



Katie McCann has spent most of her life in Central Europe, but is now based in London where she works as a freelance business trainer. She is particularly interested in how language acquisition shapes identity.

Not lost in translation

Katie McCann takes a new look at the role of translation in English language teaching and learning.

At the language training center where I work, there is a welcome meeting every Monday morning. The new students are given information, they go through the week's social program, and they introduce themselves. Oh, and the center manager impresses on them that they must only speak in English.

Once inside the classroom, it's a different story. Even advanced learners like to make a quick translation in order to impress new vocabulary on their memories; for lower levels it's essential. Having a reasonable working knowledge of most European languages myself, it's far more efficient to teach new structures by the simple method of comparing them to the mother tongue. After all, it's not a new mother tongue we're nurturing: the students already have a complete and competent means of expression etched in their neurology. To attempt acquisition of another language without reference to that former, fortified structure is to encourage fear, fragmentation and failure.

The 'no translation' rule originates in the UK-centered ELT movement and its colonial roots. Although Empire English incorporated a handful of words from local dialects, a fact much flaunted by proponents of English as a world language, the teaching was for the prime reason of imposing British governance on the occupied peoples through an army of lackeys. Far preferable, of course, than the Brits themselves doing the language learning!

In Australia and the US, the foundation of English teaching has always been more that of ESL. In a nation of immigrants, language learning becomes the door to individual assimilation and progress; for the assimilating culture it is the means to dictate standards and form identity. As a small child in an international school in Switzerland, which was run along American lines, I developed more loyalty, pride and sense of belonging than in British schools where, as the new kid on the block, I was always treated as a foreigner.

But isn't 'fear, fragmentation and failure' taking it a bit far? Not really. Fear is the natural reaction to any force which is pushing us in a direction we don't want to go, and immersion methodology often pushes people to breaking point. Fragmentation is the result when new learning cannot be integrated. My younger brother became confused in the thicket of Welsh, Swiss-German and English to such an extent that he had to embark on intensive remedial work in ESL. And he was a tiny child: for anyone older and more linguistically experienced, surely such methods amount to humiliating torture?

Fear is the natural reaction to any force which is pushing us in a direction we don't want to go

Failure is something teachers see evidence of daily. Learners, finding themselves in hostile terrain, grasp after familiar reference points—which often turn out to be 'false friends'. They can complete grammar exercises, but in any 'free' activity or discussion, all knowledge of English often evaporates, and communication reverts to meticulous translation of each word or phrase, using the structures of the mother tongue.

Thus there arises the discrepancy so prevalent between input and output: an awful lot of English is being taught, but how much of it is actually being learnt? The vast majority of learners of English today are concerned with communication in an international context, not with culture. Students are taking a bold step away from their comfort zone; it is now up to teachers to take a step, too, and meet them halfway.

How to incorporate translation methodology into your classroom

Encourage students to translate structures rather than vocabulary. In groups, little or no knowledge of the language of origin is necessary on your part—the students will (probably) reach consensus! For one-to-one teaching, a little research into the territory can be both useful and empowering: the Cambridge Handbook *Learner English* provides a comprehensive framework.

Use translation to dissipate confusion. I am assuming that most readers are working in monolingual environments, as that is where most ELT takes place. In multilingual classrooms, such as summer schools and the proverbial TEFL Certificate situation, students are more likely to be interested in culture and therefore immersion. However, translation is still an effective remedial tool: when in doubt, translate it out!

Focus on your students' needs. I once saw this defined as ESP (English for Specific Purposes) rather than EFNPP (English for No Particular Purpose). Their aim is unlikely to be consumption of their identity in a new English-speaking personality; it is far more likely that they want to expand their idea of who they already are. Support them in this.

Strengthen and develop your own second language(s) through structural translation. For French, German, Italian and Spanish, the immensely popular Michel Thomas audio packages are a good starting point. There is no need for memorizing, and no repetitive exercises. Thomas gently persuades you to structure your thoughts in a different way, just as the natives do. Motivation and confidence arise as an integral part of the method, not something to be brought to class along with a pen! A model for us all ...

katie2mcca@yahoo.com

Over the last decade, however, some people with sound equipment and/or imaginations have done their best to crack the code. Below are the best attempts to find the last lost translation. First, here's the original scene, the whisper tantalizingly low in the mix: Below is the most popular video breakdown. It's hard to know for sure if it's right, but it definitely has the best production value. The ending of *Lost In Translation* is widely lauded but what does Bill Murray whisper into Scarlett Johansson's ear in the final scene? Sofia Coppola is the daughter of filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather*) and she launched her career appearing in a number of his projects as an actress, including *Rumble Fish* and *Peggy Sue Got Married*, in addition to appearing in Tim Burton's short *Frankenweenie*. When Winona Ryder dropped out of *The Godfather Part III*, Coppola was cast in the key role of Mary Corleone. She decided to step away from acting following the negative response to her performance, though she later appeared as Saché in *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*, one of Padmé's handmaidens. *Lost in translation* commonly means that the context of something does not translate well or at all from one language to another. For example, texts that are written in German generally are said not to translate well into English or other languages. So what might be a very powerful or well written work in its native language, loses its flow, literary power or beauty when translated. When that happens, the message of the original author can be said to have been "lost in translation." 2.6K views · Answer requested by Kaisa Varonen · John Nurse · Answered 5 years ago · Author has 3.4K answers and 8.8M answer views. Virginia has explained the literal meaning of lost in translation . Not Lost In Translation. Top Songs. See All. Swearing. Not Lost In Translation. Greetings. Not Lost In Translation. Help & Directions. Not Lost In Translation. Personal Information. Not Lost In Translation. Well Wishes. Not Lost In Translation. Pick Up Lines. Not Lost In Translation. Restaurants. Not Lost In Translation. Albums. See All. Arul Menezes is a Partner Research Manager. Photo courtesy of Maryatt Photography. Episode 24, May 16, 2018. Humans are wired to communicate, but we don't always understand each other. Especially when we don't speak the same language. But Arul Menezes, the Partner Research Manager who heads MSR's Machine Translation team, is working to remove language barriers to help people communicate better. And with the help of some innovative machine learning techniques, and the combined brainpower of machine translation, natural language and machine learning teams in Redmond and Beijing, it's happening sooner than anyone expected.