
Two Languages in the Mind: Translation in a Language Classroom

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Research in bilingual access has well established that in accessing words from one language, the semantically related words in the other languages known get automatically activated, suggesting that it is a shared storage system with language non-selective access. Using these robust findings from bilingual processing, the paper shows how translation can be used as a potent pedagogical tool in a language classroom. Texts-in-translation specifically will be used as they create opportunities for such cross-language transactions. A set of activities based on texts-in-translation would be presented to aid teachers in materials design from such texts and to develop multilingual competencies in Indian learners.

Keywords: bilingual lexical access, language classroom, texts-in-translation, translation

Introduction

The paper revisits the notion of 'translation' in a second language classroom, and shows how it can be used to support bilingual/multilingual educational practices. Translation is a unique mode of language use, and in order to translate, learners need to mobilize very diverse, interdisciplinary skills and knowledge i.e. knowledge of languages, subject, real-world knowledge, as well as problem-solving strategies to accomplish their tasks. Rather than using translation as a fifth skill after reading, writing, speaking and listening, the idea that I am trying to establish is that language and translation skills are not independent of each other, but are interdependent. Understanding differences and similarities between languages, understanding that languages do not have equivalents, and that the same phrase can be translated in different ways in different contexts—are welcome outcomes of using translation activities in a second language classroom. More importantly, when translation activities are used in a second language classroom, we are actually acknowledging the presence of another language in the mind. With this objective, the activities suggested in the paper use texts in