



## Course Concepts Translating Skills

All the Course Concepts focus on skills and are based on general principles set out in the introduction to the series. One of these principles is that skills are not acquired by the learner being told about them, but rather by actually doing things themselves, or to put it another way - we learn by actively engaging in a learning process. The teacher's job is to provide suitable and sufficient support.

**What follows here are some specifics for a Translating Skills course. This will give an overview of what kind of skills are taught, and why and how.**

Translating Skills is a variation on a traditional university course, usually called German-English Translation. I chose to use the word 'translating' instead of 'translation' to indicate the focus on skills.

The course concept offered here developed out of experience teaching translation from German into English over many years and under changing circumstances. When I first taught translation, the target group was students of English who wished to become High School teachers. Their course of study included obligatory translation courses and a translation paper as part of their Degree exams. The type of text to be used was specified, namely extracts from novels or short stories, as were the grading criteria. This was rather a straitjacket for the teacher, and for the students.

Fortunately, changes in study regulations for future teachers and the introduction of new B.A. courses brought the opportunity for different perspectives.

As a language teacher, I wanted to offer the kind of translation class that any students of English could profit from, focussing on the process of translating rather than just the product. I hoped to help students become more aware of language, both their mother tongue German and the target language English, my mother tongue. I hoped that we could enter into some kind of dialogue about these languages and cultures, and any others we were familiar with.

In my experience the course concept presented here does actually make it possible to do these things. And to do them with pleasure.

So what kind of knowledge and skills are required in the process of translating?

To start with the obvious, you need a knowledge of grammar and a fairly wide vocabulary in the target language.

You also need effective reading skills, including how to acquire vocabulary in 'chunks' rather than isolated words.

You need dictionary skills, in particular learning how to use a monolingual dictionary effectively.

You need to learn how to be a critical reader of your own work.

And perhaps what is most important is learning to look really closely at the mother tongue too.

If students are helped to acquire the above knowledge and skills, translating from German into English becomes a challenge rather than a chore undertaken in order to pass an exam. Their command of English will grow in the process, as will their awareness of their mother tongue. Translating becomes a process of building bridges between languages and the cultures they are embedded in.

For a translating skills course of this kind to work, the topics and texts should be chosen carefully. The topics should be interesting for the students and the language has to be varied and challenging.

#### Choice of topics:

I tried to choose topics which were in some way relevant for the students. These choices were based on my experience with students in many different kinds of course, and on what I could find out from each particular group. There were many topics which were always relevant such as personal relationships, education, the media. The perspective taken, however, varied across time.

At one time the students were deeply affected by the treatment of mentally ill people; then passionate about integrating Turkish guest workers (as they were called then); then concerned about the institutionalised inequality in education. The international political situation was also ever present. Thus I came to see the overarching theme of their interests as injustice/human rights. In other words, there was no lack of topics to choose from.

#### Choice of texts:

For every topic or topic area chosen I looked for different types of text to translate, from fiction and non-fiction. My German collection included newspaper and magazine articles, recipes, brochures, novels, academic books, posters, children's stories, diaries, cartoons and comic strips, product packaging, and ads. To help them translate I also looked for parallel texts in English to provide suitable vocabulary.

For example, on the topic of television I once used a news magazine report 'Was zwei Familien erlebten, die vier Wochen lang auf das Fernsehen verzichteten'. Here family members related what they had done to pass the time and how they had felt about it. It was full of personal comment such as 'man langweilt sich', 'Gereiztheit', 'es war furchtbar', 'viel mehr Zeit zum Nörgeln', 'mit ihren Nerven so sehr am Ende', and one positive effect

'entwickelte sich zur Leseratte'. There were also readers' letters on the topic. All very interesting.

As a parallel text in English I used the 'Television Addiction Identification and Self-Help Guide' by Ron Kaufman [[www.turnoffyourtv.com](http://www.turnoffyourtv.com)]. Vocabulary included: a compulsive habit, giving up television, severe withdrawal symptoms, fighting a battle against boredom.

(Today we would be looking at the effects of smart phone addiction and twitter and co., or electronic surveillance.)

Please note:

The texts introduced in this Course Concept are intended as examples of what I found useful. They met my requirements: the topics were interesting for the students and the language varied and challenging.

Methodology:

Some general comments on methodology.

Firstly, I encouraged the students to talk to each other, share their ideas, with neighbours or with the whole class. This was really important, both for the atmosphere in the class and for their learning.

I encouraged them to read the German text very carefully. Not just: What is it about? But also: What type of text is it? Where did it appear? What was the target group? What is the language like? Think about the tone of the text: formal, chatty, academic, ironic etc. Look at the sentence structure, the vocabulary used. Questions like this were very productive as there was certainly not always consensus:

"I would never use that word, it's old fashioned". "I would!" "Well where do you come from?!"

This definitely helped to make them more aware of the complexities or subtleties of their own language. The better they understand the German text, at all levels, the more interesting it is to search for possible translations and select the most appropriate.

I also encouraged students to make good use of authentic English texts. For example, instead of looking up specific terms such as 'Studentenwohnheim' or 'Untermieter' in a translation dictionary, they were asked to check university websites from various English-speaking countries. At the start, they are not necessarily very keen on working like this as they feel it takes too long. It can be hard to wean them off the quick-fix habit of using an online translation dictionary, though one or two examples of really gross mistranslations might help. Over time, however, they begin to understand the value of mining authentic English texts for language, and organising vocabulary in a meaningful way for long term learning. For more information on teaching this, see: [FYF\_CC\_READINGSKILLS.PDF].

Students could start thinking about the translation in class, then complete it at home, alone or with a partner, and hand it in for marking. Every piece of work

was marked in such a way that they could see clearly what needed to be changed, and how. At the beginning of the next class there was time to look at their marked work and compare with their neighbours, puzzle and discuss, and ask. Then they re-worked it themselves.

When I gave the students a suggested translation of the text or a part of it, it would often include alternatives. The reason for this is that I could offer them correct English, some appropriate translations, but these were not intended as definitive! Sometimes a student would make a really good suggestion, which was then integrated, and the text was ready for further development.

The above are fundamentals; each different text type tackled in the course required its own special approach.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### Translating Skills

The following is a typical course description as it appeared in the Term Programme. It was handed out to the participants at the first meeting of class, along with additional information, and talked through in detail.

**Target group:** This course is aimed at all students of English in higher semesters. It is not suitable for students in their first year as translating presupposes a knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, so it makes sense to attend a Grammar and a Reading/Vocabulary class first.

**Course aims:** This course will give practice in translating into English short texts on a variety of topics taken from a wide range of text types e.g. a student magazine, contemporary fiction, a diary, a newspaper. This practice involves thinking about, trying out and acquiring useful translating skills.

**Materials:** Students will be expected to bring a copy of a good advanced level learners dictionary to class each week, if possible the Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary. Other materials will be provided e.g. English texts to mine for vocabulary.

There are also many supporting materials available on my website [[www.FindYourFeet.de](http://www.FindYourFeet.de)] for example: Writer Reader, Using Cobuild, Punctuation, Emphasis.

**Credits:** To gain credits for the course participants are required to attend regularly, complete assignments regularly, and sit a final test consisting of a passage from fiction and a passage from non-fiction to translate into English. There will also be tutorials where participants will get individual feedback on their work and help with solving problems. Participants are required to attend a tutorial at least once.

Some additional information:

Translating is taught and practised here as a process. You learn by actually doing, rather than by being told how to do it or just what mistakes you have made. Or being presented with a 'perfect' translation. This learning is spread over the whole term.

This process approach means that you have to budget for work outside class: sometimes an hour will be enough, but you may need more. When you hand in a piece of work, I 'symbol' mark it and give it back to you to work on with your neighbours in class, then if necessary take it to the tutorial to discuss it with the tutor.

Although you are not being trained to be professional translators or interpreters, I think the notes below are interesting and relevant. They are taken from a German university brochure and have to do with study requirements for translators and interpreters:

'Students select a combination of two foreign languages. Further languages may be studied as supplementary languages. German-speaking applicants must have an excellent command of their native language and of English or French if they have chosen one of these languages for study. **Competence in the mother tongue must be continuously increased throughout the student's course of studies because the native language is the most important tool at the disposal of both the translator and the interpreter.**' (my highlighting)

Organization of the Courses of Study for the Degree of Diplom-Übersetzer, Diplom-Dolmetscher and Akademisch geprüfter Übersetzer. Language Studies. In: *Faculty of Applied Linguistics and Culture Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz in Germersheim* (no date given).

One final piece of advice to make sure the class goes well: get the contact details of at least two neighbours here today so that you can contact them if you are off sick. Please make it your own responsibility to find out exactly what you missed and what you have to do to catch up. And those who give the information: please don't be mean and give only a tiny part of it. You wouldn't like it if someone did that to you.

Some comments on the course description, for you as the teacher:

- 1) Dictionary: the reason for recommending a particular dictionary is that it proved to be an excellent tool for learners. In fact, for many years while the degree exams for students majoring in English included an essay and a translation from German into English, this is the dictionary which was specified for use. It made sense overall to encourage students from the very start to learn how to use it effectively. There were copies in the library, but having their own for long-term use was the better option.

2) Tutorials: I ran tutorials for many of my classes. In general they are an opportunity for the teacher to get to know each individual student better and to give the detailed advice that each one needs in order to make progress. See for example: [FYF\_CC\_WRITINGSKILLS.PDF].

3) Contact details of classmates: encouraging students to talk to the people around them from the very start is an integral part of the course. It is also a good idea to ask them to put their first name on a card, written big enough to be seen across the room. In every class I had a card with my name on it, first name on one side, second name on the other. They could use whichever they felt comfortable with.

4) For independent study I provided the students with a great deal of assistance, in various forms.

There were course materials and handouts available as pdf files on my website, for example:

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF\\_cm\\_writerreader.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF_cm_writerreader.pdf)].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF\\_cm\\_punctuation.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF_cm_punctuation.pdf)].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF\\_cm\\_emphasis.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF_cm_emphasis.pdf)].

[[http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF\\_cm\\_grammarunit05.pdf](http://www.findyourfeet.de/assets/docs/FyF_cm_grammarunit05.pdf)].

There were handouts I produced on problems such as:

how to deal with reported speech (German use of subjunctive/ English use of reporting verbs). See: Appendix.

German premodification/ English relative clause.

English participial clauses, how they are used to replace two different kinds of clause, namely relative clauses and adverbial clauses.

There were also short passages from fiction in English, to illustrate certain grammar points. See: Appendix.

5) If you are free to decide what the students need to do to earn credits, here are one or two options. It could be a translation test in class, or a portfolio of work completed; it could be a mini-project based on translating a text (in its widest sense) of their own choice, or improving some poor quality official translation. Other ideas will develop out of your own experience, to suit your circumstances.

### **Step by step through the course:**

The course progresses from translating individual sentences to passages from a wide variety of texts to make sure that a range of language challenges is covered. Challenges occurring in any one text, however, would reoccur in others, so that the students gain expertise in dealing with them. Where there was a final test, this gave the students the chance to show how much they had learnt.

## An introduction to translating, and using the Cobuild

First I gave the students a set of sentences from class texts to translate, an unusual task as there was no or only minimal context. This was also the one and only task they had to do alone. My main purpose was to check their knowledge of verb tense and aspect and use of the article in English, as this is fundamental. The results of this were very useful for me and made it clear to the students what they needed to learn, quickly.

Some sentences to try out your translating skills on:-)

(The words in brackets are there only to provide some context so you do not need to translate them.)

1. Kinder würden nicht in die Schule gehen, wenn sie es nicht tun müssten.
2. (Sieben junge Leute wollen eine Wohngemeinschaft gründen und suchen und finden eine passende Unterkunft.) Man hat Glück.
3. (Aus einem Bericht über Fernsehen und Kriminalität.) Nur wer im Fernsehen, so Dr. Gerbner, ständig Schlägereien und Mord erlebe, könne eine so negative Einstellung zu seiner Umwelt haben.
4. Das sagen sie aber schon seit Jahren.

[...]

I symbol-marked their work for them, so that they could correct any errors themselves. This system of marking, used all through the course, is explained in the **Writer Reader Handout**, which

aims to help you to be critical of your own writing and show you how to use and learn from the feedback you get from me.

In this handout there is

- (1) The concept behind my writing classes
- (2) Questions for you as the writer of your text and as the reader of your text
- (3) The correcting system I use
- (4) Some technicalities

[\[FYF\\_CM\\_WRITERREADER.PDF\]](#).

We focussed on (3):

The system I use for correcting your work. To help you correct your own work I will underline mistakes I am pretty sure you can correct yourselves and symbol-mark them as follows:

W word

Example: if you write 'When do we write the next test' I will underline 'write' and put a 'W' above it to show that this word is wrong. If you look up 'test' in the Cobuild you will find that we don't use the word 'write' with 'a test' in English. Look it up and see! [...]

Although Part (2), Questions for you as the writer of your text, was written specifically for the Writing Skills classes, it makes sense for translators too.

Each time, before you start to write anything, take time to think about the following: Who am I writing to? My diary? My English teacher ...?(who is this person?) A selection committee? An expert in the field? etc. What will this person know? Why am I writing? To inform? To persuade? To work out my own opinions? To share ideas?

So translators can ask themselves: Who was the German text written for? Who am I translating for? What will they know?

The next step was a Cobuild Quiz. **The Using Cobuild Handout** is made up of a variety of tasks in separate parts, aimed at helping students to use this monolingual dictionary effectively. All the tasks focus on typical language problems students have, whether German speakers or speakers of other languages. There are various versions of this quiz, designed for specific courses. This one is for Translating Skills and could include the use of other reference books in comparison.

Translating Skills	<b>Using Cobuild</b>
--------------------	----------------------

Part 1. Choose what you think is the right answer – without a dictionary.

(This has to be done very quickly and spontaneously.)

(1) A friend told me that when she heard she had won a free flight to Sydney she ...

passed out  
fainted  
swooned  
collapsed?

(2) She had a wonderful trip, but unfortunately it had to be cut short because of ...

death in the family  
a death in the family  
a dead in the family

(3) Later she went to Africa to hunt for  
a game  
game?

(4) In which case are you saying “No”?

If you impose sanctions on something  
If you sanction something

(5) In which of the following did the man end up in the police station?

- She turned him off
- She turned him on
- She turned him in
- She turned him out
- She turned him around
- She turned him away

(6) Which of these would you class as vulgar?

- Fuck off!
- What a fucking awful day!
- He's a really fucked up guy.

(7) Which of these is correct?

- I try to avoid that I go by bus in the rush hour
- I try to avoid to go by bus in the rush hour
- I try to avoid going by bus in the rush hour

(8) Nowadays it is not just the Greens who are interested in protecting ...

- nature
- the nature
- environment
- the environment?

(9) Which of these is right?

- This topic is highly interesting.
- This topic is to a high extent interesting.

### Part 2

Which of the above questions would you expect to be able to solve with the help of a dictionary?

(This is the important question. The students are asked to talk to their neighbours about their expectations of the dictionary, not about what they think is the right answer. We then make a check of the expectations of the class and I note any items which anyone in the class does NOT expect to find an answer to.)

### Part 3

Now use the Cobuild to see if you can find the right answers to the questions.

(This was usually done at home and checked in the following week. Wherever there was uncertainty we worked through the item together. This takes time, but is worth it, as being able to use a good monolingual dictionary effectively is one of the keys to good writing. The students are expected not only to use the dictionary at home but also to bring it with them to every session of class, and use it.)

#### Part 4

Can you list the kinds of information that the Cobuild gives you, the learner.

*... parts of speech (word class), count/uncount nouns, constructions (verb patterns); levels of formality, register, collocations, synonyms, regional and national varieties, pronunciation etc. etc.*

(In this way the students learn a great deal and realise that they can find the answer to many questions in the dictionary by themselves. This helps them along the path to being independent learners.)

#### Part 5

Write down any meanings you know of 'mum' and 'staggering' and 'corn'.

.....

Now look in the Cobuild, see if you can find the meaning of these words in the following co-texts/contexts:

Pumpkins are often used to decorate the front porches, along with colourful Indian corn and potted mums.

My corn is killing me.

England does not have the sensible Scottish custom of staggering holidays and having different times for different cities.

Once students learned how to use the Cobuild the improvement in their work was staggering.

How would you say these things in German?

#### Part 6

Can you find a good translation for the following, using **only** the Cobuild?

Ich bin gern in der Natur

Ein Amokläufer

Das kulturelle Angebot in Berlin ist sehr gross

\*Ich hatte grosse Schwierigkeiten, eine gute Übersetzung zu finden

Ein Justizirrtum

depressiv sein

Ich habe die Erfahrung gemacht, dass die Menschen dort sehr freundlich sind

(This can be done at home. In the next session the students check what they found with their neighbours. Checking their work with their neighbours can be a good way to start a class. It gives them the chance to talk, and the time to settle in and tune in.)

\*Without the dictionary this usually gets translated as \*I had big difficulties to find a good translation.

Having done all this dictionary work, the students are now in a position to work on their translations, which had been symbol-marked by me. Anyone with grammar problems was advised to make use of the Grammar units on my website.

Unit 01: Talking about the present

Unit 02: Using the articles

Unit 03: Talking about the future

Unit 04: Talking about the past and the present

Unit 05: Talking about the past

We also made use of the **Punctuation Handout** to correct some punctuation errors e.g. \*I think, that it would be good if ..., and to put across the message that commas have meaning in English so they cannot be used the way German uses them.

This handout has a set of punctuation tasks and the right answers. There are no explanations here of rules as we work these out in class together. They are simple and logical and not difficult to learn. Part 1: four tasks. Part 2: the right answers [...].

[[HTTP://FINDYOURFEET.DE/ASSETS/DOCS/FYF\\_CM\\_PUNCTUATION.PDF](http://FINDYOURFEET.DE/ASSETS/DOCS/FYF_CM_PUNCTUATION.PDF)].

### **Text 1. Translating a newspaper article. Topic: Political and sectarian violence.**

To give an idea of the type of text and topic which worked well I have chosen a newspaper article from the 80s. I learnt a lot from using it. What is stunning and sad at the same time is to realise that if the indications of location and nationality were deleted, somewhere in the world today people would recognize the situation as their own.

#### **Der Irische Wahnsinn**

Täglich erstechen und erschiessen sich die Menschen gegenseitig. Seit sieben Jahren leben eineinhalb Millionen Bürger Europas mit Bomben, Bränden und Terror. Wie werden sie mit ihrer Angst fertig?

Die nordirische Hauptstadt Belfast hat 400.000 Einwohner. Früher eines der Industriezentren Grossbritanniens mit ungezählten Fabriken, eleganten Läden, grossen Hotels. Heute ein rauchender Trümmerhaufen mit zerstörten Strassen, brennenden Häusern, verkohlten Autos. Die Menschen leben wie in einer Festung, die seit Jahren belagert wird. In den vergangenen sieben Jahren wurden mehr als 1500 Menschen getötet, über 15.000 verletzt.

Thomas Wright, Klempnermeister von Beruf, hat den für seinen Bezirk zuständigen Guerillas das geforderte Schutzgeld gezahlt. Trotzdem hat man Ende Januar zum zweiten mal seinen Laden in die Luft gesprengt. Aber acht Tage nach der Explosion sucht Thomas Wright bereits nach einem neuen Laden: „Ich lasse mich doch von den Kerlen hier nicht vertreiben. Ich bin hier geboren, und ich bleibe hier.“

13.000 britische Soldaten sollen für Ruhe und Ordnung sorgen, weil die Polizei dazu schon längst nicht mehr in der Lage ist. „Ein beschissener Job,“ sagte einer. „Wären wir doch bloss wieder in England. Wenn es nach mir ginge, gäbe es hier keine Truppen mehr.“

So kann es nicht weitergehen, es hat überhaupt keinen Sinn. Das sagen die Iren aber schon seit vielen Jahren.

Source: Südkurier, date unknown.

The first task is to read through the text and consult with their neighbours on the topic. Since the text is in German, they usually do this in German.

Then I ask them to read it again and begin to think about possible translating difficulties. Asking them to think about possible difficulties sounds rather negative, but it gradually develops into something positive. As the students learn from the start how to deal with certain difficulties which will constantly recur, they build up a knowledge of the target language. This gives them a sense of confidence.

At the beginning of the course students usually focus on individual words, mostly nouns, they do not immediately know – and panic. Examples here are 'Festung', 'Trümmerhaufen', 'Bezirk', 'Klempnermeister', 'Schutzgeld'. I ask them to try to explain these things to each other in German as this can lead to an English word they could then check in the Cobuild.

When they eventually agreed e.g. on what a Klempnermeister is and does, we still could not find a lead in the Cobuild, so this is an example of a word they might want to look up in a translation dictionary. If someone realises that a 'Klempner' is a 'Handwerker', they just might know the word 'tradesman', which would be perfectly suitable. It is not the 'perfect' translation which is in focus here, but using different paths to find something suitable. En route you always learn.

There is, however, still the socio-cultural issue of 'Meister' to deal with. What are the connotations? Is it necessary to express them?

One very good reason for choosing a text like this at the start of the course is that it contains several typical problems of verb tense/aspect, something that needs to be focussed on and treated systematically. Here we started by highlighting all the adverbials of time such as 'täglich', 'seit sieben Jahren', 'früher', 'Ende Januar', 'längst' and then made a list distinguishing between adverbials of finished-past-time and adverbials of time-up-to-now.

Another interesting approach is to look at all the verbs in the German text and ask the students to consider what time they refer to. This is important with 'sucht' for example, which expresses something ongoing, and 'ich bleibe hier', 'ich lasse mich nicht vertreiben', which express a very firm intention or resolution.

To remind them of which verb form to use there are the Grammar Units 01-05. These things can be learnt! So it is psychologically good to focus on them early in the term.

There are many other challenges they usually do not immediately see.

For example 'man', though some might notice it and remember how it was dealt with in their very first task. We had talked about what it means in German, and how it can be used. When they checked the word 'one' in Cobuild they discovered that the meaning was much more restricted so they could not automatically replace German 'man' with English 'one'. We made a list of English options in various contexts.

There is also the German premodification in 'hat den für seinen Bezirk zuständigen Guerillas das geforderte Schutzgeld gezahlt'. Paraphrasing that in German helps.

And there is the distinction count/uncount nouns and the question of specific/generic reference in 'Der Irische Wahnsinn', 'die Menschen'.

And the modal 'sollen', which needs to be paraphrased.

And the particles 'doch bloss'. Here, the students can consider what difference it makes if you delete these. Particles are looked at in detail in a later text 'Tagebuch' (Text 4).

Thinking about the meaning of 'er-' in 'erstechen und erschiessen' helps them to look at the morphology of their own language more closely and begin to uncover its particular characteristics in comparison to English.

To help with vocabulary I would provide the students with an article in English on the same or a similar topic. Interestingly enough, an article published in 2009, provided 'an attack on xx', 'a shooting', 'was gunned down', 'were badly wounded', 'were shot dead', 'they will never be allowed to destroy or undermine the political process'.

Gunn, David (2009, March 10). Northern Ireland Violence: Continuity IRA claim responsibility for police officer shooting. *Scotsman*.

After doing the preparation work together in class, the students completed it at home, and handed it in for marking. There was always time at the beginning of the next class for students to go through their own marked work, try to make corrections themselves and compare with neighbours.

**More examples of newspaper articles in German and English on a similar topic, but closer to home, and this time the violence is connected to school:**

Outlining the events:

Mindestens zehn Tote bei Amoklauf in Realschule. In einer Realschule im baden-württembergischen Winnenden bei Stuttgart hat ein Amokläufer mindestens zehn Schüler getötet [...].

*Spiegel Online* 11. März 2009. [[www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/](http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/)].

'10 shot dead' at German school. at least 10 people have been killed in a shooting at a school in south-west Germany, police say [...].

*BBC News* 11.03.2009

[<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/7936817.stm>].

Background information and comment:

Nach Amoklauf in Winnenden. Die Statistik des Leids. Amokläufer wählen ihre Schule als Tatort aus, weil sie das Gefühl von Kontrollmangel wettmachen wollen - und weil sie dort große Verletzungen erfahren haben [...].

*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16. März 2009.

leserbriefe @spiegel.de

Leserbrief zur Titelgeschichte 'Wenn Kinder zu Killern werden'. 18.03.2009.

German school massacre: Teenage gunman 'hated world' - A teenager who 'hated the world' murdered 15 people in Germany yesterday with the one weapon his gun-collector father had left unsecured [...].

*Scotsman* (2009, March 12) [[www.scotsman.com/latestnews/German-school-massacre](http://www.scotsman.com/latestnews/German-school-massacre)].

Task: Students could each choose one short passage from one of the German texts to translate, or pick out the main points in one text, perhaps the Leserbrief, and express these in English.

Occasionally I chose to have them read the English text(s) at home first, before even seeing the German text. This can work well, as it sets the scene in English. A possible disadvantage, however, is that the students may not read the German text carefully enough before starting to translate.

### Co-text and context

Apart from the Cobuild quiz at the beginning, another good way of helping students to understand that the meaning of a word can depend on its co-text and context is the following:

I wrote one or two German words on the board and asked each student to draw them:

Ball, fallen, Schloß, Tür.

After they had shared their drawings with their neighbours and laughed, I wrote the following sentences on the board and asked them to translate:

Der Ball fand im Schloß statt.  
Die Tür fiel ins Schloß.  
Das Schloß fiel in die Hände der Feinde.

The students got the message, but it was one that they had to be reminded about, at least in the early weeks of class.

**Text 2. Translating another passage from non-fiction. A book from Psychology/Sociology: Lernziel Solidarität.**

I chose the following passage, as the topic is relevant and the language interesting.

Die Ausgangslage: Isolation und Flucht in Pseudokontakte

In einer Universitätsstadt hat man für 500 Studenten ein modernes großes Wohnheim gebaut. Das Heim hat eine freundliche Stadtrandlage. Die Zimmer sind zweckmäßig eingerichtet. Aufenthaltsräume können kleinere und größere Gruppen aufnehmen. Aber als das Haus bezogen wird, stellen die Studenten fest, daß sie sich darin nicht einleben können. [...] Die Menschen fühlen sich isoliert, obwohl sie ganz dicht beieinander leben und alle Gelegenheit hätten, Bekanntschaften zu knüpfen und aneinander Anteil zu nehmen.

Richter, Horst (1974). *Lernziel Solidarität*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, p.23.

The students first need time to talk about the content with each other, and consider whether anything has changed since publication. Then we look at the vocabulary and collect expressions related to communication such as 'Kontakte anknüpfen'; lack of communication such as 'Öde', 'Fremdheit', 'Hemmungen'.

I provided the students with one or two texts on the same topic in English, as goldmines of vocabulary.

For example: Chapter 1 'Creating a strong group' in Zander, Alvin (1982). *Making Groups Effective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1-3.

Weston, Helen (2010, December 26). Lifelines. Helen Weston on the post-Christmas Blues. *Scotland on Sunday*.

For the word 'Heim' I gave them some web pages on student accommodation from the University of Technology in Sydney, and the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, but encouraged them to check the websites of more universities in other English-speaking countries, to find the most suitable expression.

We stop to think about the first compound we have come across so far, 'Stadtrandlage'. Was heißt das? und was heißt 'Das Heim hat eine freundliche

Stadtrandlage'? Paraphrases in German needed.

And once again there is 'man' to deal with.

As a follow-up, a good way of checking whether students can actually use the English vocabulary acquired here is to ask them to pick out what they see as the main points of the text, in two or three sentences.

### **Text 3. Translating fiction. A short story. Der Urlaub.**

From this short story I chose the opening, which is peppered with tense/aspect challenges, and has one or two examples of indirect speech, and several modals: logical necessity, theoretical possibility etc. The topic is quite simply a guy having a bad day, in a pre-digital world.

Seit einiger Zeit erwachte Adrian bei Morgengrauen. Wie ein abziehender Nebel verliess ihn der Schlaf [...]. Wie sehr er auch versuchen mochte[...].

Der Tag fing also schon mit einem Dilemma an, dachte Adrian [...]. Es war Mariella, die aus der Stadt anrief, um ihn zum Abendessen einzuladen. Adrian dankte, und sagte, er werde sehr gern kommen [...].

Er musste also wohl später aufgestanden sein, als er es gewöhnlich zu tun pflegte. Seine Uhr war stehengeblieben [...].

[...] er also hätte zu Fuss gehen können[...]. Erst als er am Bahnhof anlangte und erfuhr, daß er den Zug versäumt hatte, erinnerte er sich, daß die Turmuhr bereits vor geraumer Zeit stehengeblieben war, wahrscheinlich sogar seit einigen Monaten kein Werk mehr hatte.

Hildesheimer, Wolfgang (1979). *Der Urlaub*, in *Lieblose Legenden*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 128-130.

First the students had time to read the text carefully. The next task was to try to identify a time line for the narrative. Which is the first event in sequence? Which is next? To help them do this they had page 9 from Unit 05 of the Grammar class materials, which they had already worked through at home, and discussed in class. Identifying a time line was not an easy task at all, but once they had agreed on the events in sequence they knew that when translated into English they would appear in the simple past, so there was no need to worry about them any more. There were plenty remaining tense/aspect problems.

For the modals I made a handout with a flowchart which we worked our way through together. To help with the translation of indirect speech there was also a handout. See: Appendix.

So that we could focus on the verb forms I gave the students a suggested translation of the passage with gaps for many of the verbs, i.e. they had to find a suitable English word and choose the correct/most suitable tense/aspect.

For some time past Adrian \_\_\_\_\_ at dawn. Sleep \_\_\_\_\_ him like rising mist, gently but inexorably, and there he was, transported into the twilight of reality. \_\_\_\_\_ to flee back into this sleep, [...]. It was Mariella, calling from the town to invite him to dinner. Adrian thanked her and said \_\_\_\_\_ very happy to come [...].

For other good fiction texts to translate see the Appendix.

### **Checking progress, or Memory check.**

After working through some texts, one way of checking progress is to hand out brief extracts taken from the translations already completed in class, but with gaps for individual words. They might not remember the exact word used but they will remember the context, and can use the Cobuild to help if needed. It is fun. (It is not a test!)

One example, from Iraq Embargo:

The Federal Government is considering tightening the controls on exports to Iraq and imposing \_\_\_\_\_ penalties on the firms \_\_\_\_\_ the export embargo imposed on all kinds of goods by the UN at the beginning of August. The Government has confirmed that \_\_\_\_\_ into seven firms are being carried out [...].

### **Text 4. Translating a passage from a diary: Tagebuchauszüge zweier Erstsemester oder das Leben ist eines der härtesten.**

This text is from a student magazine I picked up from a table in the university canteen in 1983. The 'Tagebuchauszüge' were hand-written, which was typical of that time and added a touch of authenticity. The topic is the trials and tribulations of the first week at university.

## 2.9

Endlich haben wir eine Wohnung gefunden und damit der monatelangen Sucherei ein Ende gemacht. Waren richtig froh den Maklerhaien und „alten Omas“ ein Schnippchen geschlagen zu haben; die einen wollen nur das Geld und die anderen „pflegeleichte“ Untermieter, die wir nunmal nicht sein wollen. Aber dem Südkurier zufolge gibt es ja genügend Studentinnen, die ruhig und nichtrauchend sind, jedes Wochenende nach Hause fahren und keinen Besuch nach 22.00 empfangen wollen. Also wird man/frau uns auf dem Wohnungsmarkt nicht vermissen.

## 1.10

Die Einführungswoche für das SG liegt hinter uns. Da scheint ja einiges auf uns zuzukommen. [...] Aber im Grunde ist die Sache ja kinderleicht: man/frau muß nur EDV und Informatikkenntnisse haben, unter 24 sein und Berufserfahrung besitzen wenn man/frau fertig ist und natürlich darf man/frau keine Frau sein, dann ist einem ein Job fast sicher. Wenn das nicht Mut macht!

## 12.10

Bißchen an der Uni rumgeschnüffelt, dabei kommen wir uns allerdings noch ziemlich doof vor. [...] die Bibliothek gleicht auch nach der Führung einem Irrgarten. Während wir nach 2 Stunden mit einem gefundenen (Belletristik) Buch das erste Erfolgserlebnis zu verzeichnen haben, fuhrwerken andere uns bekannte Erstsemester souverän an On-line Terminal herum und schleppen kiloweise Fachbücher nach draußen. Überhaupt phantastisch, was die so alles schon zu wissen scheinen. [...] aber noch lassen wir uns nicht aus der Ruhe bringen. Noch nicht!

## 17.10

Mutig stürzen wir uns ins Chaos. Das ist ja ein tolles Bild, das sich uns da bietet; gibt's bei Trotha eigentlich Freibier oder warum ist's hier so voll? [...] Doch auch in den anderen Kursen ist es nicht besser, Stühle holen und andere Räume suchen sind an der Tagesordnung. Uns ist es ein Rätsel, was die anderen Erstsemester schon alles mitschreiben. Wir sitzen überhaupt nur ziemlich dumm 'rum und kommen uns fehl am Platze vor. Arbeitstechniken, Scheine und Fachbücher, das ist anscheinend das einzige, was die meisten interessiert. Haben die Probleme! Wir wären schon froh, wenn man/frau hier mal einen vernünftigen Menschen treffen würde!

## 19.10

Wir kriegen schon Kopfweh wenn wir nur an Uni denken, [...] Eigentlich hätten wir von den Leuten, die Politik und Verwaltung machen, ein wenig mehr erwartet also nur arbeitsmarktorientiert zu studieren, die Illusion von Nutzen ist ehe mehr als fragwürdig. So schieben wir uns mit den Massen durch die Gänge und sind total erledigt, wenn wir abends nach Hause kommen. Zum Arbeiten

kommen wir gar nicht, wir schaffen's höchstens noch in die Kneipe,  
um den Frust runterzuspülen. Prost!

20.10

Frischgestärkt und voller Tatendrang ziehn wir gen Uni. Auch der Nebel bringt uns nicht aus dem Konzept. Wir haben die Hoffnung, dass heute alles ganz anders wird. [...]. Die Schlange zum Essen ist heute zwei Meter kürzer als gestern, und die Frau auf der Bank lächelt uns sogar leicht an. Das sind doch alles positive Zeichen, und wir sind bereit, jedes wahrzunehmen. Doch man/frau soll den Tag nicht vor dem Abend loben. Mittlerweile sind wir Besitzerinnen von ca. 6 Literaturlisten; die Bücher darauf sind allerdings schon ausgeliehen, nur die englischsprachigen sind übriggeblieben [...].

MSB Spartakus (1983, November). Tagebuchauszüge zweier Erstsemester oder das Leben ist eines der härtesten. *Uni Kurier*.

Step one was to read and enjoy (without any information about the source). Then they can try to guess when it was written, pointing to clues. The students always really like this text; though some details may have changed, they can see their own experience reflected here.

The publication details make it clear who wrote the text, and who it was written for. The students can consider who they will have in mind when they are translating.

Next they can begin to read again and comment on language they find interesting but probably difficult to translate. Sometimes they notice immediately things which are typically German such as man/frau; Benutzerinnen. These need thought and discussion.

If they start to worry about technical terms such as Belletristik, and Fachbücher, you can remind them that paraphrasing in German helps. If they stumble over 'SG', for example, you can remind them to look at the co-text and context. As it is embedded in 'Die Einführungswoche für das SG' it must be some course of study. (In fact, it was a course of study peculiar to Konstanz at that time, 'Sozialwissenschaftliches Grundstudium'). They also need to remember that everyone in Konstanz knows the name 'Südkurier', but those reading the translation would not. All that is necessary here is 'the local paper'.

More important, though, than individual terms is the language of the whole text. What effect does the German have on them personally? How would they describe it? What is the tone?

'Der monatelangen Sucherei ein Ende gemacht', 'mutig stürzen wir uns ins Chaos', 'frischgestärkt und voller Tatendrang ziehn wir gen Uni'.

Do they hear 'echoes' of any of these in their heads? Can they trace them to any particular kind of text?

Sometimes students realise that a factor contributing to their impression that most of the text is written in a chatty, conversational tone comes from the use of particles such as 'ja', 'doch', 'schon', 'überhaupt'. Our next step is to focus on these.

The task called 'Das sind ja aber doch nur ganz kleine Wörter' which I discovered in a course book for students learning German turned out to be an excellent way of getting native speakers of German to puzzle about the effect of particles. It begins with the question:

Der Satz „Er lebt schon seit zwei Jahren in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland“ ist banal und für fortgeschrittene Deutschlerner sicherlich kaum von Interesse. Habt ihr schon einmal überlegt, was man mit so einem einfachen Satz alles ausdrücken kann, wenn man Akzent und Intonation verändert und Partikeln einfügt z.B. aber, also, auch, bloß, denn, doch, eben, etwa, ja, mal, noch, nun, nur, sogar.

Bachmann, Saskia (1997). *Sichtwechsel neu. Mittelstufe DAF*. München: Klett.

The task continues with challenging questions which make it clear to the students that each of these particles can carry a whole package of information, and that this can vary according to co-text and context.

Returning to the 'Tagebuchauszüge' it is not difficult for the students to find and highlight particles, but having done the task in 'Sichtwechsel' they are now aware that when translating they will have to take co-text and context of each particle into consideration. This is a further positive step in the direction of translating chunks of German, not individual words.

I usually got everyone to translate the entry for the first day. It was handed in, symbol-marked and discussed in class. Following that, they could each choose another entry they liked and translate it.

At the end I gave them a suggested translation of the complete text, with gaps to fill in. I found this a good way of dealing with a long text.

Example entry 19.10.

The very thought of the uni gives us a headache, and -----  
----- twice a day. Actually, we -----  
----- a bit more of the people who do politics and  
admin than study just with a view to their future job prospects. The  
illusion of usefulness is more than ----- So we  
push /push and shove our way through the corridors along with the  
masses and are absolutely exhausted when we get home at night.  
We don't ..... , the furthest we get is the pub to

wash down the frustration/to drown the frustration.

-----!

### **Text 5. Translating a passage from a news-sheet. Topic: Education.**

In 2009 dissatisfaction in many countries in Europe with the education system led to mass protests and strikes. Copies of 'str!ke Zeitung zum bundesweiten Bildungsstreik 2009' were available all over Germany. There were four different topic areas in the paper. The first two were:

Streik: Bildung in der Krise

Schule: warum sie scheiße ist und was wir dagegen tun können.

The latter began:

Seltsamerweise beschäftigen wir uns meist nicht mit Dingen, die uns direkt betreffen. Wir gehen jeden Tag zur Schule. Aber hast Du dich schonmal gefragt, was der wirkliche Zweck von Noten ist? Warum andere für Dich über deine Bildungschancen entscheiden? Oder warum Du in überfüllten Klassenräumen mit alten oder teuren Büchern lernst?

linksjugend ['solid] e.V (2009, Mai). *str!ke Zeitung zum bundesweiten Bildungsstreik 2009*. Berlin.

From this article, all of it on issues close to the students' hearts, I chose the passage headed 'Lernfabriken abschalten':

'Erst lernen wir laufen und sprechen, dann sitzen und schweigen.' Dieser Spruch trifft genau, was die Schule aus uns macht. Wir müssen uns an die Regeln, die andere uns auferlegen, halten, sonst drohen Sanktionen. Wir müssen Informationen aufnehmen, abspeichern und in regelmäßigen Abständen in Tests reproduzieren, wie Maschinen [...] Die Benotung des 'Lernerfolges' missachtet also jegliche Individualität und erfolgt zudem noch - wie viele Studien beweisen - stark subjektiv ja sozial selektiv. Mit dem Erhalt der Note werden wir aufgeteilt in Gewinner\_innen und Verlierer\_innen [...].

After reading the text with care, we began to talk about possible translation problems e.g. compounds such as Lernfabriken, Notendruck, Lernerfolgs, Lebensqualität, Konkurrenzdruck, Persönlichkeitsstörungen, Bildungsmisere, Bildungszugang. What do these terms mean? They need to be paraphrased and explained in German.

Some phrases also caught their eye such as:

Sanktionen drohen, gute Noten schreiben, einen guten Abschluss bekommen, gute Zensuren haben, die Schere zwischen Oben und Unten.

I found it positive that by this time the students are generally able to think more in terms of lexical units rather than individual words.

There were other things which I drew their attention to such as:

'mit dem Erhalt der Note'. A word for word translation produces: With the receipt of the grade. But what does that mean? I would encourage the students to consider what the German phrase really means, by paraphrasing it. (Wenn wir benotet werden usw.). The same goes for the noun phrase 'Die Benotung des Lernerfolges'. A good question to keep in mind when paraphrasing is 'Who does what?'

To help them acquire more English before starting to translate I made some authentic English materials available e.g.

Kohn, Alfie (1999). *The Costs of Overemphasizing Achievement*.

[<https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/costs-overemphasizing-achievement/>]

accessed May 2020.

McIlvanney, William (2002, June 16), Exam factory education is failing the test. *Scotland on Sunday*.

These were really excellent for the purpose as they were not only well worth reading in terms of content, but also very productive in terms of language e.g. our educational goals, assessment, disastrous consequences, grading, to undermine learning, long-term recall of facts, grades used as carrots and sticks to coerce them, whether teaching and learning have been successful, to feel increasingly pressured, to learn effectively, the systemic demand for high achievement, poor performance, numbing the brain, self-esteem, fool's gold of academic excellence.

The first task for the students was to read these authentic materials closely for meaning and then mine them for vocabulary, and bring their vocabulary work with them to class. The following week I brought copies of a mind map I had made very quickly by hand, with words and phrases from the text which had to do with Assessment and with Learning, clearly organised as to meaning. Much of this could be used in the translation of our text 'Lernfabriken abschalten'. This helped the students with little experience of collecting vocabulary in a useful way to understand how to work effectively on texts.

(You will notice here and there that I occasionally wrote or drew by hand. I enjoyed doing that; I like the freedom of hand movement and the spontaneity, and I found that the students liked it too. It encourages them to 'illustrate' their texts, using visuals as aids to memory. 'Texts' here includes their own dictionaries.)

Everyone was expected to translate the opening lines. Following that each could choose their favourite sentence in terms of content and then translate it. A good final task is to write a couple of lines in English, expressing the main message of the text.

To finish off this unit I gave them a copy of a little sticker from the strike in 2009. These stickers could still be found on doors in the university, but they are so small that nobody noticed them until told where to look.

Man kann ja doch nichts dagegen machen?  
Doch!  
→STREIK

Their task was to translate this into an effective English sticker. I reminded them about 'man' and about German particles. They handed in their stickers and I typed up those which had no major mistakes in them such as 'do \*against it', and hung them on the board. The students read them all and gave a vote to their favourite. Of the many different versions the favourite was:

You think there's nothing you can do about it?  
Well there is!  
Go on strike!

#### **Text 6. Improving a translation. Topic: Food. Everyone loves pasta:-)**

The task was to turn the text of a recipe, translated not from German but Italian, into more acceptable and appropriate English. I had found this recipe on a packet of cannelloni and wanted to show the students that even though they are not native speakers of English, they could produce a better text by applying the skills they had learnt in class.

First, before they were given the text, they were asked to find a pasta recipe and bring it to class. It had to be from an authentic English-language source. In class the task was to collect from these recipes words which referred to equipment (e.g. oven), utensils (e.g. grater); ingredients (e.g. cheese); activities (e.g. cut, drain, cook). They were put on the board for everyone to see. The students also had to consider how instructions are given in recipes.

**IMPORTANT: ALO\* Cannelloni do not ought to boil**

1. Bring in Cannelloni, as they are, a stuffing maked with: beef, eggs, cheese parmigiano, papper or spices, as you like, all well amalgamated and juicy.

2. Besmear a backing-pan, previously battered, with a good tomato-sauce and after, dispose the Cannelloni, lightly distanced between them in a only couch.

At last for a safe success in cooking, shed the remnant sauce, possibly diluted with broth, as far as to cover the surface of Cannelloni.

3. Add puffs of butter and grated cheese, cover the packing-pan, and put her into the oven, previously warmed at 180/220 centigrade degrees above zero.

4. Cook for about an half of hour at the same temperature without to uncover the backin-pan and after, to help at table.

Net Weight oz 8 (gr.226.79)

ALO tell you how to cook their cannelloni

(\*ALO was not the original name)

The students puzzled and wondered and discussed ... They also considered the market addressed, to get the tone right. Then with all the information on the board plus the recipes that they had brought with them, they were able to make a pretty good job of the text. 'ALO Cannelloni do not ought to boil' was a problem, as was 'in a only couch', but applying their knowledge of the world, and a little French, helped in the end.

A sample of our suggested translation:

[...]

3. Dot with butter, add grated cheese, cover the casserole dish and put it in the pre-heated oven (180/220 C).
4. Cook for about 30 minutes, keeping the dish covered.  
Serve immediately.

ALO let you into the secret of delicious Cannelloni  
How to cook delicious Cannelloni - from ALO's top chef

### **Text 7. Back-translating contemporary popular fiction.**

I thought that the students would enjoy translating a passage from German back into English and then comparing it with the English original. I chose a novelist many students were familiar with, Cecilia Ahern, and a particular novel 'Für Immer Vielleicht', which is written entirely in the form of emails and chat. They did indeed enjoy it.

The passage I chose is a goldmine of tense/aspect challenges, and also of vocabulary as there is some terminology from the Roman Catholic Church.

Phil: Was machst du denn?

Alex: Das weist\* du doch.

Phil: Warum heiratest du sie?

Alex: Sie hat einen Namen, sie heißt Bethany.

Phil: Warum heiratest du Bethany?

[...]

Phil: [...] und weil ich fest vorhave, den Rest meines Lebens mit ihr zu verbringen, in guten wie in schlechten Tagen, bis dass der Tod uns scheidet.

[...]

Alex: Momentan bin ich dermaßen wütend auf sie, dass es mir egal

ist, was sie denkt. Ich glaube, ich entferne mich innerlich von ihr, ich entwickle mich weiter. Meine Zukunft, das ist Bethany und unser Baby. Kann ich den Beichtstuhl jetzt verlassen?

Phil: Ja. Sag fünf Ave Maria und ein Vaterunser, und Gott sei deiner verwirrten kleinen Seele gnädig.

\* One or two noticed the spelling and were curious to see the original.

Ahern, Cecilia (2005): *Für immer Vielleicht*. Frankfurt/M: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 308-309.

Ahern, Cecilia (2004): *Where Rainbows End*. HarperCollins, 397-398.

Most students consulted the Grammar materials, especially Unit 03 Talking about the Future, and looked for authentic English texts on the Internet for the wording of a traditional wedding ceremony. The wedding of Charles and Diana in 1981 is good. The Archbishop of Canterbury:

[...] Charles Philip Arthur George, wilt thou have this woman to they wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?

[<http://www.researchhistory.org/2011/04/28/read-the-entire-royal-wedding-program-from-charles-and-dianas-nuptials/>].

In linguistic contrast, a more recent royal wedding, Harry and Meghan in 2018:

The declarations

[...].

The Archbishop says to the Bridegroom

HARRY, will you take MEGHAN to be your wife?

Will you love her, comfort her, honour and protect her, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

[[www.express.co.uk/news/royal/961837/Royal-wedding-order-of-service-in-full](http://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/961837/Royal-wedding-order-of-service-in-full)].

Their translations were symbol-marked as usual, for basic grammatical correctness and stylistic suitability. But it was the last step which was really interesting, comparing their version with the original.

### **Reaching the end of term. The end-of-term translation test.**

I usually used two short passages, one from fiction, the other from non-fiction, with a total of roughly 330 words. Non-fiction came from newspaper or magazine articles, or academic books; fiction from contemporary writing. I made sure to include narrative and dialogue, with tense and aspect

challenges. As far as vocabulary was concerned, the students had practised ways of dealing with 'difficult' words all term, so paraphrasing the German and using the English-English dictionary were familiar strategies.

Below are two examples of good passages from fiction, Bernhard Schlink's 'Der Vorleser' and Martin Suter's 'Lila, lila'.

Den einzigen Streit hatten wir in Amorbach. Ich war früh aufgewacht, hatte mich leise angezogen und aus dem Zimmer gestohlen. Ich wollte das Frühstück hochbringen und wollte auch schauen, ob ich schon ein offenes Blumengeschäft finde und eine Rose für Hanna kriege [...] Ich hätte sie in meine Arme nehmen sollen. Aber ich konnte nicht. Ich wußte nicht, was tun. Bei uns zu Hause weinte man nicht so. Man schlug nicht, nicht mit der Hand und erst recht nicht mit einem Lederriemen. Man redete. Aber was sollte ich sagen?

Schlink, Berhard (1995). *Der Vorleser*. Zürich: Diogenes, 54-55.

Marie ignorierte die Antwort. "Tobias gibt dir sicher frei, wenn Du es ihm erzählst." David erschrak. "Dem erzähl ich es ganz bestimmt nicht." Er nahm einen Schluck Kaffee, und ein neuer Gedanke erschreckte ihn. "Und du auch nicht. Versprichst du das? Keinem Menschen ein Wort. Keinem." [...] Trotz des Ernstes seiner Lage war David beschwingt. So katastrophal der Anlaß ihres Treffens im Dutoit auch gewesen war, die Begegnung selbst war wunderbar verlaufen.

Suter, Martin (2004). *Lila, Lila*. Zürich: Diogenes, 90-92.

Whatever short passages the students were asked to translate in the final test, they were always embedded in one or two pages of the text and reproduced on an A3 sheet, to help the students understand the context.

### **Bringing the class to a satisfying close**

At the end of term feedback on the class can be given via an Evaluation Sheet. The following example is short, uncomplicated, and gives the students the chance to offer their own ideas. Scales were provided from 'really interesting' to 'dead boring', or 'a lot' to 'very little', or 'Yes', 'Partially', 'No'. The questions you put into an evaluation sheet should be those that you really want to get answers to.

How would you rate this course from really interesting to dead boring?

How much do you feel you have learnt?

Be honest! How much effort did you put into this course?

Given the aims of this course (Please read the course description carefully): Do you think we/you reached them?  
What would you definitely have liked more/less of?  
Any other comments on this course?

### **Lastly, bringing the class to a good-fun end**

As in most classes, the very last twenty minutes or so of class time were used to give the students the chance to be creative, fast, and to voice their frustrations or whatever, by writing a few lines of poetry about their experience in the class. Mostly they were by this time so used to sharing their ideas that they did this by choice with a partner or in a small group; they wrote quickly on an overhead and then read their poems out. The poems were always good-humoured, often wise, but many only make sense to those who have been in the class. I wrote them up later and sent them to everyone to enjoy, sometimes adding a poem of my own, dedicated to them.

Here are only one or two:

It's way too early, but I'm on my way,  
Knowing I'll have to carry this heavy Cobuild all day.  
“Beware of the grammar traps!” Mrs R.. will say,  
But my Cobuild will save me, I know – so hooray!

---

#### **Recipe for a good translation**

Check your tenses and your verbs,  
Check the internet for words,  
Check your Cobuild, check your mind,  
And a good translation you will find.

---

It is early in the morning and I want to sleep.  
But Mrs R.. wants us to think deep.  
Most important is tense and aspect, too.  
I wonder if I'll ever get through.

It is early in the morning and I am tired.  
As English teachers we probably won't get hired.  
However, things are going to be fine –  
At least everyone knows how to rhyme.

---

- Recipe for a perfect translation -

You need to get tense and aspect right,  
Have a close look at the Cobuild's inside,  
And if you also get the register straight,  
You will look forward to a decent grade.

---

Tense is killing me softly

Thursday morning eight o'clock  
Five mistakes again, what a shock!  
Will-future, going-to-, simple past  
All that stuff has to get better at last.

---

And from me:

So that's it, folks,  
That's all from me.  
No more wise words,  
Can't even rhyme, as you can see :-(  
FR February 2013

## Appendix

This is to give an idea of the kind of materials I made available, apart from those already on my website, and apart from parallel texts in English.

### Handout on reported speech

To help students deal with reported speech I made a handout with my own squiggly drawings: two figures with speech balloons to be filled in, one speaking German, the other English. The language examples were taken from a text used in class, a report on the situation of Turkish people in Germany, based on an interview with an expert.

- 1) ....die Lage der Türken habe sich verschlechtert ...
- 2) ....Gefragt, ob er die Möglichkeit sehe ...
- 3) ....die Chancen stünden gut ...
- 4) ....typisch für ihre Situation sei die Einstellung...  
[...].

I suggested that the easiest way to translate reported speech is to follow these steps: What did the speaker actually say? Translate that into English. Transform that into reported speech.

Example 1) ... die Lage der Türken habe sich verschlechtert ...  
What did the speaker actually say?  
'Die Lage der Türken hat sich verschlechtert.'

Translate that into English.  
'The situation of Turkish people has deteriorated.'

Transform that into reported speech.  
He said that ... /According to ... the situation of Turkish people has/had deteriorated.

Example 2) Gefragt, ob er die Möglichkeit sehe ...  
What did the speaker actually say?  
'Sehen Sie die Möglichkeit ...?'

Translated into English:  
'Do you see the possibility ...?'

Transformed into reported speech:  
Asked if he saw the possibility ...  
etc.

This is much more effective with the little figures and the speech balloons!

### **Extracts from books with examples of grammar points:**

All the extracts are from books on my own shelves. They are good stories well written, each in their own way.

The children's story 'Santa's Toyshop' has examples of fronted adverbial with question form of the verb, and can be used in conjunction with the **Emphasis Handout**.

'Never have I had such fun,' Santa told Mrs. Santa Claus.

It also has good examples of **simple past v. present perfect**.

Way up north in the land of ice and snow stands a cozy little house. And beside the front door hangs a neat little sign. *S. Claus*, says the sign. Because that is who lives there - Santa Claus. [...] "Never have I had such fun," Santa told Mrs. Santa Claus. "I did as you suggested and stopped at the last house." And he whispered the children's names in her ear. Do you think he might pick your house to stop at this year?

Walt Disney Books (1950). *Santa's Toy Shop*. New York: Golden Press Inc.  
Also available in a 2005 edition.

The next two extracts are for **narrative tenses**. They are both from stories of

adventure in very special locations. The first is non-fiction and begins:

The telegram arrived at ten-past seven. It was Wednesday, 23 April 1913, and I had finished my evening meal and was settling down with my pipe and the evening paper when the doorbell rang [...].

I cannot remember its exact wording, but I still recall vividly the thrill I felt when I read it. Was I willing to join an Arctic expedition for four years? No salary, but all expenses paid. It was signed 'Stefanson'.

McKinlay, William Laird (2000). *Karluk: A Great Untold Story of Arctic Expedition*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

The next is fiction for children and young adults and opens with:

If I had not caught a bad cold and developed bronchitis, and if I had not upset the supper tray one night in June, I might never have taken the long road from my quiet street in Chelsea to the Isle of Mist in the Hebrides. It happened as simply as that. I suppose it had to happen that way.

McLean, Allan Campbell (1955, 1989). *The Hill of the Red Fox*. Edinburgh: Collins

### **Some more good material for translating:**

A cartoon from a magazine for travel agents, referring to an article called 'Übernachten Sie mal landestypisch!'

Tourists, husband and wife, just arriving, with their bags and baggage, about to enter a room, which contains a picture of the Taj Mahal and a large bed, with a mattress of nails. The figure beside the bed is wearing a turban and says: 'Wenn Sie sich erstmal dran gewöhnt haben, wollen Sie's nicht mehr missen.'

TravelTalk Nr 49 2011

### **Die Bergtrolle im Tal:**

Die Bergtrolle wohnten in einer Höhle oben im Berg. Es war kalt und feucht in der Höhle, und es gab dort nichts zu tun. Aber die Bergtrolle waren daran gewöhnt. So wohnten sie schon seit tausend Jahren. Wenn Knubbel nicht angefangen hätte zu fragen, würden sie sicher noch heute dort wohnen. Knubbel, der jüngste Bergtroll, ging jeden Tag zum Rand des Felsens und schaute hinab. Unten im Tal gab es grüne Wälder und kleine Seen. In den Wäldern wohnten Waldtrolle. Er [...] konnte sie genau sehen. Die Kinder der Waldtrolle spielten oft Verstecken. Knubbel war manchmal ein wenig neidisch. 'Natürlich kann man auch in einer Höhle Verstecken spielen', dachte er, 'aber es ist nicht dasselbe'. Eines Tages fragte Knubbel den ältesten Bergtroll, ob Bergtrolle wirklich in Höhlen wohnen müßten [...].

Lööf, Jan (1977). *Die Bergtrolle im Tal*. Hamburg: Carlsen Verlag.

Nina:

Schwestern wissen voneinander entweder alles oder gar nichts. Ich wußte von meiner Schwester Nina bis vor kurzem nichts. Sie ist zwölf Jahre jünger als ich, und sie war, als ich heiratete, ein unfreundliches, mageres Geschöpf von zehn Jahren mit struppigen Zöpfen und unzähligen Schrammen an Armen und Beinen, das, stumme und blaß vor Zorn, auf meinen Brautschleier spuckte, als die Eltern es zwingen wollten, ihn bei meiner Hochzeit auf Pagenart zu tragen [...].

Rinser, Luise (1968). *Nina*. Berlin: Fischer.

Irrlicht und Feuer:

Sei still. Glaubst du im Ernst, ich verplempere mein schönes Geld mit Schuldenbezahlen?

Aber Ingeborg, sagte ich beschwörend, wenn wir die Raten vom Hals hätten, dann könnten wir wieder ruhig schlafen.

Wieso, schlafst du schlecht? Dann geh doch gleich mal zum Arzt. Hol dir meinetwegen einen Krankenschein, ein paar Wochen Krankfeiern können wir uns jetzt schon leisten.

Ich war wie vor den Kopf geschlagen [...].

Ich hob den gelben Zettel vom Tisch auf und wollte mir die verflixten Zahlen einmal genau ansehen, ob sie etwa eine Beziehung zu unseren Lebensdaten hatten, aber in dem Moment kam Ingeborg angeschnellt, riß mir den Schein aus der Hand [...]. Finger weg, schrie sie. [...]. Hör bitte mit deinem Gequatsche auf, es hängt mir zum Hals raus. Du bist primitiv, rückständig, du kennst nie deine Chance, du lebst wie ein Träumer, und du fühlst dich wohl in deinen Träumen, du lebst in den Tag hinein und weißt nicht, dass es am anderen Tag einen Morgen gibt [...].

Von der Grün, Max (1976). *Irrlicht und Feuer*. München: Bertelsmann.

Das Glasperlenspiel:

'Wenn wir sehr schnell schwimmen', rief er hastig und knabeneifrig, 'so können wir grade noch vor der Sonne am anderen Ufer sein.'

Die Worte waren kaum hervorgestoßen, die Parole zum Wettschwimmen mit der Sonne kaum erteilt, so war Tito mit einem gewaltigen Satz, den Kopf voran, im See verschwunden, als könne er, sei es aus Übermut oder aus Verlegenheit, gar nicht rasch genug sich davonmachen und die vorangegangene feierliche Szene in gesteigerter Tätigkeit vergessen machen. Das Wasser spritzte auf und schlug über ihn zusammen, einige Augenblicke später erschienen Kopf, Schultern und Arme wieder und blieben, sich rasch entfernd, auf dem blaugrünen Spiegel sichtbar.

Hesse, Hermann (1971). *Das Glasperlenspiel*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, s. 472. (First published 1943.)

Der Zauberberg:

Diese Furcht machte ihm bewußt, dass er es heimlich bisher geradezu darauf angelegt hatte, sich um die Orientierung zu bringen und zu vergessen, in welcher Richtung Tal und Ortschaft lagen, was ihm denn auch in erwünschter Vollständigkeit gelungen war. Übrigens durfte er sich sagen, dass, wenn er sofort umkehrte und immer bergab fuhr, das Tal, wenn auch möglicherweise fern vom 'Berghof', rasch erreicht sein werde, - zu rasch; er würde zu früh kommen, würde seine Zeit nicht ausgenutzt haben, während er allerdings, wenn das Schneeunwetter ihn überraschte, den Heimweg wohl vorderhand überhaupt nicht finden würde. Darum aber vorzeitig flüchtig zu werden, weigerte er sich, - die Furcht, seine aufrichtige Furcht vor den Elementen mochte ihn beklemmen wie sie wollte.

Mann, Thomas ( 1924). *Der Zauberberg*. Kapitel Sechs, Schnee. Berlin: Fischer.

These passages from Hesse and Mann are challenging, with complex sentences and formal style. Students need to be well used to reading carefully and thinking out loud with their neighbours. To begin with: Do they like the language? Does it please them? Does it sound good? or strange? Are they familiar with it?

Next, preparing to translate. I think the best approach is for the students to talk at length with their neighbours, paraphrasing freely in German till they feel they have a visual image of the text. This is particularly important in the passage from 'Das Glasperlenspiel'. There are for example movements 'mit einem gewaltigen Satz, den Kopf voran, im See verschwunden' to be imagined and emotional states such as 'knabeneifrig', 'feierlich' to be understood. And could they give each passage a 'title'?

In both, one sentence to translate would be enough (or 'sufficient', to be formal). The whole class could work on the same sentence, or the three sentences could be shared out so that in the end there is a translation of the whole passage. However, it is not completing the translation of the passage which is important, but rather the students working with their neighbours until they find something they all like, including alternatives. It is also interesting to compare the class's suggestions with one or two published translations, taking into consideration when these translations were made.

\*\*\*\*\*