

# Approaches to translation

## Rationale

A requirement of the MFL GCSE 2016 is for students to “*translate a short passage from the assessed language into English*” in Reading and to “*translate sentences and short texts from English into the assessed language to convey key messages accurately and to apply grammatical knowledge of language and structures in context*” in Writing.

Translation reflects the reality of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An ever greater number of the world’s citizens use two or more languages every day in school, at work, with friends or family, when travelling or on the internet. The vast number of online translation tools and apps attests to the everyday need for translation, as do the increasing quantities of multi-language material online, and when we travel.

Translating from one language to another requires students to pay attention to detail in order to convey meaning accurately. Students need vocabulary, the ability to manipulate language structures and an awareness of the pitfalls of word-for-word translation.

When we approach translation from the point of view of communicating the message, we introduce learners to the concept of non-literal translation. We can encourage students to move beyond word-for-word rendering. In translation from the target language into English, students are encouraged to use their linguistic skills, but also their world knowledge, common sense, and to ask themselves ‘what sounds right?’ In both forms of translation there is the opportunity to make active use of grammar. Translating into English engages students in the conscious noticing of particular structures as they attend directly to the detail in sentences and short texts. Translation into the target language is a direct test of students’ ability to manipulate language to make meaning.

The translation booklet accompanying this guide contains twenty activities across Foundation and Higher tiers that can be used for translation practice in class or for homework, to help prepare your students for the new GCSE. This document suggests some strategies that can be used with students when approaching translation activities.

## Strategies<sup>ii</sup>

### Classroom strategies: Translation into English

It is important to bear in mind that translation is a variation on and extension of many of the types of activity that teachers already do. Translation is not something completely new, therefore, it is just another type of comprehension task.

In the classroom, with more challenging texts, it feels useful for translation (of a part of the text) to be the last in a sequence of comprehension activities, which would typically start with pre-reading tasks, a gist reading task to identify the genre of text and the overall theme, followed by several comprehension tasks to draw out key details.

These could include:

- 1) Multiple choice
- 2) Find the English for
- 3) True / False
- 4) Picture sequencing
- 5) Table / grid completion
- 6) Cloze text

## 7) Question / answer

In the classroom translation can often be a collaborative teaching and learning activity. Working in pairs or groups, or led by the teacher in whole class activity, students can approach challenging texts with more confidence, thereby developing translation strategies that students can draw on in the new GCSE examinations.

See also the **Guide to Using Literary Texts** for a detailed set of reading strategies for the KS4 classroom.

## Exam strategies: Translation from the target language into English

- Read the whole text through and get a sense of the overall meaning or gist.
- Work then at sentence or phrase level. For each, try to produce an English equivalent that sounds right.
- You cannot often translate word for word. Mostly, you need to paraphrase: i.e. find a phrase that has the same meaning, but uses different words.
- Try to work out the meaning of any unfamiliar words in the sentence. Consider words surrounding the unfamiliar word and try out words that would fit, using an English sentence with gaps. E.g. *Ellos leen un libro* = They \*?\* a book.
- Think about the context and use common sense. What makes sense in the context of the rest of the text?
- Once you have the meaning of the sentence in your head, play with the order of the words until you have English that sounds natural when you read it.
- The golden rule: read aloud what you have written. If it doesn't sound right to you, it probably isn't.

## Classroom strategies: Translation into the target language

Sentence and short text translation into the TL test vocabulary and grammar knowledge in use. As part of classroom practice, it can be much more than a test, however. If it forms part of an integrated cycle of activity, involving formative assessment, individual analysis, target-setting, follow-up tasks and further activity, there is every opportunity for learners to experience a real sense of linguistic progress. A possible sequence of learning might include the following steps:

### 1. Formative assessment

Students complete the initial translation task.

### 2. Individual analysis

Students receive their corrected work or work through the answers together in class. From this they identify any issues.

### 3. Individual target-setting

Students decide for themselves which structures they need to work on.

### 4. Follow-up tasks

Students complete tasks that focus on the knowledge gaps they have identified.

### 5. A further round of formative assessment

Students repeat the same task or complete the task at a higher level.

Certain types of prose translation task can also develop an understanding of, and sensitivity to the use of language, where it differs to English; an awareness of when word-for-word translation does not work. These sorts of 'mind the gap' activities are instrumental in

developing students' ability to write more creatively and more accurately, and they include:

### 1 Sentence auction

Students are presented with 10-15 sentences, some of which have mistakes. They have 'money' to reflect their level of confidence in identifying those mistakes. There are many different ways to organise the activity, but the aim is to focus on 100% accuracy.

### 2 Jigsaw or parallel translation

Students are given a paragraph of translation. They have versions of the text in English and the TL, but the texts are alternately gapped, so that students have to work with both versions to produce complete texts in both English and the TL.

### 3 Guided writing

Students generate from memory a list of TL words and phrases that they have learnt as part of work on a given topic. Then students are asked to produce a short text in English (100 words) on the same theme, using English versions of the TL on their lists, and adding to it to make full sentences and up to 100 words. Students then try to produce a full TL version of their English text, following the exam strategies listed below.

To practise translation into the target language with students of different abilities, teachers can offer a choice of tasks using the same language, building up from words to sentences and paragraphs as follows:

- A individual word gap-fill sentences (with English words given in brackets for each sentence)
- B parallel translation laid out in individual sentences
- C gap-fill paragraph with English text provided as a paragraph
- D English sentences/paragraph to translate.

## Exam strategies: Translation into the target language

- Read the whole text through once.
- Work then at sentence level. For each, try to produce a French / German / Spanish equivalent.
- As you build each sentence, use a mental checklist for accuracy:
  - Verbs**
  - Subject – Verb agreement (Who is doing what?)
  - Tense (When?)
  - Position in the sentence
  - Nouns**
  - Masculine / Feminine
  - Singular / Plural
  - Definite / Indefinite article
  - Adjectives**
  - Noun – Adjective agreement
  - Position
- If you don't know a word, try to think of a synonym or similar word
- If you can't think of a suitable replacement word, use a short paraphrase to describe it
- If a whole sentence is too complex, try to express the meaning with a simpler expression
- Go through your work thoroughly. Imagine you have been given the job of marking it. Check for spelling, accents, and the items on your grammar checklist.

## Practice

Use the activities below to practice translating texts and using translation strategies:

### French<sup>iii</sup>

Use **pour** + the infinitive.

Use the present tense here...

... and the perfect tense here.

For me, my hero is my dad. He really impresses me. He worked very hard to become a soldier and I respect that. He is brave when faced with terrible dangers. I admire his courage. I would like to be like him.

Do you need to use **son** or **sa** with *courage*?

Use the masculine version of the adjective.

### Spanish<sup>iv</sup>

Which past tense do you need here?

Which negative expression do you need?

Which tense do you need here? And which verb?

Last year we decided to go to Scotland where we had a great time. On one hand the town didn't have a cinema or a swimming pool, but on the other hand the landscape was beautiful and it was sunny every day.

Remember that this adjective should agree with the noun it describes.

Which set phrase do you need to use here?

German<sup>v</sup>

What verb  
would you  
use here?

Ideally you need to write the time in words. You won't impress by writing numerals (e.g. 7:45) but if you are really stumped, you could use *um 7:45 Uhr*.

I go to a state comprehensive school. School starts at quarter to eight and I find that unfair. The school is well equipped and we have eight labs, a sports hall and a big computer room. Last week I learned physics in the library every day, because I had an exam on Friday.

Remember  
word order  
after *weil*.

Think  
carefully  
about the  
adjectival  
ending  
needed here.

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<sup>i</sup> *Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content* (DfE, 2014)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Reference: DFE-00348-2014

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from *Translation, Literary Texts and Classroom Talk toolkit for Studio KS3 French, Stimmt KS3 German and Viva KS3 Spanish* by Rachel Hawkes (Pearson, 2015)

<sup>iii</sup> *Studio Edexcel GCSE Higher Student Book* (Pearson, 2016)

<sup>iv</sup> *iViva! Edexcel GCSE Higher Student Book* (Pearson, 2016)

<sup>v</sup> *Stimmt! Edexcel GCSE Higher Student Book* (Pearson, 2016)

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