

Online translation as friend, not foe: using online translations as parallel texts to access literature for modern language learning

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The activities

First year module *Language Awareness* - introduction to linguistics for language learners

Final lecture: *Pitfalls of translation*

Literary text + machine translation to analyse and discuss language

Machine translations are used as parallel text (Veronis 2000)



Erstes Kapitel

der Junge the boy	der Mann the man
das Mädchen the girl	die Frau the woman

Peter ist ein Junge. Marie ist ein Mädchen. Frau Schmidt ist eine Frau. Herr Schmidt ist ein Mann.	Peter is a boy. Marie is a girl. Mrs. Schmidt is a woman. Mr. Schmidt is a man.
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das Kind - the child	die Mutter - the mother
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die Kinder - the children	der Vater - the father
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Peter ist ein Kind und Marie ist ein Kind. Peter und Marie sind Kinder. Frau Schmidt ist die Mutter von Peter und Marie. Herr Schmidt ist der Vater.	Peter is a child and Marie is a child. Peter and Marie are children. Mrs. Schmidt is the mother of Peter and Marie. Mr. Schmidt is the father.
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heißt - **is called**

ihr/ihre - **her**

sein/seine - **his**

Schwester - **sister**

Bruder - **brother**

The learning activity

MODL105 Language Awareness

German Seminar

Songs

1. Herbert Grönemeyer 'Currywurst'

Improve the Google translations of the first song. Listen to the song, analyse the dominant textual features of the source text and comment on the translation difficulties. Discuss in class.

Translation brief

You were asked by a music company to translate the song 'Currywurst' by Herbert Grönemeyer into English to be performed for Comic Relief on the BBC. You were also asked to suggest a singer/artist to perform the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnZT0cXNRJQ>

Source text	Google translation
gehste inne stadt wat macht dich da satt 'ne currywurst	go to town wat makes you sick A currywurst
kommse vonne schicht wat schönret gibt et nich als wie currywurst	Take a break wat schönret does not exist as like currywurst
mit pommes dabei ach, dann gebense gleich zweimal currywurst	with chips Oh, then give it twice currywurst
biste richtig down brauchste wat zu kaun 'ne currywurst	right down I needed to know what to do A currywurst
willi, komm geh mit ich krieg appetit auf currywurst	willi, come along I get some appetite

ich brauch wat in bauch für mein schwager hier auch noch ne currywurst willi, is dat schön wie wir zwei hier stehn mit currywurst	on currywurst I need wat in belly for my brother in law also a currywurst willi, is beautiful as we two stand here with currywurst
willi, wat is mit dir trinkse noch n' bier zur currywurst	willi, wat is with you do not drink beer to the currywurst
kerl scharf is die wurst mensch dat gibt'n durst, die currywurst	guy spicy is the sausage human dat thats thirst, the currywurst
biste dann richtig blau wird dir ganz schön flau von currywurst	biste then right blue you will be very quiet from curry sausage
rutscht dat ding dir aus gehse dann nach haus voll currywurst	you slip out date then go home full currywurst
aufm hemd auffer jacke kerl wat ist dat ne k.... alles voll currywurst	aufm shirt auffer jacket guy wat is dat ne k all full currywurst
komm willi bitte, bitte, komm geh mit nach hause hörma ich kriegse wenn ich so nach hause komm willi, willi, bitte, du bisn kerl nach mein geschmack willi, willi komm geh mit, bitte willi	come willi please, please, come home I hear it when I come home willi, willi, please, you bisn guy for my taste willi, willi come with you, please willi

Listen to (and watch) the German song and read the lyrics. Identify the salient features of the original text.

1. Define the purpose and audience of your translation (partly determined by the brief).
2. Compare the Google translation to the source text.

The learning activity

Students receive a text in the target language alongside its GT translation in English

They are asked to analyse the machine translation critically. They're asked to

- identify poor or wrong translations;
- suggest better translation choices;
- reflect on the poor translations in an assessed commentary;
(which textual features are difficult to translate for GT?)
- evaluate the overall translation and the efficiency of GT as a translation tool.

Aims of the activity

1. Foster engagement with and awareness of language (knowledge about language and noticing);
2. Enable learners to access literary texts for their language learning;
3. Raise awareness of the advantages and problems of using machine translations, teach effective use of translation tools.

1. Why awareness of language?

The Association for Language Awareness defines language awareness as *explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.*

Association for Language Awareness

2. Why literature for language learning?

- Literary texts are authentic . They counteract the decontextualization of the foreign language classroom that often comes with the mundane and decontextualized controlled input (Widdowson 1998);
- Literary texts are motivating and interesting, since the aesthetic quality of literary texts invites and rewards the close reading and deep engagement with the text;
- *Literature is a set of texts [...] whose purpose includes, but extends beyond, communication, in which language itself is as much a part of the end product as is the content.*

Kusch 2016: 3-4

- Literary dialogues exhibit features which are closer to authentic language use than scripted textbook texts;
- Literary texts often deal with the interface between individuals and society, allowing an insight into social and cultural aspects of the target language community;
- *Fictional literary texts can invite students to adopt different viewpoints and thus enhance intercultural awareness.*

Jones and Oakey 2019

- There seems to be a link between literary reading and mental health and wellbeing.

Almeida, Bavendiek and Biasini 2020:2

3. Why machine translation?

Students use machine translations for their studies.

Have you ever used GT in the past?	N=23
Yes	22
No	0
Not GT but another machine translation service	1

If you have used machine translations, what was/were the purpose/s? You can tick more than one answer.	N=23
At school, college or university	23
At work	1
Private	12

Coming-of-Age novel, 2010





tschick
Chapter 1 (extract)



«Ich dachte, fünfzehn?»», sage ich, und der Polizist schüttelt
den Kopf.

«Nee, vierzehn. Vierzehn. Was ist mit dem Kaffee, Horst?»

«Kaffee ist kaputt», sagt Horst.

Ich möchte meinen Anwalt sprechen.

Das wäre der Satz, den ich jetzt wahrscheinlich sagen

müsste. Das ist der richtige Satz in der richtigen Situation,

wie jeder aus dem Fernsehen weiß. Aber das sagt sich so

leicht: Ich möchte meinen Anwalt sprechen. Würden die sich

wahrscheinlich totlachen. Das Problem ist: Ich habe keine Ahnung, was

dieser Satz bedeutet. Wenn ich sage, ich möchte

meinen Anwalt sprechen, und sie fragen: «Wen möchtest du

"I thought fifteen?" I say, and the policeman shakes
the head.

"No, fourteen. Fourteen. What about the coffee, Horst?"

"Coffee is broken," says Horst.

I want to talk to my lawyer.

That would be the sentence that I am likely to say now

would. That's the right sentence in the right situation,

as everyone knows from television. But that says so

easy: I want to talk to my lawyer. Would that yourself

probably laugh. The problem is: I have none

I do not know what that phrase means. When I say I want



Examples of student work 1

Source text	Google translation	Corrected translation	Comment
... der Polizist schüttelt den Kopf	... the policeman shakes the head	... the policeman shakes <u>his</u> head	Although the text has 'den', it makes sense to use 'his', as presumably does not have another head in his hand.

The learner notices the use of 'lexical chunks' or 'pre-formed strings of words' (Jones: 114) and how they can contribute to meaning.

Underlines: Student's own emphasis.

Examples of student work 2

Source text	Google translation	Corrected translation	Comment
Hahaha. Da lachen die sich natürlich kaputt. Und ich finde, es geht mir schlecht genug, ich muss mich nicht auch noch zum Obst machen.	Hahaha. Of course they are laughing. And I think, I feel bad enough, I do not have to make a fruit.	Hahaha. <u>They'd kill themselves laughing.</u> <u>And I think to myself, I feel bad enough already without making a bigger tit of myself.</u>	Untranslatable. So Google stays with 'Obst' = 'fruit', which conveys no meaning. An alternative might be, ' <i>without making things worse for myself</i> ', but I think as this 14 year-old has clearly used a colourful phrase with no explanation, a corresponding one in English is needed. The official (American) translation has 'ass', but a British teenager is unlikely to say this. Keeping with fruit, British English does have 'banana' or 'nana', as in ' <i>I wouldn't want to seem a total (ba)nana</i> ', but this is somewhat dated now.

The learner

- pictures the situation and notices the implied conditional 'they'd kill themselves...'
- notices colloquial youth language, tone, difference between British and American use, language change etc.

Examples of student work 3

Source text	Google translation	Corrected translation	Comment
Unser Held hier will wissen, ob er einen Anwalt braucht ! Guck dir das an. Blutet den ganzen Boden voll, pisst sich in die Hosen wie ein Weltmeister und – will seinen Anwalt sprechen !	Our Held here wants to know if he needs a lawyer! Look look at that. Bloody the floor, pissing in the pants like a champion and - wants to talk to his lawyer!	Our <u>big hero</u> here wants to know if he needs a Lawyer! <u>Can you believe it? Bleeding all over the floor and</u> pissing in <u>his</u> pants like a <u>world</u> (-) champion, and he wants to <u>know if he can</u> talk to his Lawyer!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Google has simply repeated the German word for 'hero'- 'Blutet' is a verb not an adjective- 'His' makes it clear he is pissing in his own pants, not somebody else's.

The learner notices

- obvious mistranslations (grammatically incorrect sentences) and
- unidiomatic sentences.

Results of the study

- Students engage critically with language and linguistic issues. Most students show good linguistic awareness.
- Most students agree that through the activity they develop their language awareness/metalinguistic knowledge.

Working with GT has helped me develop my knowledge about language	<i>N</i> = 21
Strongly agree	3
Agree	10
Neither agree nor disagree	6
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	0

Results of the study

Students are more critical of Google translations and less likely to use them after the activity.

Example question: GT provides reliable translations with regard to context and cultural aspects. *N=19 (paired questionnaires)*

	Pre-treatment questionnaire	Post-treatment questionnaire
Strongly agree	0	0
Agree	0	0
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2
Disagree	14	10
Strongly disagree	3	7

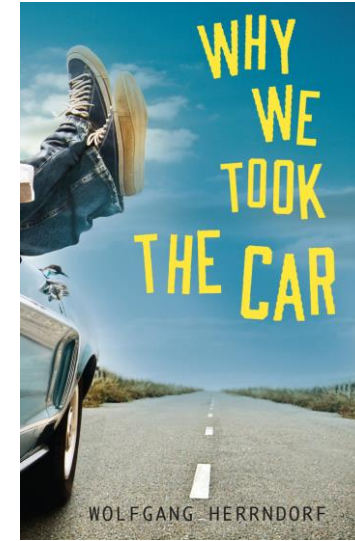
Results of the study

- **!** Students engage with the target language text, but to a lesser degree.
- **!** Most students engage little with the literary content of the text.
- **!** Students don't always appreciate the use of GT for accessing literary text.

I find GT useful to meaningfully engage with literary texts in the target language	<i>N</i> = 21
Strongly agree	0
Agree	4
Neither agree nor disagree	7
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	1

Suggested use of parallel text

1. Watch the film *Why We Took the Car*.



Suggested use of parallel text

2. Read the extract.

3. Correct the Google Translation where necessary.

4. Answer the questions in German.

«Ich dachte, fünfzehn?»», sage ich, und der Polizist schüttelt
den Kopf. ¶
«Nee, vierzehn. Vierzehn. Was ist mit dem Kaffee, Horst?» ¶
«Kaffee ist kaputt», sagt Horst. ¶
Ich möchte meinen Anwalt sprechen. ¶
Das wäre der Satz, den ich jetzt wahrscheinlich sagen
müsste. Das ist der richtige Satz in der richtigen Situation,
wie jeder aus dem Fernsehen weiß. Aber das sagt sich so
leicht: Ich möchte meinen Anwalt sprechen. Würden die sich
wahrscheinlich totlachen. Das Problem ist: Ich habe keine Ahnung, was
dieser Satz bedeutet. Wenn ich sage, ich möchte
meinen Anwalt sprechen, und sie fragen: «Wen möchtest du

"I thought fifteen?" I say, and the policeman shakes
the head. ¶
"No, fourteen. Fourteen. What about the coffee, Horst?" ¶
"Coffee is broken," says Horst. ¶
"I want to talk to my lawyer." ¶
"That would be the sentence that I am likely to say now
would. That's the right sentence in the right situation,
as everyone knows from television. But that says so
easy: I want to talk to my lawyer. Would that yourself
probably laugh. The problem is: I have none
I do not know what that phrase means. When I say I want



Questions

1. Wie alt ist Maik Klingenberg? (How old is Maik Klingenberg?)
2. Was müsste Maik jetzt sagen? (What should Maik say now?)
3. Kennt Maik einen guten Anwalt? (Does Maik know a good lawyer?)
- ...
1. Warum ist Maik auf der Polizeistation? (Why is Maik in the police station?)
2. Wer ist Tschick? (Who is Tschick?)
3. Was haben Maik und Tschick gemacht? (What did they do?)
4. Warum haben sie das gemacht? (Why did they do it?)
5. Wohin sind Maik und Tschick gefahren? (Where did they go?)
- ...
1. Würden Sie ein solches Abenteuer erleben wollen? (Would you enjoy an experience like that? Why? Why not?)

Thank you!

For questions and information, please contact me
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Please visit us  **CTELL**
Centre for Teaching Excellence in Language Learning

<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/centre-for-language-excellence/>

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