

# **Abstract**

## **Translation in Teaching English for Specific Purposes at the Tertiary Level**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore translation as an aid to language teaching from various perspectives relevant to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes at the tertiary level of education. Our intention is to offer the option of incorporating translation activities within ESP courses at universities. The research presented in the thesis is relevant to the context of English as a foreign language, taught in a linguistically homogeneous environment to adult learners of ESP at a tertiary level, with a particular focus on English for legal purposes.

The research questions dealt with in this thesis are as follows:

1. Can translation contribute to effective learning of English for Specific Purposes?
2. If the answer to the first question is 'yes,' what forms of translation activities are best suited to make such a contribution?
3. Is translation currently used in courses of English for Specific Purposes, and, more specifically, in courses of English for law taught in the Czech Republic? If so, how is it used?
4. What are learners' perceptions of translation activities?

The first two questions are answered through a review of the relevant literature. The third question is answered through semi-structured interviews with Czech teachers of ESP and through a questionnaire survey distributed among Czech (and some Slovak) teachers of foreign languages for law. The last question is explored through semi-structured interviews with learners who participated on a two-semester elective course of Business English for Lawyers in which translation activities were used. These interviews were also supported by a small questionnaire survey. The nature of the research presented in this thesis is primarily qualitative, as we aimed to find out how translation is used - if it is used at all - in ESP courses, how it relates to language learning, and mainly what the views of learners and teachers are regarding translation activities.

The literature review shows that a conflict between indirect and direct methods of language instruction has had a long-lasting effect on the attitude of language teaching experts toward using translation in language classes. Proponents of the communicative language teaching approach are less prescriptive, however their attitude is still reserved to say the least, especially in ESL contexts, where translation is much harder to use. Those experts who mentioned translation as an optional technique in class showed divergent opinions as to how it should be used, starting

from simple pedagogical use at the beginner stages (A1-A2), up to a communicative language learning activity involving translation designed for more advanced learners (B2-C1-C2).

Looking at the traditional classification of the four language skills, translation plays the most important role in teaching reading and writing. Translation is seen as a natural companion of reading, and some authors point out that mental translation, use of bilingual dictionaries, cognate vocabulary and glosses are strategies that are unique to learners of a second or foreign language. Teaching vocabulary is another area where the use of translation is uncontroversial as there is no faster way of explaining the meaning of a foreign word than by translation.

Experts in translation are in agreement that translation is a useful activity for both beginners and advanced learners as a close-to real-life communicative activity. Translation can certainly enhance the learning of ESP if used in line with modern translation practice which requires the translator to take into account the purpose of the target text and the target audience. This is in our opinion particularly pertinent to the needs of learners in English for Legal Purposes classes. The results of the case study show that translation is currently used in courses of English for Specific Purposes and especially in courses of English for law in the Czech Republic. The most frequently used translation activities included oral translation by the student of written text into the mother tongue, which is followed by the teacher providing translation equivalents for terms and then oral translation of a written text by the learner into the foreign language.

All teachers participating in the questionnaire survey considered translation to be a useful skill for law graduates. All the learners interviewed considered translation activities to be useful for their careers. The students in general considered translation from Czech into English to be more useful than translation in the other direction. The questionnaire survey further showed that written translation of legal text from Czech into English received the highest utility rating.

In our opinion there are several important principles that should be taken into consideration when incorporating legal translation in ESP classes: (1) translation activities should always approximate as much as possible real-life assignments; (2) students should never be asked to translate without being provided information about the context, and preferably should be allowed to use reference material; and (3) the teacher should keep in mind that in many cases there will be no single correct solution.

**Keywords:** translation, legal translation, teaching of English for Specific Purposes, English for Legal Purposes, mediation