'Auto-Translation' and/or 'Self-Translation' for Translation Students' Assessment and Applicability

Imen Mansour Khazri
Email 1: ealkhazi@kau.edu.sa
Email 2:imenelkhazri@yahoo.com
King Abdul Aziz University, KSA
University of Manouba, Tunisia

Abstract

In a modern world full of divisions and differences, of broken bridges, let us revive the story of the Tower of Babel (meaning 'confusion') to retell the history of translation origin. The American academic scholar, translator, and fiction-writer, Douglas Robinson stated that "[t]he biblical story of Babel [...] has long fascinated translators and students of translation. It contains the Old Testament story of the fall into linguistic diversity, which has often been read as the myth of the origin of translation"[i].

According to the story, in Shinar or Babylonia, Babylonians wanted to construct a tower that reaches the heavens. So feeling a menace to His authority, God prevented them from finishing the construction by confusing the peoples' language [so] "that they may not understand one another's speech"[ii]. As such, the translator conjured up to remedy the scattering of tongues and to restore linguistic unity; he "becomes the World Saviour"[iii].

Away from mythology, translation has always been a vital activity needed by the different nations essentially to trade and communicate. The old practice of translation developed leading to the emergence of 'translation studies' as a discipline standing by itself in the second half of the twentieth century. There appeared different approaches to translation ranging from the communicative/functional, through the linguistic, to the psycholinguistic/cognitive and interpretive ones. Along with the different approaches emerged different types, too; 'auto-translation' was one among these many subcategories.

We will see the different meanings that the word 'auto-translation' carries from the most noticeable to the least recognized, its importance in translation teaching and learning and a measuring of its applicability in King Abdul Aziz University (KAU), Rabigh Branch, College of Science and Letters, English Department.

Keywords: auto-translation, meanings, importance in translation teaching and learning, applicability.

Introduction:

The compound word 'auto-translation' is formed by the prefix 'auto' and the noun 'translation'. Before going into the meanings that the prefix carries, let us start first with general definitions of the word 'translation' according to three prominent figures in Translation Studies.

The German linguist, Wolfram Wilss defines translation as the *"transfer process which aims at the transformation of a written source language text (SLT) into an optimally equivalent target language text (TLT)"*[iv].

The American linguist and translation theorist, Eugene Nida states that *"translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style"*[v].

The English professor of Translation and one of the founders of Translation Studies as a discipline, Peter Newmark defines translation as *"the act of transferring meaning of stretch or a unit of a language, the whole or a part, from one language to another"*[vi].

As can be seen, the different definitions highlight the same idea that the act of translating necessarily includes the communication of meaning across two different languages or linguistic systems and as such, being a 'translator' necessitates being 'bilingual'. They also make it clear that to translate is necessarily to translate to the 'Other'.

Now, it is not irrelevant to deal with the meaning of the prefix 'auto' in relation to the word 'translation'. Going back to Collins English Dictionary, the origin of 'auto' is the Greek '*autos*' meaning 'self', it means 'same'; 'of or by the same one', 'acting from or occurring within', 'self-caused', 'automatic'. As noticed in here, the prefix simultaneously combines two opposite meanings; what is human in nature or ' what is done by a human' and what is mechanical or ' what is done by a machine', I would say in a more sophisticated way; what is FROM WITHIN and what is FROM WITHOUT. Hence, 'auto-translation' can be understood both as automatic or automated translation and as 'self-translation'.

At this point, one should ask; what is automatic or automated translation?

1-'Auto-Translation' as 'Automatic/Automated Translation':

Broadly speaking, automatic/automated translation is another term for 'machine translation' or 'machine-aided translation'/ 'computer-aided translation' as the German translator and translation theorist, Karl-Heinz Freigang states. As defined by Collins English Dictionary, it is *"the production of text in one natural language from that in another by means of computer procedures"*[vii]. This process of automatization or automation can be full/ non-interactive or partial/ interactive and thus, depending on the degree of automation, we started to see new classifications of this form of computerized translation such as MAHT or Machine-Aided Human Translation, HAMT or Human-Aided Machine Translation or FAMT or Fully Automatic Machine Translation.

For instance, a sentence like بكرههم اغلقوا الأبواب، و تركونا نختنق و بحبنا استطعنا فتحها لنتنفس.. نورنا أضاء و ضلامهم ظلمهم قبل أن يظلمنا نحن

can be fully-automatically translated by Google Translate as such: 'By their hatred, they closed the doors, and let us suffocate and we loved, we were able to open them to breathe .. Our light is

light and their dream is their penance before it oppresses us'. Another less sophisticated sentence like 'I don't know what is going on, my mind is lost, I am distraught' is translated as أنا لا أعرف ما
يجري، فقدت ذهني، أنا ذهول
A more 'scientific' sentence like 'the temperatures will be low compared to Monday, there will be winds from North to West; Rains might fall' is translated as
فإن درجات الحرارة تكون منخفضة مقارنة يوم الاثنين، وسوف تكون هناك رياح من الشمال إلى الغرب، قد تسقط الأمطار

It is evident that a fully-automated machine translation cannot be seen as really good. In some cases, it is rather unreadable. And thus, the importance of the human translator's role is never questioned. The latter is to be the agent who directs the translation process and for this direction to be faster, more productive and more effective, the use of CAT tools or translation softwares can be useful to improve quality and reach higher levels of consistency, still to a degree. Examples of CAT tools can be;

Translation memory [that] is a database of previously translated content, Terminology management [that] performs automated terminology extraction from new source content, and can help create terminology databases (also known as "termbases"), Spelling and grammar checkers [that] catch linguistic errors related to spelling, grammar and syntax [and] Bi-text word aligners [or alignment tools that] align source text and corresponding translation, segment by segment[viii].

In a 'facetious' article entitled 'Auto-Translation Programs to Face Off Against Human' and recently published on the site of Chosun Media, Korea's largest media groups, it has been mentioned that Sejong Cyber University and the International Interpretation and Translation Association of Korea held a contest between 4 human interpreters and Google Translate, Naver's Papago Translation Application and Systran's Translation Program which *"ended in a resounding victory for the human race"[ix]*. No doubt, the playfulness of language needs a good player and a good translation needs a good translator who goes beyond the surface level of meaning to the deep one, who moves from text to context. Translation is not a mere mechanical activity; it is rather a very creative one. Emphasizing 'self-translation's creativeness and the 'self-translator's creativity is to be seen in this part devoted to 'Auto-Translation' as 'Self-Translation' among many other qualities that make this very type 'privileged'.

2-'Auto-Translation' as 'Self-Translation':

It should be noted that the notion of 'self-translation' had been much neglected. It was only in the twentieth century that *"the spike in popularity is evident not only in the emergence of new term 'self-translation studies'[x] [as coined by Simona Anselmi] but also in the recognition the topic is now garnering outside the immediate realm of this scholarship"*. As a term, it is defined by the Canadian-Belgian essayist, Rainier Grutman as *"the act of translating one's own writings"[xi]* into another language. Consequently, the writer of the original text is himself or herself the 'rewriter' or 'translator' of the target text. Grutman, in this context, distinguished

between two types of 'auto-translation' or 'self-translation' namely "*simultaneous auto-translations (that are executed while the first version is still in process) and delayed [or consecutive] auto-translations (published after completion or even publication of the original manuscript)*"[xii]. It is worth citing here that the act of 'self-translating' is meant to be performed exclusively by professional bilingual literary writers such as Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Nancy Huston and many others. The development in 'self-translation studies' has led to new classifications such as individual 'self-translation' that is carried out by an individual 'self-translator' and 'collaborative' self-translation that is carried out by a 'self- translator' with the assistance of other parts. From the literature, too, I dare to make other classifications that might be unrecognized namely 'interlingual self-translation' (to translate one's own thoughts and ideas that are usually written in the mother tongue into a different language although translation directionality can be in the opposite sense as well) and 'intralingual self-translation' (to translate one's thoughts and ideas within the same language, to paraphrase in a sense, to reformulate what is said or written for reasons of dialects' differences for example or jargons' differences, etc.) 'receiver-oriented self-translation' (to translate one's own thoughts mainly for communication or dialogue with the other) and 'subject-oriented 'self- translation' (to translate one's own self to his or her own other implied self or selves[xiii], a kind of self-dialogue and self-criticism maybe), 'obligatory self-translation' (self-translation that is needed due to extrinsic, external factors and 'free self-translation' (self-translation that is a personal choice taken due to intrinsic, internal factors like motivation, willingness or 'passion').

One could notice here the richness that the notion of 'self-translation' implies. *"It is therefore [considered as   ] a privileged form of [...] translation"*[xiv] since its practice necessarily needs a combination of skills and competencies. It can also result in a more faithful transfer of meaning; as Brian Fitch points out *"the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any ordinary translator"*[xv]. Other reasons for seeing 'self-translation' as privileged include the amount of freedom and liberty that the self-translator enjoys and which results in more experimenting and creativity, the 'economical' nature of it, its importance to make one's production accessible to a wider range of receivers, one can go further even to assert its 'role in the Decolonization Process', its role to ensure a kind of balance or equality between two different languages of different degrees of dominance and power, etc.

Now, let us turn to the importance of 'self-translation' in translation teaching and learning.

3- Importance of 'Auto'-/'Self-Translation' in Translation Teaching and Learning:

If translation generally assumes a vital role in language learning and teaching, the 'privileged form' of 'self-translation' specifically does play a vital role in Translation Teaching and Learning. Here, I should say that I use 'self-translation' as a classroom activity included in different types of translation courses such as literary translation, economic translation,

journalistic translation, technical translation, etc. It is also included in assignments, quizzes, mid-term and final exams, equally.

As a teacher, the inclusion of this very activity helps me to make myself understandable to my students whenever difficult meaning occurs (what I have called previously 'receiver-oriented self-translation'). Explaining a translation strategy, for example, is done through L1 and L2, consecutively, something that appears highly-effective as it is based on the Grammar-Translation Method that supports L1 interference. It should be noted, however, that its counterpart, the Direct Method, is also used. The activity allows me to change my roles, to be flexible, sometimes 'the director', other times 'the observer' and students are giving freedom (although not absolute) to be the main 'players' in 'the game' of 'self-translating'; they use dictionaries at times, they translate automatically at others since, in this case, they are allowed to do this, they 'post-edit' then, they seem combining the two meanings of 'auto-translation', unconsciously. This 'playing' seems again effective when some introverted students appearing with low self-esteem become more active in class discussions. Others seem more motivated than ever. Still, this freedom does not deny the fact that the activity is usually introduced strategically starting with the word as a unit of 'self- translation' and reaching the paragraph and the text as longer units, it is also carried out, the majority of times, through my 'collaboration' with them (e.g. 1-introducing the students to a list of specific idioms organized alphabetically, 2- translating them into Arabic by the students either individually, in pairs or in groups, 3-making sentences in English with some of these idioms and translating them simultaneously into Arabic, 4-Reading aloud the sentences and their translations, 5-Discussing the grammatical or semantic errors that occur in the sentences, 6-contrasting the two languages, etc.).

To conclude, the inclusion of 'self-translation' as a classroom activity encourages the teacher to be more flexible and creative in terms of the roles to be played and proves effective in terms of the students' development of their linguistic and communicative competence (internalization of new lexical items and awareness of syntactic differences between L1 and L2, self-expression, etc.). This is due to the fact that the activity makes them read, write, speak and listen.

Still, there exist some factors that hinder an effective applicability of this activity; the most important one is 'willingness'. Here, I should state that I link the notion of 'willingness' to the notion of 'risk' (one is generally willing to do something if it is of low risk). It is through measuring what I called 'Willingness To Self-Translate' (WTST) that the effective applicability or non-applicability of the activity of 'self-translation' is to be measured. The question now is the following: Is 'auto-translation' an activity of high risk or not for the students?

4- Applicability of 'Self-Translation'/ 'Auto-translation' as a Class Activity:

"[T]he contributions of cognitive studies, psychology and psycholinguistics in both translation and interpreting studies"[xvi] cannot be ignored. It is from this 'psychological'

perspective that I am to approach the applicability of 'self-translating' as a classroom activity to be assessed. I have prepared a questionnaire to measure 'Willingness To Self-Translate' among my students mainly in 3 translation classes (economic, journalistic and literary translation). The total number of students is 53. They are asked to answer what is called a 'General Risk Question' first before going to answer what is called 'Context-Specific Questions'. The total number of questions is 12, only 37 students answered them.

Results and Analysis:

For the GRQ, or General Risk Question, the results come as follows:
  1- How willing are you to take risks?
a- [0]: not willing at all: 6 students (16.21 %)
b-[1-3]: not willing : 4 students (10.81 %)
c-[4-6]: sometimes willing, other times not depending on the situation: 13 students (35.13 %)
d-[7-9]: willing : 10 students (27.02%)

e-[10]: very willing: 4 students (10.81%)

→From the results, one can consider the degree of willingness to take risk as more than average.

   Going now to the CSQ or Context-Specific Questions, the results are the following:
  2- What is 'Auto-Translation'?

      a- Automated/Automatic Translation: 29 students (78.37%)
      b- Self-translation (i.e. the writer of ST and the translator at the same time): 5 students (13.51%)
      c- Auto-Translation can have both meanings: 3 students (8.10%)
→As can be seen from the results; students seem almost totally unaware about the fact that 'Auto-Translation' can carry simultaneously the meaning of automated translation and self-translation.
  3- If 'Auto-translation' is 'automated translation', do you think it is:

      a- Of high risk: 21 students (56.75 %)
      b- Of low risk: 16 students (43.24%)
  4- Why?
  →Generally, those who consider automated translation as an activity of high risk have the following reasons:
  -Time is not enough
 -Not knowing how to use CAT Tools
  -CAT tools are not accessible and if unpaid, the quality of translation is very poor.
  -Bad network .
  -The possibility of having lower grades.

→On the other hand, those who consider automated translation as an activity of low risk justify their points of view as such:

-Performing the activity is faster and easier.

-The conviction that the quality of translation with the computer can be better than that done with the help of hardcopy dictionaries.

-There are various ways to translate automatically other than using necessarily CAT Tools.

- Availability of Network.

-The possibility of having higher grades.

5- If 'Auto-translation' is 'self- translation', do you think it is

    a- Of high risk: 28 students (75.67 %)
    b- Of low risk: 9 students (24.32%)

6- Why?

→Broadly speaking, the majority of students who think that 'self-translation' is of high risk agree on the fact that:

-The task is very difficult

-It needs a lot of time

- There is a certainty that 'normal' translation will be easier than 'self-translation'.

-There is a fear of lower grades and failure.

→Those who think that the activity is of low risk share common attitudes:

-'Self-Translation' for them means freedom to choose what they like and to be creative

-The activity is challenging and very motivating and not as boring as 'normal' translation

-It helps them to practice other types of translation mainly 'consecutive translation' and 'simultaneous translation' along with other skills.

7- If 'Auto-translation' is both 'automated translation' and 'self-translation', do you think it is:

a-Of high risk: 28 students (75.67 %)

b-Of low risk: 9 students (24.32%)

8- The reasons are exactly the same as the ones mentioned in question 6 concerning 'self-translation'.

9- Your attitude towards the inclusion of 'self-translation'/ 'auto-translation' in exams:

    a- For: 5 students (13.51%)
    b- Against: 28 students (75.67%)
    c- It doesn't matter with me: 4 students (10.81%)

→It is clear that the students who consider the activity as of low risk in questions 5 and 7 are ready to be assessed in it while the ones who consider it as of high risk in the same questions are not ready. The answers reveal that it is all a matter of differences in self-esteem levels that are dependent mainly on grades.

10- If it must be included, where do you prefer it to be?

a- I prefer it in class with the assistance of the teacher: 19 students (51.35%)

b- I prefer it in Blackboard assignments: 9 students (24.32 %)

c- I prefer it in Midterm Exams: 7 students (18.91%)

d- I prefer it in Final Exams: 2 students (5.40%)

→ As seen from the results, the students who consider 'auto-translation' as of high risk and who are not ready to be assessed in it have lower levels of self-esteem which make them   very dependent on the teacher's interference or on other parties' and the contrary is true with the students who consider the activity as of low risk.

11- Why?

→ Some students repeat the idea that the activity is very difficult and that the teacher's collaboration will facilitate things; they will be guided all along the task.

→Some others state that if it is an assignment on Blackboard, they will have enough time to do the task and they won't worry much about the grade.

→The students who prefer it to be included in midterm exams rather than in final exams stress the fact that it is just a matter of exam's length and time pressure; midterms are somehow shorter and time pressure is generally less.

12- Would you like that 'Auto-Translation' be:
- A separate course taught, assessed and scored as other translation courses? 0%
- A 'coefficient-0' course (if you have more than the minimum average, the extra marks will be added as a bonus to other courses)? 37 students (100%)

Ultimately, it can be said that the degree of effective applicability of 'auto-translation' can be considered as beyond average; some students emphasize the notion of liberty[xvii] while 'self-translating' or 'auto-translating' while others 'find the experience to be tedious and/or difficult'[xviii].

Conclusion:

In this paper, I have mainly dealt with two contradictory meanings that 'auto-translation' carries. Instead of being mutually exclusive, a complementarity is a good solution to train translation students. The activity is challenging and motivating and it helps both teacher and learner to be flexible and to rediscover their own potentials. The degree of effective applicability seems beyond average. Yet, what remains to be discussed in future papers can be a comparison between males' and females' degrees of willingness to self-/auto-translate, differences in degrees of willingness to self-/auto translate from a specific translation course to another, degrees of accessibility to CAT Tools, Trainings' availability for KAU translation students to use Technology in Translation, etc.

[i] '*Tower of Babel*', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p.21

[ii] *Ibid* , p.21

[iii] *Ibid* , p.21

[iv] *The Science of Translation: Problems and Methods*,

[v]

[vi] *A Textbook of Translation*

[vii] *Collins English Dictionary*

[viii] https://www.dynamiclanguage.com/cat-tools/

[ix] http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/02/14/2017021401454.html

[x] Cited in http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199913701/obo-9780199913701-0104.xml

[xi] '*Auto-Translation*' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, p.17.

[xii] *Ibid*, p. 20.

[xiii] In '*The Passion of Self-Translation*', Anthony Cordingley considered 'self-translation as an exploratory, creative act, a positive discovery or negotiation of multiple "selves", even the emancipation of one or many identities witihin the self", p.81 in *Self-Translation, Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*.

[xiv] '*Masocriticism and Translation*' in *Self-Translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture*, p.83.

[xv] Cited in https://asmarttranslatorsreunion.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/self-translation/

[xvi] *Psycholinguistic and Cognitive Inquiries into Translation and Interpreting*

[xvii] In *Performing without a Stage*: *The Art of Literary Translation,* it is stated that 'what's wonderful about self-translation is that it allows the translator to take any liberties he feels like taking', p. 214.

[xviii] '*The passion of Self-Translation*', p.84.