by May (2014).

<sup>6</sup> The lack of disciplinary interaction between second language acquisition, translation studies and language teaching was lamented by Colina (2002) but by the end of the 2010s, Laviosa (2020a, p. 275) was able to speak of the “opening up” of applied translation studies to “neighbouring disciplines such as SLA, TESOL and bilingual education”.

<sup>7</sup> This is clearly illustrated by the contributions to Venuti’s (2017) edited volume, *Teaching Translation: Programs, Courses, Pedagogies*.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Louie (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Reproduced with the permission of the editor in chief.

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