



Creative Translation in the Classroom and the Polish Spotlight

An evaluation of two educational outreach programmes run by the Stephen Spender Trust

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Introduction

The Stephen Spender Trust turns translation into a powerful vehicle for dialogue and cultural exchange, empowering language-learners and giving expression to marginalised voices. Our core activities are the Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation and our award-winning education programmes. Cross-curricular, playful and inspiring, these programmes are accessible to all, regardless of linguistic background or ability. Our flagship education programme is 'Translators in Schools' (TiS), which trains translators and teachers to lead creative translation workshops in classrooms across the country and develops creative translation teaching resources.

Evaluation of TiS to date has shown the value of creative translation activities for young learners from primary school to GCSE. It has found that creative translation not only stimulates pupils' critical awareness of other languages and cultures, thereby encouraging empathy and increasing consciousness of others' perspectives, but also raises the profile, confidence and self-esteem of multilingual children, and raises aspiration for artistic excellence in both monolingual and multilingual pupils. In addition, creative translation develops literacy and decoding skills, and provides a springboard for creative writing and story-telling. These benefits are particularly prominent amongst young people with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Within Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) teaching, the programme

responds to key recommendations of the [Teaching Schools Council's Pedagogy Review](#) (2016), which is driving current government policy, and of the recent Policy Briefings on [Community Languages and Social Cohesion](#) (2018) and on [Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK](#) (2019).

Translators in Schools entered an exciting new phase in 2017. With the support of the Rothschild Foundation, we embarked on a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and practice-sharing for teachers and translators called 'Creative Translation in the Classroom' (CTiC). This new programme embeds creative translation in UK schools by training teachers and generating resources. Within this programme, the annual Stephen Spender Prize functions as an ongoing focus for teachers' practice and pupils' engagement. In addition, the CTiC programme now has an annual language 'spotlight', engaging new UK language communities. The first spotlight, piloted in 2018, is Polish. TiS-trained translators gave workshops in primary, secondary and Polish Saturday Schools, and the Stephen Spender Prize included a special category for poetry translation from Polish. The Polish Spotlight prize was divided into three age categories: 10-and-under; 14-and-under; and 18-and-under. Participants in Polish Spotlight workshops were encouraged to enter the prize, and translation and poetry resources were published on the SST website for those without access to a workshop. The prize attracted entries from young people across the UK, from Cornwall to the Isle of Arran, both entering individually and in groups supported by their teachers. The Polish Spotlight was generously supported by the Rothschild Foundation, the Polish Cultural Institute, the British Council and Christ's Hospital School, in partnership with the European Commission Representation in the UK (EC).

In order to draw on the learning from this pilot to develop the spotlights in future years, we commissioned external evaluations of three workshops in the series by EAL consultant and former MFL teacher Amanda Millican. In June 2018 Amanda evaluated two primary school workshops with Year 5 classes at Haydon Abbey School in Aylesbury, facilitated by translator Anna Blasiak. In these workshops, the 9/10-year-old pupils worked together to translate a Polish picture book into idiomatic fluent English, using a glossary. In July 2018 Amanda evaluated a day of workshops held for Year 9-10 pupils at Ruskin Community High School in Crewe, facilitated by Maja Konkolewska. In these workshops, the 14-16-year-old pupils worked together to translate a Polish poem into English using a glossary. Maja went on to run poetry workshops for Year 5 pupils at Southway Primary in Bognor Regis in March 2019. All the workshops used interactive and playful activities to introduce, practise and reflect on the task of translation. This report summarises Millican's evaluation and recommendations.

Evaluation findings

“It was intriguing to see different pupils approach the work from different angles, first producing a literal translation and then putting their own stamps on the final text.”

– Paul Kaye, European Commission

“Translating Polish poetry into English seemed like a daunting if not impossible task. Yet, it happened very successfully at Ruskin with the energy, enlightenment and erudition of Maja, the workshop facilitator. When left to their own devices all pupils excelled at polishing the literal translation into one that made sense in English and retained the message from the original Polish. It was an eye-opening, inspiring and excellent learning activity. More poetry in translation please!”

– John Putt, English teacher at Ruskin Community High School

The evaluation focused on the following three core objectives:

- a. Supporting MFL teaching and learning
- b. Supporting EAL learners and teachers/coordinators
- c. Supporting inclusive multilingual classrooms and community cohesion

a. Key MFL benefits

The workshops benefit both teachers and pupils in their MFL teaching and learning at primary and secondary level. Teachers feel empowered to use the workshop format and materials as part of their MFL teaching, which is in significant demand now that translation is part of the new GCSE curriculum. This is a staged, creative approach to translation, starting with the literal translation and glossaries before focusing on the grammar, vocabulary and literary/rhetorical devices to develop coherent and creative versions of the original. This method is helpful to teachers developing approaches to the new curriculum. Fiona Brown, EAL Coordinator and Head of MFL at Ruskin Community High, immediately saw the workshops’ potential for supporting the MFL mainstream curriculum: “Translations have just been brought into the new GCSE Foreign Language spec so we are doing a lot of translation now. We are looking at any ways in which we can bring in translations. We are not 100% confident about how to tackle translations, so this workshop has been really interesting.”

The workshops also expose pupils to essential grammar points and terms needed for MFL at GCSE, giving them the opportunity to use that terminology in practice. For example, after completing the workshop one Year 5 pupil at Southway Primary in Bognor Regis was able to make the grammatical comparison between languages: ‘In English we have lots of determiners but in Polish there are barely any.’

These workshops were facilitated by native speakers of Polish and professional linguists. Having these individuals in the classroom provides support for class teachers not confident in their MFL teaching (particularly prevalent at primary level) and enhances the status of the subject for pupils. Haydon Abbey Primary class teachers enjoyed this new approach to MFL: “When we do modern foreign languages we say, ‘here’s this expression in French and that’s how you say it.’ We remove the possibility of pupils finding out for themselves the meaning of words in other languages.”

The workshop structure enables pupils of all abilities to achieve something they had thought impossible and gave a ‘concrete purpose to language-learning’ by offering a clear, practical context for it. The fact that the translation task is broken down into stages removes the fear often associated with language learning. One of the Year 5 pupils at Southway Primary suggested that the most important thing they had learnt from the translation workshop was ‘that it doesn’t matter what language you speak, people can translate it.’ When asked how the workshop could be improved the same pupil said, ‘You could not improve it as it was a fabulous experience. Thank you!’

Teachers at all schools felt this integrated approach was more useful to pupils than the lists of vocabulary or set phrases they currently teach, and that it familiarises children with strategies they can apply to the learning of any language. This meant that many monolingual pupils of all levels were inspired by language-learning in general. A class teacher at Southway Primary in Bognor Regis commented that the aspect of the workshop which had most impact on the children was ‘thinking about the structure of the language. Even the monolingual pupils often struggle with word order when writing.’

b. Key EAL benefits

The workshops provide practical resources and ideas for teachers and coordinators in classrooms with high EAL numbers, which teachers welcomed. Recognition of bilingualism is crucial at secondary level, particularly for more advanced EAL learners who may not recognise the importance of literacy in their home language. The EAL coordinator and the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) at Ruskin Community High both remarked that the structure of the translation tasks could assist them in supporting EAL learners. Using EAL learners’ first language as a starting point to help with more complicated texts is a successful strategy for supporting EAL learners at all stages of acquiring English. Likewise, Haydon Abbey headteacher Judith Ejdowski saw in the Spotlight great potential for supporting the school’s large EAL population (36%), in particular if it can be extended to training teachers and developing further classroom resources.

The workshops were found to benefit lower-, middle- and high-ability EAL pupils, by building fluency and literacy in both the home language and English (including an enhanced understanding of grammar and grammatical terms) and boosting confidence and classroom participation. One of the class teachers at Southway Primary commented that she thought the Polish first language speakers in her class ‘felt proud that others were exploring their language.’ Creative translation recognises and validates bilingualism as a skill, especially where the source language is a community or heritage language spoken in the classroom, and this has a direct positive impact on EAL learners’ self-esteem. Staff at Ruskin Community High noted that these workshops could contribute to raising GCSE attainment, by improving literacy in the home language and raising intellectual self-esteem: GCSEs in Polish, Slovak and Romanian are on offer at the school but EAL pupils are often hampered by deficient home-language literacy despite their oral fluency. Creative translation also gives EAL pupils the chance to put into practice literacy tools they have acquired elsewhere in the curriculum, and helps them to process the frequent challenges that they encounter when working between languages.

Key Stage 3 English classes consisting of many EAL pupils would particularly benefit from staff running these workshops during lesson time, with one teacher seeing “massive potential” for this tool in GCSE poetry. The Ruskin LSA noted the practical training offered staff by the workshop: “I feel better for seeing the workshop and now that I know which tools are being used, and how the pupils are expected to work in groups.”

c. Key benefits for inclusive multilingual classrooms and community cohesion

The workshops build key skills for the multilingual classroom and the broader community. They encourage and facilitate empathy and collaborative learning, as noted by the primary pupils themselves, who remarked on having learnt how “to work together” and “to listen to each other.” A class teacher at Southway Primary observed that the translation workshop had encouraged the children “to work together to solve a problem; to talk and use their individual skill sets.” Curiosity about the other languages, heritages and identities in the group (or society outside school) is stimulated. Thus classroom relationships between pupils of different heritage are improved. Millican noted that “through exploring the different languages spoken by the children in the class, the diverse skills of the pupils were highlighted.” The Senior Leadership team at Haydon Abbey School remarked that they welcomed the support and ideas offered by the programme on how to include the parents of their EAL learners in the school community. Both the class teachers and the LSA felt that asking parents to help with the translations, or to choose their favourite childhood texts to share with the children, would forge links with them. This would thereby address the difficulty many schools have in communicating with parents

of EAL children and their very low attendance at parents' evenings, as well as helping schools to meet the native speaker requirements of the National Language Strategy for England (see Appendix, Key Stage 2). Similarly, the EAL coordinator at Ruskin Community High noted that "getting parents of EAL learners involved is our biggest challenge" and the English teacher agreed, stating "We need to do more work with our EAL community parents."

The creative translation method also models and teaches that it is acceptable to make mistakes and to rework, a powerful belief that encourages persistence, raises confidence and breaks down language barriers. All these skills are of course transferable right out across the curriculum, not least to PSHE and Citizenship.

Finally, as the workshop tasks are designed to be differentiated in order to support both high- and low-ability multilingual or monolingual pupils, they are easily adaptable for any specific group of learners. The workshop tasks contribute to 'Talk for Writing' (<http://www.talk4writing.co.uk/>) for all levels.

Recommendations

The key recommendations produced by this evaluation can be grouped into two categories: (1) training teachers and (2) developing teaching resources. By embedding translators in schools for sustained cooperation with teachers, SST fulfils both of these aims. The presence of the translator in the classroom empowers, inspires, supports and upskills teachers and LSAs, giving them access to new teaching methods and tools. Their work together creates context-appropriate resources for teachers and LSAs to use in their own classroom practice, independently of the translators. In this way a sustainable resource is created that benefits teachers and their pupils in the three key areas (MFL, EAL, and inclusive classroom cohesion) identified above.

Recommendations for training teachers:

- Involve teachers more in the planning and delivery of the workshops, so that creative translation can be embedded into their ongoing practice
- Provide CPD training for mainstream staff/EAL/MFL coordinators on translation activities to ensure they feel confident delivering the workshops themselves
- Advise schools on grouping the pupils for the workshops, so that EAL learners at different stages of English-language acquisition and lower-ability monolingual learners can be supported by good language role models
- Advise schools on techniques to encourage workshop contribution from all pupils
- Invite EAL parents into the classroom to assist in an activity and demonstrate their first language skills
- Encourage teachers and LSAs to focus on grammar and language-use points thrown up by the translation, such as synonyms, homophones, rhyme, word order, adjectives, idioms, during discrete sessions to expand on the obvious links between the workshop and the mandatory SPaG (Spelling and Grammar) sessions

Recommendations for developing resources and schemes of work

Incorporate activities into mainstream teaching that promote and encourage bilingual skills

- Provide detailed lesson plans in an accessible format, including audio recordings of the original text to help with pronunciation and intonation and visuals on the cultural background of the writer and their era, to allow all teaching staff to incorporate these activities into their lesson plans
- Develop a scheme of work for class teachers around the translation workshop, to facilitate exploring the activities from the workshop in more detail in line with the wider curriculum, and enable teachers to use the workshop to conclude a series of work on a certain genre, or as part of their MFL teaching

- Provide additional resources to support the teacher before and after the workshop. John Putt, English teacher at Ruskin Community High, suggested including “a pack containing work around what poetry is to revisit with the children. Having background on the poet and the glossary is key.”
 - Establish links with first-language community schools (e.g. Polish Saturday Schools) to promote the importance of developing literacy skills in the first language
 - Develop and teach staff a model session exploring the language skills (oracy/literacy) of the children in the class and highlighting the value of knowing other languages, including a discussion of the skills needed to be a translator
- Strengthen specific links to the MFL and Literacy National Curriculum at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

Conclusion

Both the primary and secondary workshops raised the profile of language-learning and multilingualism in the participating schools, generating highly positive feedback from staff and pupils. Interaction with professional translators raised academic, creative and professional aspirations amongst students, and teachers were given inspiration for developing school-wide literacy policies as well as developing their own professional skills. As a result of these workshops, SST has developed a clearer understanding of the specific needs in this field, and developed new ways of maximising impact on marginalised groups and in community settings. This will be the focus of our education programmes in 2019-22, as we embed translators in schools for teacher-training and develop resources to enable teachers to integrate creative translation into their classroom practice.

APPENDIX

National Curriculum areas and objectives covered by Creative Translation workshops:

1) MFL Key Stage 2

“Every child should have the opportunity throughout Key Stage 2 to study a foreign language and develop their interest in the culture of other nations. They should have access to high quality teaching and learning opportunities, making use of native speakers and e-learning.”

(National Language Strategy for England. Languages for all: Languages for Life DfES Publications 2002).

- listen attentively to spoken language and show understanding by joining in and responding
 - explore the patterns and sounds of language through songs and rhymes and link the spelling, sound and meaning of words
 - engage in conversations; ask and answer questions; express opinions and respond to those of others; seek clarification and help
 - develop accurate pronunciation and intonation so that others understand when they are reading aloud or using familiar words and phrases
 - present ideas and information orally to a range of audiences
 - read carefully and show understanding of words, phrases and simple writing
 - appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes in the language
 - broaden their vocabulary and develop their ability to understand new words that are introduced into familiar written material, including through using a dictionary
- (DfE Languages Programme of Study 2013)

2) English Key Stage 2

- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others (spoken language)
- understand what they read by identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning (comprehension)
- draft and write by selecting appropriate grammar and vocabulary, understanding how such choices can change and enhance meaning (composition)

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english->

3) English Key Stage 3

Reading:

Pupils should be taught to:

- understand increasingly challenging texts through:
 - learning new vocabulary, relating it explicitly to known vocabulary and understanding it with the help of context and dictionaries.

Writing:

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
 - writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including: stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing;
- plan, draft, edit and proof-read through:
 - amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness.

Spoken English:

Pupils should be taught to:

- Speak confidently and effectively, including through:
 - giving short speeches and presentations, expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point;
 - improvising, rehearsing and performing play scripts and poetry in order to generate language and discuss language use and meaning, using role, intonation, tone, volume, mood, silence, stillness and action to add impact.

(DfE English programme of study 2013)

4) MFL GCSE

- understand and respond to written language
- understand and respond to different types of written language
- understand general and specific details within texts using high frequency familiar language across a range of contexts

- identify the overall message, key points, details and opinions in a variety of short and longer written passages, involving some more complex language, recognising the relationship between past, present and future events
- deduce meaning from a variety of short and longer written texts from a range of specified contexts, including authentic sources involving some complex language and unfamiliar material, as well as short narratives and authentic material addressing a wide range of relevant contemporary and cultural themes
- recognise and respond to key information, important themes and ideas in more extended written text and authentic sources, including some extracts from relevant abridged or adapted literary texts • demonstrate understanding by being able to scan for particular information, organise and present relevant details, draw inferences in context and recognise implicit meaning where appropriate
- Translate a short passage from the assessed language into English
(MFL GCSE Subject Content DfE 2015)