The significance of translation for learning foreign languages: an example with proper names in the Harry Potter books

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Abstract: The present study aims at examining the effect of using translation from L2 to L1 as a strategy to improve foreign language learners' linguistic accuracy and increase their intercultural communicative competence skills. Through the examination of translations of proper names in the Harry Potter books from English into Spanish and French, we try to open up a new horizon for English instructors to encourage the use of learners' mother tongue in second language acquisition. To fulfill this purpose, we present an experiment carried out with 2nd Year students of the subject EFL Applied to Translation, which is part of a degree in Translation and Interpreting Spanish-English-French at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Through the results of this experiment, we reach the conclusion that translation activities in the foreign language classroom are a means to reinforce structural, conceptual and sociolinguistic difference between the native and target languages.
Key Words: Translation, Second language acquisition, Interculturality, Harry Potter, Proper names

1 Introduction

Whether English language teachers should incorporate or exclude students' native language in the classroom has been a controversial issue for a few decades. Atkinson (1987) is one of the first theoreticians to advocate the use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom, stating that translation into the target language reinforces the learning of recently taught structures, concepts and vocabulary. Although the 'English Only' paradigm continues to be dominant in communicative language teaching (Vaezi and Mirzaei, 2007), everyday practice and research reveal that the mother tongue is used as a learning tool and resource in many foreign language classes (Auerbach, 1993). Auerbach identifies many uses of mother tongue in the classroom by both teachers and learners, including: classroom management, language analysis and presenting rules that govern grammar, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions or prompts, explaining errors, and checking comprehension.

Although we agree that maximum L2 exposure to the learners must be provided, it does not mean that using the mother tongue is harmful for the learning process. Turnbull states that "a principle that promotes maximal teacher use of the target language acknowledges that the L1 and target language can exist simultaneously" (2001: 153). Similarly, Cook asserts that "the first language can be a useful element in creating authentic L2 uses rather than something to be shunned at all costs" (1999, p. 185).

The role of translation in the foreign language classroom is part of this debatable issue. In the following pages, our aim is to demonstrate that, though there is not much positive literature on the use of translation in the classroom, it can serve as a fruitful teaching technique (Cook, 2001, p. 200). One the one hand, it allows learners to contrast and compare grammatical structures and vocabulary items, thus making foreign language acquisition more thoughtful and effective; on the other, it enhances interaction, develops communicative competence (Duff, 1989, p. 55) and, in our opinion, is an amazing asset to foster intercultural communication.

2 Second Language Acquisition and Translation

Following Vanessa Leonardi's straightforward argument about the importance of pedagogical translation in Second Language Acquisition (Leonardi, 2010), we believe that, since learners always consciously or unconsciously translate between L1 and L2 when learning a second language, translation can and should be employed in foreign language teaching and learning. When integrating translation into foreign language classes, Leonardi makes a clear distinction between pedagogical translation and translation pedagogy. While the latter's main objective is to train professional translators, the former is "a means to help learners acquire, develop, and further strengthen their knowledge and competence in a foreign language" (Leonardi, 2010, p. 17).

It is true that, since the failure of the Grammar-Translation method, translation as a foreign language teaching method has been perceived negatively. However, given that "L1 and L2 are constantly and automatically interwoven in the learner's mind at all levels, such as phonology, syntax, lexis, and pragmatics" (Leonardi, 2010, pp. 62–63), it would seem fair to recognize translation in foreign language classes as a natural phenomenon that has to be taken into account by theoreticians and practitioners and that has more than one benefit for learners. First, it leads them to acquire meaning and knowledge in a foreign language "through comparison between existing and new information (Leonardi, 2010, p. 63); then, it develop their analytical abilities by helping them to "notice differences in uses and functions between and among languages" (Leonardi, 2010, p. 63); and finally, translation helps them to become mediators between languages and cultures, to become interculturally competent by promoting communication and encouraging them to actively participate in the learning process through active negotiation of meaning.

Ten years before, Don Kiraly (2000) had also emphasized how mutually benefiting such a communicative approach could be both for Second Language Acquisition and Translation Training, his most significant contribution being, in our opinion, to conceptualize how the focus of language and translation teaching needs to be shifted from being teacher-centered or learner-centered to "learning-centered".

Campbell (1998) proposes that an exploration of "how individuals develop the competence to translate into a second language [can show] that a key aspect – textual competence – is developed in a systematic way". If this competence does indeed develop systematically, then by definition, we should be able to analyse and single out parts of that system for teaching within a structured learning programme. He argues that in studying an evolution of translation competence in individuals, we will gain an insight into how second languages are acquired, about the nature of interlanguage, about the writing of texts, and about describing levels of language competence. Therefore, it would seem there is a lot to be learnt by researchers in both the fields of Second Language Acquisition and Translation, since, in the special case of translation into the L2, the two overlap and become intertwined. Whilst Second Language Acquisition and interlanguage can be said to belong to the field of Applied Linguistics in language learning and teaching, text production and language competence are equally relevant to the students' L1 and L2 knowledge. The most important factor in this view of language learning/acquisition of translation competence is that its central focuses are the student and the learning process. This is in contrast to the major part of the literature on translation pedagogy which is generally either text-centred (Delisle, 1980; Kuepper, 1984, cited in Campbell, 1998) or theory-centred (Hatim, 1989, cited in Campbell, 1998) rather than process- and student-centred, as well as concentrating on translation into the L1. It proposes prescriptive methods which, by their very nature, prevent a description of translation competence because they focus on the anticipated results of their programmes. In our view, one of these results is directly linked to the improvement of L2 skills, as long as the texts and activities presented by the teachers are both context- and meaning-based for the translation tasks they wish to engage in.

3..Translation tasks and text choice

Beeby Lonsdale (1996) proposes discourse analysis as a framework within which the selection, grading and presentation of texts can be carried out in a course designed to meet the objectives of translating into

the L2. However, as the literature into second language learning and teaching has shown, the grading of texts has proved to be an enormously complex task, and one so time-consuming as to make it impractical for most classroom teachers, and for this reason, in our programme, we have preferred to grade the translation tasks rather than the texts themselves as our criteria for curriculum design. Our course focuses on meaning-based translation within the foreign language classroom; it is process-oriented and aims to assist students in their evolving stages of language learning by taking a different approach to the teaching of grammar motivated by a need for expression, rather than a literal correspondence of structures, and of lexis as a context-based rather than dictionary-focused activity.

In this article, we have given focus to the teaching of lexis and word-formation as a context-based activity, using some of the proper names in the Harry Potter books and their translations as a way of increasing our students' intercultural communicative competence as future translators. Our learners are 2nd Year students of a subject called EFL Applied to Translation, which is part of a degree in Translation and Interpreting at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. They all have English as their first foreign language, but the level varies greatly among individual students. They will also have studied French from scratch on entry to the university. It is also interesting to point out that four of them are native French speakers brought up and instructed in Spain. Their previous experience of translation has been as a secondary school method for teaching English grammar and another 2nd Year university course called Introduction to Translation, which offers little practice of translation into the L1, and where dictionary dependence is reinforced. Students are accustomed to teacher-centred transmission in the classroom and individual product-oriented study outside it. Both our process-oriented classroom and the act of translating into the L2 are therefore unexplored terrain for the students and at the outset they require a substantial amount of support and justification.

In explaining the rationale for a process approach we try to foster a co-operative atmosphere by encouraging learners to support each other, focusing on how each individual brings different knowledge and

experience to the classroom. The approach is also interactive: learners identify translation and language difficulties and discuss their solutions, and also research their own work, with the teacher as a guide or facilitator in the process. Our aim is to progress towards autonomy by providing scaffolding at the beginning of the course, with structured tasks where students work in small groups and all members of group work on the same text at the same pace. There is occasional teacher-centred focus for consolidation of the aims of the tasks. The teacher then gradually withdraws over the course of the year as learners become more familiar with drawing on their own resources to improve in the knowledge of the foreign language.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone is part of an obligatory reading list for all the students enrolled on the EFL Applied to Translation subject. It was chosen as a required reading because it allows for many ways of engaging in interesting and useful activities and tasks which deal with various considerations in language acquisition and translation such as dictionary use, words in context, text classification, text analysis applied to translation, a meaning-based approach to translating, and the use of parallel texts. These have been used during the course and attempt to show how the approach is applied in the classroom and how we attempt to introduce the idea of progression through the syllabus, the ultimate goal being to train students to be autonomous and critical in their learning process.

Below are some considerations for using the translation of proper names in the Harry Potter books in a language class aimed at the translation students we introduced before. It will lead us into discussions on the complexity of translating proper names, obliging students to be creative, to reflect on the sociocultural nature of names and develop intercultural communication skills, in other words to acquire a degree of cultural sensitivity, which is of utmost importance when studying languages and cultures in contact.

Broadly, intercultural communication involves the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others. Byram's model further stresses that ICC requires "certain attitudes" which include "curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and

the speaker's own without being judgmental" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). However, because culture is context-specific and thus dynamic – Kramsch (1998) reminds us that culture involves membership of a discourse community – intercultural understandings and development are dynamic too. Consequently, if culture is embodied in what people do and the way they use their knowledge at a certain time in a certain context, we may wonder if it is truly possible for teachers to facilitate ICC without giving the opportunity to experience 'other' cultures first-hand and if the development of intercultural communicative competence should not be best facilitated through active production and reflection that relate to real communication contexts and real life.

Following Byram's and Kramsch's approaches, we consider the use of translation in the foreign language classroom an appropriate way of experiencing cultures first-hand and a way of developing the ability to behave in a correct and flexible manner when confronted with other cultures. This implies the understanding of differences between one's own culture and the foreign culture, the acquiring of skills to be able to solve intercultural problems as a consequence of these differences and, finally, the capacity to mediate between cultures. In that respect, we consider proper names to be such culturally-bound words that a reflection on their translation can but bring more insight on the significance of intercultural sensitivity in foreign language education. Through translation, the foreign language learner is viewed as an "intercultural speaker", someone who "crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values" (Byram and Zarate, 1997, p. 11).

4 Mediating between languages and cultures through the translation of proper names in the foreign language classroom: some examples taken from Harry Potter

Initially written for the British and American culture industry, the Harry Potter books were soon translated into more than forty seven languages, including French and Spanish, to meet the needs of the mass media and youth culture. Such translations did nothing but increase

the phenomenal aspect of the reception of the Harry Potter books all over the world. Referring to J.K. Rowling, this led Professor Jack Zipes to write: "The phenomenon is indeed beyond her control. She herself did not even conceive of its possibility." (2000: 172)

Leaving the world phenomenon aside, we have chosen to linger on the translations of the Harry Potter books. It is interesting to know that, in France, several publishers initially turned the series down, on the grounds that it was too English to cross the Channel successfully. Eventually Gallimard decided to make the venture. To translate the books they recruited Jean-François Ménard, a lecturer in English and a professional translator with, at the time, a special interest in translation for children. To translate the books into Spanish, Salamandra recruited a team of translators consisting of Alicia Dellepiane, Adolfo Muñoz García and Nieves Martín Azofra. The first translations, both French and Spanish, were published in 1999, two years after the original which came out in 1997.

Through the target language learning process, students are led to observe that such translations tend to reflect certain troubling sociocultural changes. Indeed, the complexities of text translation and particularly the translation of proper names will be at the heart of their concerns. The Spanish translators chose to keep the English names whereas French translator Jean-François Ménard opted for the adaptation of many of them, starting with Hogwarts (Poudlard).

We share the opinion that the Harry Potter books are not only a fine addition to English children's fantasy literature, but also, as we stated before, an immense opportunity for translation students to discuss the translation of a whole series of cultural elements, such as proper names. Harry Potter, orphaned when his parents are killed by the evil wizard Voldemort, is taken in by his aunt and uncle, who are Muggles (ordinary, non-magical people). Harry is rather out of place there, but things improve greatly for him when he goes to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Part of the attraction of the Harry Potter books comes from the familiar but at the same time exotic setting of an English public school, complete with houses and schoolboy adventures (in which Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione struggle to save the world and win the house cup).

This short presentation leads us into the complexity of translating such exotic words as Muggles or Hogwarts, to start with. Indeed, Harry Potter's world is divided between those belonging to witchcraft and wizardry and the Muggles, or the ordinary lot. The Spanish translators decided not to translate the word coined by J.K. Rowling, whereas Jean-François Ménard opted for Moldus. JKR says she derived it from *mug*, in the sense of stupid person. As JFM explains it in an interview delivered to *Le Figaro* on 27 November 2000, he derived the translation from *mol*, a form of the adjective *mou* (soft in English. "Etre mou" also means to be feeble or useless).

En anglais, le mot exact est muggles. Il s'agit d'un mot extraordinaire car il existe bel et bien dans le très complet Oxford dictionnary. Pourtant, la définition précise est… qu'on ne sait pas du tout ce que veut dire ce terme. On apprend que le mot a été employé par un certain Thomas Middleton au XVIIe siècle. Mais aucun sens précis ne s'en dégage. En fait, le terme muggle donne l'impression de mollesse. Par extension, les moldus sont devenus pour moi, des gens un peu « mous du bulbe », incapables de percevoir le monde de la magie derrière l'apparence des choses.

This is but an example to show our language students that, as a task of translation, the Harry Potter stories present a fascinating set of challenges all of their own. Translation of the text, if it is to be faithful to the spirit of the original, has to be very free at times where the letter is concerned. The reason for this is that the English text is crammed with puns, wordplay and verbal jokes of all kinds, which will not translate straight. Often the task is one of adaptation rather than ordinary translation.

The books to date contain almost one hundred proper names of people (and some place names), nearly all of which, in our opinion, should have been changed in translation, since they are not really names, but comic spoofs on names made up out of English words in the original. For instance, let us refer to the names of the four houses. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as we now know, is the typical English public school with its division into houses, namely four of them:

Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. None of these proper names was translated for the Spanish reader who has to get used to the Englishness of such terms without questioning their meanings. French translator JFM, however, chose to make the reading and understanding of the adventures easier for a French-speaking reader. Hogwarts then became Poudlard (well-known school of wizardry in the French Middle Ages), Gryffindor became Gryffondor (or golden griffin, a fabulous animal of Ancient Mythologies made of the body of a lion, and the head and wings on an eagle), Hufflepuff became Poufsouffle (to huff and puff, or "pouffer et souffler", meaning to show annoyance), Ravenclaw became Serdaigle (the French translator, certainly for phonetical reasons, opted for a change of animals and translated Ravenclaw by Serdaigle instead of Serdecorbeau, which would have been the literal form of the English name) and Slytherin became Serpentard (not a literal translation but an adaptation from the same connotations: the snake (or serpent) slithers or moves along in a twisting way. The suffix "-ard" once again gives a pejorative connotation).

Students are made to realize that all such proper names were coined on puns which abound in the English text. Whether or not one agrees with Freud that puns are the lowest form of humour, they are certainly difficult to translate, and will not usually translate straight at all, hence the importance of negotiating astutely between the two cultures in order to produce acceptable and meaningful translations.

Concerning the pupils of Hogwarts, most names remained the same in both translations, with only slight spelling changes in the French one essentially for phonetical reasons: Millicent Bullstrode, Crabbe, Colin Creevey, Penelope Clearwater, Cedric Diggory, Oliver Wood, Seamus Finnigan, Goyle, Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Draco Malfoy, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley. Two names were given a translation by Jean-François Ménard: (Olivier) Dubois for Oliver Wood and (Neville) Londubat for Neville Longbottom. The rest remained the same even if, in our opinion, such adaptations were not only unnecessary but also far-fetched.

Through the consultation of dictionaries and parallel documents, students are required to work in small groups on the connotations of

two relevant names: Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy (or Drago Malefoy in French). The English pronunciation of the name Harry may evoke the adjective hairy or the substantive heir. In old medieval legends, to be born with a black tangled hair was a mark of the Devil. There also exists an English expression that designates the Devil as follows: "Old Harry". Furthermore, Harry Potter speaks parseltongue, or the language of snakes, such animals being usually associated with evil. Last but not least, Harry is the name of famous magician Houdini. Harry's family name, in its turn, may sound close to the adjective "potty", meaning "small, insignificant". Indeed, Harry's enemies often tend to regard him as unimportant and definitely not dangerous.

The latin name Draco has two significations: dragon and snake (let us not forget that Draco belongs to Slytherin). It is also the name of a Greek tyran known for his great cruelty. Draco's family name Malfoy means "mauvaise foi" or "maléfique" in French. The name only adopted a French spelling according to the feminine gender of the word "foi" (faith). The equivalence of Draco in French is simply Drago. This co--operative activity encouraged learners to help each other by bringing their individual perspective and experience according to their readings, findings and knowledge of other languages.

This interactive approach whereby learners identify translation and language difficulties and discuss their proposals or solutions, with the teacher as a facilitator in the process, motivated them to carry on researching into the translation of the names of other people who dwell at Hogwarts: Madam Hooch, Prof. Binns, Sir Cadogan, Prof. Sprout, Sir Patrick Delaney-Podmore, Albus Dumbledore, Prof. Flitwick, the Fat Lady, Rubeus Hagrid, Gilderoy Lockhart, Remus Lupin, MinervaMc-Gonagall, Moaning Myrtle, the Fat Friar, Nearly Headless Nick, Peeves, Madam Pince, Prof. Quirrell, Severus Snape, Argus Filch, Sybill Trelawney. They found out that most of them have a translation into French and none into Spanish. The French shall read about Mme Bibine, Prof. Binns, le Chevalier du Catogan, Prof. Chourave, (Sir Patrick) Delaney-Podmore, Albus Dumbledore, Prof. Flitwick, la Grosse Dame, Rubeus Hagrid, Gilderoy Lockhart, Rémus Lupin, Minerva McGonagall, Mimi Geignarde, le Moine Gras, Nick-Quasi-Sans-Tête, Peeves,

Mme Pince, Prof. Quirrell, Severus Rogue, Argus Rusard and Sibylle Trelawney.

A task which could have been considered extremely complex for 2nd Year students of Translation and Interpreting turned out to promote maximal use of the target language through the process of documentation, as well as plenty of spoken interaction in groups. Furthermore, through the comparison between existing and new information, as well as the analysis of translations into other languages, students could appreciate differences in uses and functions among languages, thus becoming real mediators between languages and cultures, and improving their intercultural competences.

Below are some of the most relevant finding made by our students:

- Albus Dumbledore: Albus is a latin word that means "white". The colour white, in Occidental myths, symbolizes purity, wisdom and light. As such, this colour is associated with the principle of goodness as opposed to evil. The name Dumbledore is the ancient form of the English word bumblebee that means "drone". The bee often stands for wisdom, work and immortality in many myths. The name could also be a pun on the adjective dumb that means stupid or silly, or even on the verb to dumb meaning to silence. Interestingly enough, the Italian translation of Dumbledore is Silente.
- Madam Hooch (Mme Bibine): a hooch is a low-quality alcoholic beverage, the exact equivalent of the word "bibine" in French.
- Prof. Sprout (Prof. Chourave): the exact equivalent of chourave is kohlrabi and not Brussels sprout. The decision taken by the translator may be discussed.
- Moaning Myrtle (Mimi Geignarde): a myrtle is a shrub called "myrte" in French, and the verb to moan has an equivalent which is "geindre". "Mimi" is usually the shortname for Mireille, here a far-fetched adaptation of the English original.
- Nearly Headless Nick (Nick-Quasi-Sans-Tête): this periphrasis was given a word-for-word translation in French and in Spanish (Nick Casi Decapitado)
- Severus Snape (Severus Rogue): to snape means to treat someone badly, especially children and pupils, to rebuke, to snub. "Rogue",

that means arrogant, haughty, in French, is a well-chosen equivalence. The name Severus was obviously chosen after the latin word that mean severe.

- Argus Filch (Argus Rusard): he is the guardian of Hogwarts. He was named after the Greek god with hundreds of eyes around his head. JKR called him Argus Filch, the verb to filch meaning to steal or take away things of small value. The French translation Rusard rather insisted on the cunning character of the man (rusé = cunning in English), the suffixe "-ard" usually adding a pejorative connotation in French.

After all these considerations, students were required to analyse both translations (French and Spanish) and try to weigh up the pros and cons of translating proper names in the Harry Potter books. This also lead into discussing the role of translators as co-creators of the original, some who read children's literature through the eyes and thoughts of the authors in order to make meaning as transparent as possible. They were required to try and answer these two questions in the target language: 1) To what extent can the translators of the Harry Potter books not translate proper names to keep a certain degree of Englishness in their text? 2) Why are there differences between the French and Spanish adaptations? Is it only a matter of national identity? Theoretically, there exists the often-expressed opinion that translators should not change the original. However, in practice, this is, in our view, a self-defeating and totally unrealistic approach. This is the whole debate around the concepts of translation and adaptation, a debate we focused on children's literature with them.

Isabel Pascua Febles, in *La adaptación en la traducción de la literatura infantil* (1998), comments: "En lo que se refiere a la literatura infantil, las adaptaciones existen casi desde la aparición de aquella; en nuestra opinión, desde que existió un destinatario especial y diferente" (Pascua Febles 1998: 29). The author, and translator, ends up writing that there exist two types of adaptations: one that could be regarded as necessary and the other one as part of a communicative activity different from translation. Is this not the kind of communicative activity all language teachers constantly aim at?

Carmen Bravo-Villasante (1978, pp. 46–50) is basically opposed to adaptations. In an article in which she writes about her experience as a translator, she clearly expresses her rejection to all kinds of adaptations. She agrees that the good translator is that who remains entirely faithful to the original. Swedish scholar Göte Klingberg partially shares this opinion. A translation should be transparent and an adaptation actually is not. Klingberg argues that children's books should be written and thus translated just as adult's literature but he also recognizes that, to make literature closer to the target-language child readers, the text can be slightly changed and transferred into a country, language or period more familiar to them (Klingberg, 1986, p. 7). What Klingberg calls "cultural context adaptation" obviously depends on the reading or listening child, who may not understand the foreign elements found in the text, hence the necessity to adapt some proper names, for instance.

Riitta Oittinen follows the same argument. She agrees that "anything can be adapted" and the "names can be domesticated" (Oittinen, 2000, p. 99). To a certain extent, she sees the translator as no-one else but the co-creator of the original, the producer of a text and not the reproducer. Other scholars like Peter Newmark in England, Michel Ballard in France or Virgilio Moya and Javier Franco Aixelá in Spain have written various articles and books on the translation of proper names, and on the importance for translation students to be aware of the cultural and linguistic specificities proper names have. However, we have not come across any literature defending the use of the translation of proper names for language purposes and as a way of improving our students' intercultural communicative competence within the language classroom.

Conclusion

With this article, our intention has been to put our oar in the debate about the effectiveness of using translation from L1 to L2 as a teaching technique on the improvement of EFL learners' linguistic and intercultural skills. As we argued before, in children's literature, proper names very often convey a particular meaning. They are usually coined after the physical or moral characteristics of the protagonists. Onomastic

motivation is a key concept translation students should take into account. The name of a character will usually represent a quality or a defect that will condition and determine his role throughout the story. This is what Ballard calls "l'importance de l'acte de nomination" (2001: 171). Indeed, this is still truer for children's books, taking into consideration that the French or Spanish child will generally have no idea of English and will not be able to understand the message and humour that was put through a name. If, for one reason or the other, the translator does not adapt a motivated name in the target culture, we can consider the target text to be inadequately expressed, thus falling short of the expectation of conveying the original idea.

Once understanding such keys aspects, our language students have come up with some tentative proposals for revision of the translations of some proper names in the Spanish text. What about Señora Aguardiente for Madam Hooch, Prof. Col. for Prof. Sprout, Marta / Carola Quejosa for Moaning Myrtle, Severus Altivo for Severus Snape, Argus Astuto (insisting on the cunning character of the guardian of Hogwarts) for Argus Filch / Dedosligero / Ratero, Grifodoro for Gryffindor, Echapeste for Hufflepuff, Garraguila for Ravenclaw, Serpentino for Slytherin or Blandengue for Muggles. These are but alternative solutions, each of which can be discussed in the light of what we argued before, but they do demonstrate, in our opinion, that integrating translation into foreign language classes fulfils the two objectives we advocated at the beginning: to train professional translators, and to help learners acquire, develop, and strengthen their knowledge and competence in a foreign language.

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