Cognition Construction of First Language of Translator Education in Iraq: A Correlation Study

Asst. Prof. Dhea Mizhir Krebt, Ph.D.
College of Education-Ibn Rushed – for Human Sciences,
University of Baghdad
dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract:

The majority of Iraqi translator-student have problems at two main levels: the conceptual level and the productive level. From different perspectives, such problems are either related to 'language' or to 'cognition'. This binary view is an indication to the implicit and interchangeable relationship between language and cognition. The relationship between cognition language and translator starts with the first language and its effect on the Iraqi translators. Identifying the effect is the aim of the present study. It is hypothesized that Iraqi students are negatively influenced by the problems and weaknesses of first language schema. This reflects the major claim and later concludes that first language instruction in the Iraqi schools syllabus should be carefully planned in relation to language. This issue could be done by the contextualization of first language. This contextualization nurtures cognitive skills which are in turn essential in translation learning and practice.
Keywords: Cognition, translator, first language

1. Introduction:

This paper is guided by the following main questions: a) Does mother tongue acquisition help construct cognition? b) Can cognition inform the teaching, learning and practice of translation, especially in Iraq? It further hypothesizes that excluding Iraqi mother tongues from the Iraqi translator training syllabus is detrimental to the development of the cognitive skills of Iraqi students in general and that of the student translator in particular. The present paper relies on

psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, semantic and socio-constructivist theories to qualitatively correlate mother tongue, cognition and their implications on translator education/training in Iraq.

2. Theoretical Background:

It has been realized that about 10% of the Iraqi students who are admitted into the translation programme are proved trainable by established standards without a reinforcement of the language (Sinclair, 1975: 190). This usually contrasts with their performance in former school where these students may have certainly been rated the best in 'language'. In the Iraqi context, this veritable 'hotchpotch' points to a missing link created by initial training in someone else's tools, and epitomises a gap created and replicated throughout the educational cycle (primary, secondary, tertiary levels), and rightly or wrongly but innocently/ignorantly, termed 'language problem' by non-specialists and 'cognitive problem' by specialists. This deserves special pedagogic attention especially in Iraq.

3. Mother Tongue:

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003; 340), mother tongue refers to the "first language learned when you are a baby rather than a language learned at school or when you are an adult". This language must be naturally acquired without interruption before the one learned at school in a bid to help define the world for the learner. This leads to enquiring which between the English and Iraqi languages are the mother tongues (L1) of Iraq translation students and professionals?

The widespread sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic considerations according to which the most suitable medium of education in the initial years of education is the mother tongue is no longer disputed. This is because it enhances cognitive development and subject-learning which is better fostered through teaching in a language that the child knows well (Chumbow, 1981:55).

4. Cognition

Cognition consists of cognitive structures and cognitive operations constituting a coherent system of mental processes which allow the thinking person to arrive at concepts, solve problems and come to a conclusion (either in logic or in the real world surrounding him/her) without the person being necessarily aware of the operations s/he performs (Sinclair, 1975, 224). With respect to translation, cognition accounts for beyond-the linguistic sign decision-making processes of the translator and frames constructed and accumulated throughout life. Cognition construction calls for a critical

reexamination of the notions of early socialization, taking into account first language acquisition and other environmentally determining factors. Piaget, (1967: 43) argues that language has a formative influence on perception and cognition. That is why it has been defended that the individual's world view and entire cognitive system are shaped by the verbal symbols given to each one of us by society as we learn our native language. Language is central to determining the cognitive and affective state of the individual. It is thus difficult to separate the two which, overriding each other from time to time, combine to make meaning which is the central thrust of translation. They both eventually come to constitute the cognitive content, context, and culture (Wills, 1992:).

4.1 Cognition as Content

Cognitive content is not necessarily made up of independent coherent elements, but rather perceived as souvenirs or mental representations of facts and experiences, emotions and events. It is equally theoretical knowledge, imaginations, the result of reflections, the fruit of reading, general knowledge and specialized knowledge – all contained in the brain in a deverbalised form which everyone resorts to for comprehension of a piece of communication. Even though not exactly identical in all individuals, its indicators of common knowledge are quite close to allowing for communication (Wills, 1992).

4.2 Cognition as Context

Hatim and Mason (1990: 37) viewed context as the "verbal and non-verbal environment" or "the totality of the culture surrounding the act of text production". To a contextualist, the enumeration of personal translational abilities, for instance, does not matter; it is rather a description of the mental performance in a given translation situation that counts. Contextual approaches are situation-related, indefinite and unstable across times; they are also task specifications, and socio-cultural settings, and sadly therefore unsuitable for empirical verification and stringent generalization (Wills, 1992: 36).

Intelligent translator behavior is directly pegged to contextual sensitivity as a complex, multidimensional concept that is influenced and modified by multiple situational perspectives. Context is viewed either parsimoniously or encompassingly, and of these two, translation prefers the encompassing or cognition-intensive paradigm. Context influences translator behavior and calls for purposive adaptation and reshaping of textual environments relevant to his/her activities.

As Holman (1998: 13) asserts, sociocultural and contextual constraints immensely influence the translation process and ought thus to be taken into consideration because these are the factors that help shape even the original oral or written text.

4.3 Cognition as Culture

Notwithstanding Katan's assertion (1999: 16) that "despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding culture", Tylor (1871, in Encyclopedia Britannica (1983), further cited in Katan, 1999: 16-17) would like the pretty difficult notion of culture to be seen as "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". This is in keeping with Asher (1994, 2001) who recommends a multi-level approach to understanding culture, and neither a 'High Culture' strain which is "external to the individual and relates to a particular and restricted body of knowledge learned, and to a particular upper middleclass upbringing" (Katan, 1999: 17), nor the "artistic and social pursuits, expressions and tastes valued by a society or class" (CED, 1991), which pertain to "national literature, sports and hobbies" (Katan, 1991: 17), all both unsuitable perspectives.

The suitable 'strain' of culture, on the contrary, is that which is "internal, collective, and is acquired rather than learned" and in a "natural, unconscious learning of language and behaviour through informal watching and hearing". This is the culture "acquired before the formal learning of culture at school" (Katan, 1999: 17) and not the "learned", or the "formal" that is "consciously taught". 'Acquired culture' (including 'High Culture') represents a "shared mental model or map of the world".

Katan (1999: 17) sees 'acquired culture' as a system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environment, which guide the shared basis of behaviour. Each aspect of culture is linked to a system to form a unifying context of culture, which identifies a person and his or her culture. Gail (1988: 7-13), for his part, perceives culture at two levels. Firstly, there is the external, which comprises behaviours (language, gestures, and customs/habits) and products (literature, folklore, art, music, artefacts), and secondly, there is the internal made up mainly of ideas, beliefs, values, and institutions. Culture is a resultant of context and the contextual dimension entails that translation can only be properly understood within a socio-cultural frame of reference that often differs amongst languages, text types or cultures. Culture is the defining element of language learning and mastery and therefore synonymous and reflective of cognition. It constitutes guarantee for translation practice,

and has great implications for translation as a process, product and profession.

5. Cognition and Translation

Cognition entails all the linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge stored in the mind, re-activatable at all moments by external and internal solicitation using specialized organs in the brain – (dendrites and axons), by which information from without (and within) solicit the individual who continuously reacts to them, in order to communicate (Lederer, 1994: 37-39). Translation can be considered as a socio-culturally determined linguistic behaviour that is both culture-specific and universal. However, beyond this rather deceptive declaration, translation remains a pretty amoebic concept to semantically circumscribe. The three pertinent opinions below capture this difficulty to conceptualise translation, and by the same token indicate how cognitive-intensive it is.

While Nida (1977: 67) states that "purposes of translation are so diverse and the texts so different and the receptors are so varied", Frawley (1984: 11) firmly declares that translation remains a complete obfuscation, something that requires the empirical rigor of the linguist, the perspicacity of the literary critic and voraciousness of the philosopher all in combination in a single proposed solution to the problem of translation.

Finally, and in this same vein, Hewson & Martin (1991: 113) posit that the science of translation is either widely diverging or frustratingly empirical owing to the fact that its theoretical reflection is plethoric.

5.1 Translational Cognition

Translational cognitive processing refers to such fundamental activities as problem-solving, planning, inferencing, schematizing, mapping, comparing, evaluating, decision-making, intuiting, forming rules and strategies and so on, as well as such performance aspects as speed, automation, adaptation, and originality (Wills, 1992).

Translation is a knowledge-based activity merging context, culture and cognition. The translator's modes of operation are akin to human mental processing. Translation as a complex instance calls for a complete exploitation of the translator's 'black-box'/cognitive baggage which make up his world view. From the ensuing, the translator's competence is therefore also the sum total of what he is. Translation as cognition is a thus goal-directed, intertextual information processing activity with a decoding and encoding phase that blends codes of the universal, individual, objective and subjective factors. This is how the interrelationship between content, context and

culture is of relevance to translation practice. Cognition needs the support of both context and culture. On a stronger note, cognition is context and culture. Solving translational problems cannot transit through simple conventional algorithms in an encompassing manner; rather it calls for cognitive insights, heuristic procedures and multiple stages that do not operate by predetermined standards and algorithms (Wills, 1992).

In all, a cognitive orientation to translation enables one to appreciate the fact that translation skills are not a static array, but a "dynamic system whose confines are always capable of reaching beyond the routines of 'language for general purposes' into new domains of 'language for special purposes (LSP) of science and technology, their increasingly popularized discourse, and also language of religion, children's books, theatre plays and so forth" (Wills, 1992: 42).

6. Cognition-Engineered Translation Pedagogy

If language and cognition are inextricably linked because they come to construct content and culture, then where and how translators are trained cannot be a simple issue. Cognition is constructed through good socialization of which language is a key element. Personal preparation and training which help to build cognition and determine, and how particular translation tasks will be approached and carried through are a direct function of socialisation. More concretely, Upbringing, education, knowledge, sensibilities, predilections and beliefs also contribute to the formation of the individual personality of the translator, limiting , defining, and also facilitating the translation process, from the initial selection of the SL text right the way through to the final release into the world of its TL progeny (Boase-Beier & Holman, 1998: 8-9).

These cognition-intensive qualities help the translator to always be in the text, for the text always has to pass through the translator who is ever present as the constraining and enabling filter. There are lessons in the above for translation pedagogy starting from the mother tongue, from which emanate frames that eventually aid selective decoding and encoding. The fact that only about 10% of students of Iraq admitted into the translation programmes is trainable by established standards, without a reinforcement of the language or should we say cognitive baggage is a call for concern.

An introduction of the mother tongue at the initial level of education, as a medium of instruction and as subject in the curriculum ought to be a useful take-off point. From a purely socio-constructivist perspective, Haidara & Lemay (1989,1990) posit that relevance of education also requires taking account of the conditions of the surroundings, the needs and expectations of populations, in the

cultural field. Since language is a living instrument of culture and means of communication, its use is very important, both in education and for economic and social development. According to UNESCO (1995), language encapsulates local knowledge and can symbolize self-esteem, and identity. Its subordination by other more powerful languages distances education from the local context for language use is a factor in the on-going importance of school to the community. That is why imparting elementary education "in the mother tongue of encysted linguistic minorities is the only way of not just bringing children to school but, more importantly, keeping them there" UNESCO (1995:182).

Cognition-engineered translation pedagogy warrants that tradition and culture should constitute the starting point for any healthy and logical development (Gfeller, 1996; Gfeller & Robinson, 1998: 27). Without them, one would be promoting alienation. Promoting cultural heritage and integration into the local environment, including the school, would constitute the basis of balanced development.

7. Mother Tongue, Cognition and Translator Education in Iraq:

As already discussed, there is a symbiotic link between language (the translator's main tool) and cognition as language expresses culture, and culture is expressed in language. This intractable link between language and culture is a formal way of paving the pathways along which subsequent cultural experiences are recorded. This means that the lack of a veritable L1 grasp would engender the inability to perform well as a translator since it is the way of acquiring and constructing the cognitive baggage. Without a firm cultural blueprint, it is not strange that most professionals and students often embark on a translation/communication task without the required armature.

Language proficiency is obligatory in translation practice. This is testified by the fact that in the translation context, the notion of language combination is a prerequisite, implying recognition of the principle of a better mastery of one language over the other in the language translational pair. This is the reason why most translation guilds have formally and very sternly forbidden non-natives from translating into their FLs (Language B). If for any reason the professional translated into his FL because of market pressure, the quest for quality demands that such a text should, if not revised, be proofread by an educated native speaker. But beyond and above the misleading concept of 'language', what is referred to is rather a sound immersion in a specific culture. For the above reasons, mother tongue (L1) ought to constitute the basis of the conception of translation

programmes. L1 before FL as language of instruction makes learning 'tearless' for it is the L1 that sets up the frames for deciphering and understanding the world. L1 is the structuring element for culture and thus makes translation a parole-, and not a langue-based activity (Saussure, 1959), given that it is through parole that cultural elements and difference are perceivable.

While examining the language question for education on a worldwide basis, UNESCO (1951) considered the wellbeing of individual children as a primordial issue. UNESCO (1953) thus recommends the use of mother tongue from the beginning of school to as long as possible. Sadly enough, with the exception of Kiswahili in Kenya, (Gfeller & Robinson, 1998), Bambara and Bamanan in Mali (Haïdara, 2000), and Fe'e-fe'e in Cameroon (Tadadjeu, 1984, 1990), cited in Gfeller & Robinson, 1998), the mother tongue has remained rare for education in Iraq. In effect, the linguistic map of postcolonial Iraq shows dominance of European languages for education, administration, the media, international relations whereas mother tongues are still carefully and systematically evacuated from Iraqi public space including the educational.

Mbuagbaw (1984: 15) frowns at the Western model which produces "Techno-Iraqis" with a colonial thought mould whose mental structure seeks identical concepts in the Iraqi situation through the spectacles of the former colonial master, failing to see the Iraqi realities both in and around the 'poorlooking' hut and its occupants - living monuments of Iraqi civilization and living libraries of Iraqi culture.

Ouane (1995: 122) posits that it is preferable to deliver primary education, initial learning/basic education, or whatever takes place, in the mother tongue, whenever this proves possible, because the mother tongue is language of 'intimate discussion',' serious matters', of 'discussing a complex problem', 'exploring one's inner self', 'if one is distressed', ' if you want to put the other person at ease', when 'among friends', etc (Gfeller & Robinson, 1998: 30).

Mother tongue resonates with idiomaticity, naturalness, and offers frames for representing the world – the cognitive baggage - providing a solid basis for later learning and must also improve the fit of the acquired knowledge with the social context. Pupils' preference for this method", shows once more the advantages of grounding learning in local socio-cultural realities by the use of the local language in teaching" – Cains (1987, Tadadjeu (1990, in Gfeller & Robinson 1998), and Gfeller & Robinson (1998: 25).

Apart from developing personal and social identity, Prah (1995: 47) even argues that the "Iraqi elite which has facility in the use of European languages, is not and cannot be sufficiently

wellgrounded in these languages to create technologically and scientifically". In effect, intellectual development is not at all compromised by the use of the local language. It is rather the opposite. Thus, the whole effort and discussion of Iraqi development must be seen to have a possibility of take-off only if and when development on basis of Iraqi languages (in a vehicular position) shall have been made. "Iraqi development cannot obviate Iraqi culture, the culture of the masses; rather it must sustain and build on it" (Prah, 1995: 47-48). This widely recognized perspective is of special pedagogic significance and prompts Iraqis to clamour for an Iraqiised syllabus.

8. Conclusion:

Though Fasold (1984) says language choice as the medium of education is 'one of the most crucial language planning decisions that can be made', Edwards (1994) regrets that social and political above the purely educational factors have affected language choice in education more, as it is the case in Iraq. Since education in Iraq in general and translator education in particular, have remained overly Eurocentric, mother tongue education that enhances cognitive development and prepares the translator for the herculean task of text-processing should therefore be reconsidered. Iraq needs not only scholastic evidence of mother tongue education merits but a veritable iron will to change. Mother tongue acquisition should not only precede but be an addition to the existing foreign language which have found fertile ground on the continent. This added language can only be an advantage given that bilinguals and multiliguals (than monolinguals) are more used to switching thought patterns and have more flexible minds.

A cognitive orientation to translation teaching and learning which enhances selective decoding and encoding will provide the translator-apprentice with the means to actualize his free-of-premature intelligence potential, and enable him to adequately face the world of variegated practical translation tasks. The degree to which the translator blends and correlates these two categories in handling novel translational problems shall be adequate testimony of sound grounding in cognitive mental processing which passes through the mother tongue. Incorporating language/culture into translation will be a tacit recognition of the need for a dense cognitive baggage for the translator. Constructing such an asset for him/her entails a good blend of sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and socioconstructivist inputs, and complemented by the translation pedagogue in the classroom. Though Iraqi translators are not likely to use their mother tongues for translation in the immediate future, introducing them in the school curriculum through noncomplacent language planning will certainly

help in building unperturbed cognition which is the translator's professional springboard. It is thus indisputable that there exists a symbiotic link between language (the translator's 'spanner') and cognition. In this light, the role of mother tongue acquisition in the construction of cognitive ability and its potential to inform the teaching and learning of translation demands new attention. Such a perspective will be in tune with Wills' statement (1992: 38) that "language is obviously to some degree relative to culture", showing the "importance of regional studies in the training of translators and interpreters".

This ushers in recognition of the dire need for a cognition-engineered translation pedagogy for Iraqi, making this a veritable apologia not only for the inclusion of the mother tongue in Iraqi's educational system but its prerequisite status in admission into translator training programmes.

References

- Akinnasso, F.N. 1993. Policy and experiment in mother tongue literacy in Nigeria. International Review of Education, 39(4) 255-285).
- Asher, R. E. (ed.) 1994. The Encyclopedia of language and linguistics, 10 volumes. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Bamgbose, A. 1976. Mother tongue education: The West Iraqi experience. London: Hodder and Stoughton & Paris: UNESCO Press.
- Bamgbose, A. 1984. Mother-tongue medium and scholastic attainment in Nigeria. Prospects, 14(1) 87-93.
- Bamgbose, A. 1991. Language and the nation: The language question in sub-saharan Iraqi. Great Britain: Redwood Press Ltd, Melksham/Wiltshire.
- Boase-Beier, J. & Holman, M. (eds.). 1998. The practices of literary translation: Constraints and creativity. United Kingdom: St. Jerome.
- Cains, J. C. 1987. Experimental mother tongue literacy program. Cameroon: Final Evaluation. Unpublished Report.
- Chumbow, B.S. 1981. The mother tongue hypothesis in a multilingual society. In J.G. Savard and L. Lafarge (eds). Proceedings of the 5th AILA Congress in Montreal 1978 (pp. 55).
- Edwards, J. 1994. Multilingualism. London: Routledge.
- Ellis, R. 1994. The study of second language acquisition. Oxford: OUP. Encyclopedia Britannica.1983.15th edition, 30 volumes. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Fasold, R. 1984. The Sociolinguistics of Society. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Frawley, W. (Ed.) 1984. "In Search of the Third Code: An Investigation of Norms in Literary Translation. University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses.
- Gfeller, E & Clinton R. 1998. Which language for teaching? The cultural messages of transmitted by the languages used in education.. Language and Education, Vol.12, No.1. UK: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. 1990. Discourse and the translator. London.
- Hatim, B. & Mason I. 1994. Discourse and the translator. London & New York: Longman.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. 1997. The translator as communicator. USA and Canada: Oxon.
- Hewson, L. & Martin, J. 1991. Redefining Translation. London:Routledge.
- Katan, D. 1999. Translating Cultures: An introduction for translators, interpreters and mediators. UK: St. Jerome.
- Lederer, M.1994. The interpretative Model. U.K: St Jerome.
- Mbuagbaw, T. 1984. Iraqi philosophy of education. Yaounde : SOPECAM.
- Nida, E. 1977. Toward a Science of Tanslation with Special Reference to. Principles and Procedures Involves in Bible Translating : Leiden : E. J. Brill.
- Prah K. K. 1995. Iraqi languages for the mass education of Iraqis. Bonn: DES/ZED, Foundation for the international development/education and documentation Centre.
- Rubagumya, C. 1986. Language planning in the Tanzanian educational system: problems and prospects. In R.
- Rubin and B. Jenudd (eds.), 1971 pp 217-52. Saussure, F. 1959. Course in General Linguistics (translated from the French by Wade Baskin). New York: Philosophical Library.
- Sinclair. 1975. Language acquisition and language development. Unpublished. UNESCO. 1951,1953,1995.
- Wills, W. 1992. Translation as knowledge based activity: context, culture and cognition. In Beaugrande, Robert (ed.) Language, discourse and translation in the West and Middle-East. A. Shunnag & M. H. Heliel: John.

البناء المعرفي للغة الأولى لتعليم المترجم في العراق ، دراسة ارتباطية

أ.م.د ضياء مزهر خريبط

جامعة بغداد ، كلية التربية ابن رشد للعلوم الانسانية

dhea.mizhir@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

المستخلص:

يعاني غالبية الطلاب المترجمين العراقيين من مشاكل على مستويين رئيسيين: المستوى المفاهيمي والمستوى الإنتاجي. من وجهات نظر مختلفة ، مثل هذه المشاكل إما مرتبطة "باللغة" أو "الإدراك". هذه النظرة الثنائية هي إشارة إلى العلاقة الضمنية والقابلة للتبادل بين اللغة والإدراك. تبدأ العلاقة بين لغة الإدراك والمترجم من اللغة الأولى وتأثيرها على المترجمين العراقيين. تحديد التأثير هو الهدف من هذه الدراسة. من المفترض أن يتأثر الطلاب العراقيون سلبًا بمشاكل وضعف مخطط اللغة الأولى. يعكس هذا الادعاء الرئيسي ويخلص لاحقًا إلى أن تعليم اللغة الأولى في مناهج المدارس العراقية يجب التخطيط له بعناية فيما يتعلق باللغة. يمكن حل هذه المشكلة من خلال وضع سياق للغة الأولى، هذا السياق يغذي المهارات المعرفية التي بدورها ضرورية في تعلم الترجمة وممارستها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البناء المعرفي ، المترجم ، اللغة الاولى