

Perceptions of University Students Regarding the Implementation of Translation as a Teaching Strategy

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Abstract – Translation has historically been a subject of debate in the field of English education. It has been widely disregarded as a legitimate endeavor for language practice and enhancement. Despite the opposition of many language educators, the prevailing view on the use of translation in language classrooms is gradually shifting. Increasingly, experts are recognizing the beneficial role that the first language plays in English Language Teaching (ELT). This topic has been deliberated in the context of language pedagogical techniques. The primary objective of this study was to examine the utilization of translation as a learning approach by Vietnamese English learners in their pursuit of acquiring proficiency in the English language. It is also important to identify the translation mechanisms that students employ during the learning process. To do this, the study utilized the quantitative approach, involving 120 Vietnamese university students who are learning English as a foreign language. Subsequent data analysis and statistical calculations demonstrated that language learners employed a diverse range of learning strategies pertaining to translation in order to comprehend, retain, and generate English, regardless of whether their teachers opposed such practices.

Keywords: Translation in EFL, L1 use in ELT, Perceptions, Education

I. INTRODUCTION

A significant number of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Vietnam may be reluctant to teach a translation course in a class that is not specifically focused on translation. Translation teaching is typically carried out in the English Department, as noted by Ardi (2012) and Sunardi (2017). While many individuals acknowledge the use and advantages of incorporating translation into language acquisition, there remains uncertainty over the students' level of motivation to participate in the course. Students predominantly depend on translation automation technologies or machine translation, such as Google Translate, instead of participating in traditional courses due to their time-consuming nature. Additionally, teaching translation entails a significant amount of theoretical concepts, manual verification of words, and the task of pairing activities. These aspects may be uninteresting for students who are more inclined towards technology.

In this interconnected world, where cultures are composed of multiple languages, translation is an essential means of communication. Hence, translation is a valuable proficiency, not only for individuals working as professional translators and interpreters, but also for the academic community.

The incorporation of translation-based learning activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been a subject of debate over the past two decades. In the 1990s, only a few studies recognized the value of integrating and practicing translation in the EFL classroom. However, there was no established approach to view translation as a useful teaching tool (Atkinson, 1993; Conacher, 1996; Eadie, 1999; Ellis, 1992; Harmer, 1991; Ur, 1996). Nevertheless, the utilization of translation as a teaching tool in the EFL classroom is continuing to expand. Translation is considered highly significant in foreign language instruction as it facilitates conscious learning, where the mental process of translation occurs during the language learning process (Shiyab & Abdul, 2001). Translation in the classroom with exercises is also considered a motivating activity (Lavault in Mogahed 2011, Carreres 2006). Herman in Hung (2002: 14) contends that translation is not an inherent ability, but rather a skill that must be acquired and navigated through cognitive and normative processes.

This study specifically investigates the use of translation as a learning strategy among adult learners of English as a foreign language in a private university. While learners' success in language learning and acquisition can be influenced by various factors such as motivation, aptitude, learning strategies, and age, this

study solely concentrates on exploring the role of translation in the learning process. Hence, the current work endeavors to tackle the further research question

- What are the beliefs of EFL university students in Vietnam regarding the role of translation in EFL learning?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The definition of Translation

Translation is the act of transforming written or spoken words from a source language to a target language, while maintaining the original meaning, style, and context as faithfully as feasible. Translation requires not just linguistic analysis but also comprehension of cultural subtleties, idiomatic phrases, and the target readership of the translated piece. The objective of translation is to enhance efficient communication among persons or groups who own distinct languages by enabling the accessibility of information, ideas, and literature across linguistic obstacles. Translation is a process that can take place in different areas, such as literature, business, science, diplomacy, and ordinary communication. It has a vital function in promoting worldwide comprehension and cooperation.

Moreover, Translation is the act of converting words and conveying meanings from one language to another. It can also denote something that is rendered in both spoken and written formats. Catford (1965, cited in Putrawan 2015) defines translation as the act of substituting a text in one language (source language) with a text in another language (target language). Larson (1998, cited in Putrawan 2017) provides a definition of translation that emphasizes the transfer of meaning from the source language to the receptor language. This transfer occurs by converting the form of the source language into the form of the receptor language through the use of semantic structure. The essence remains constant, but the structure undergoes alteration.

In addition, Vermeer (1986, referenced in Snell-Hornby 1988) disagrees with the perspective that asserts translation is solely a linguistic affair. He perceives it as a cross-cultural transfer. He additionally asserts that a translator need to possess a bicultural, or even multicultural, background, as language is an inherent component of culture. It signifies that a translator must possess a deep understanding and familiarity with at least two distinct cultures. Put simply, the individual must possess fluency in two languages and have a deep understanding of two cultures.

2.2. Belief about Translation in EFL Learning

EFL learners' belief regarding translation, in the context of EFL learning, refers to their conviction that utilizing translation can effectively enhance their English proficiency. Put simply, they hold the belief that translation serves as a means to aid their acquisition of EFL.

Liao (2006) demonstrated that English learners hold the view that translation plays a significant influence in their acquisition of the English language. English learners employ a range of translation tactics, such as cognitive, memory, compensatory, social, and emotive procedures. Proficient English language learners, specifically those studying EFL, commonly hold unfavorable attitudes about translation and infrequently utilize it in comparison to non-EFL students.

Similar results were also documented by other investigations (Aktekin and Gliniecki 2015; Al-Musawi 2014; Dagilienė 2012; Guerra 2014; Karimian and Talebinejad 2013; Mutlu et al. 2015). Translation is widely regarded as highly advantageous when used as a means of acquiring proficiency in EFL. Learners typically employ translation as a learning approach in their English language acquisition.

The aforementioned findings unequivocally demonstrate the presence of translation in the realm of EFL teaching and learning. Translation serves as a crucial learning instrument for EFL learners, aiding them in acquiring, enhancing, and expanding their knowledge of the English language.

2.3. Emphasizing the Benefit of Translation

When questioned about the significance of language proficiency, there is no doubt among the academic community. Translation might be considered as the fifth language proficiency, in addition to the fundamental

skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Translation is proposed as a distinct phase in the process of language instruction. According to Rose (2000: 61), translation is a crucial social ability as it facilitates communication and comprehension among unfamiliar individuals.

Nevertheless, there are some who hold the belief that the ability to translate cannot be acquired by learning and, more specifically, cannot be imparted through instruction. It is believed that certain individuals possess an innate aptitude for languages, enabling them to excel as translators or interpreters. Tisgam (2009: 456) asserted that translation is a skill that can be taught, as it falls under the category of crafts, which are also teachable. In order to cultivate the skill of translation, educators should guide their students in understanding the essence of translation and emphasize the need of studying translation theories alongside honing their practical translation abilities. It is important for them to recognize that disregarding the aforementioned factors can result in pupils becoming confused, unmotivated, and disinterested in the program.

The primary objective of translation instruction should be to train and equip proficient individuals who can effectively pursue a career in translation, so instilling in students a sense of accountability for the practice of translation and its significance. According to Popovic (2001: 2), the objective of teaching translation in the classroom is not to prepare individuals for professional translation work, but rather to assist learners in enhancing their understanding of the English language. Put simply, it is a method used to attain a desired outcome, rather than being the desired outcome itself. Nevertheless, certain individuals may eventually pursue a career as translators, and the foundational understanding of translation acquired in the classroom can serve as a strong foundation for developing translation expertise.

When creating a translation course, it is imperative for the teachers to ensure that students have ample opportunities to engage in translation practice. The objective should be to enhance the student's understanding of the essence and importance of translation by exploring the interaction between their native language and the foreign language in the pursuit of finding equivalent meanings. This process should also contribute to the student's proficiency in both their native language and the foreign language.

2.4. Translation as an EFL Learning Strategy

Oxford (1990, referenced in Rodríguez 2016; Khonbi and Sadeghi 2015) provides a definition of learning strategy (LS) as "particular actions utilized by learners to facilitate language acquisition, expedite the learning process, enhance enjoyment, foster self-direction, improve effectiveness, and promote transferability to novel contexts." LS can be categorized into six types: memory-related strategies, cognitive strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990, as quoted in Viriya and Sapsirin, 2014; Ahmadi and Mahmoodi, 2012). Furthermore, according to Liao (2006), translation has been categorized as a cognitive learning technique due to the extensive research and multiple proposed classifications of language learning processes.

According to Al-Musawi (2014), translation can be utilized as a learning approach to effectively enhance learners' communicative ability. Additionally, engaging in this practice serves as a cognitive exercise for pupils, aiding them in acquiring new phrases and expressions in the language they are studying. Furthermore, it serves as a problem-solving activity that enables pupils to enhance their proficiency in language analysis and processing. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper, and Russo (1985, cited in Al-Musawi 2014) identify 11 cognitive strategies for learning English. Among the learners investigated, 11.3% reported using translation as a learning strategy, 19.6% reported using repetition, 18.7% reported using note-taking, and 12.5% reported using imagery as a learning strategy. This suggests that translation continues to be employed for the purpose of language acquisition.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The study involved a sample of 120 second-year students who were selected at random from the community of academic English majors at Nam Can Tho University. The sample consisted of individuals aged between 19 and 21. The participants were all Vietnamese individuals who reported having received seven years of English education in secondary and high schools, as well as at least one year of English study at the university level.



3.2. Instrument and Data collection

The study employed a questionnaire called the Inventory for attitudes about Translation (IBT), which was developed from Liao (2006). This instrument was utilized to assess participants' attitudes. The instruments were translated from English into Vietnamese by a translator and another researcher in order to ensure the questions were clearly articulated for elementary-level learners and to enhance the trustworthiness of the research's nature.

IV.FINDINGS

The participants' beliefs on translation in their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the participants' replies to the International Baccalaureate Test (IBT) items are shown in Table 1. Out of the 12 items in the IBT, 6 of them have a mean score higher than 3.5, placing them in the high means category.

Table 1. Mean for IBT items

Statements	N	Mean
I state Translation facilitates my comprehension of my teacher's English instructions.	120	4.34
I feel utilizing Vietnamese translation enables me to expedite the completion of my English tasks and optimize time efficiency.	120	4.27
I believe Translating helps me understand English grammar rules.	120	4.12
I find that at my current level of schooling, I am unable to acquire proficiency in English without the aid of Vietnamese translation.	120	3.95
I believe Translating helps me speak English.	120	3.88
Translating helps me learn English idioms and phrases.	120	3.67
I state Translation aids in the retention of English language in my memory.	120	3.62

After completing the IBT, the participants were instructed to assess items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, indicating the frequency with which they relied on translation as a learning approach. Table 1 demonstrates that learners employ translation strategies to enhance their reading and vocabulary development abilities. The tactics employed by participants complement, exhibit consistency, and demonstrate a positive link with their beliefs. The use of bilingual dictionaries to compensate for limited reading skills highlights the impact of translation on self-study. This approach allows learners to be independent and incorporates their first language (L1) to improve their independent study abilities (Bolitho 2003, K.A. Brooks-Lewis 2009:233).

IV. DISCUSSION

According to the aforementioned findings, when considering the perspective of belief regarding translation, Vietnamese learners of EFL hold the concept that translation assists them in understanding and acquiring English skills, as well as other areas of EFL such as writing, speaking, vocabulary, idioms, and phrases. The results are consistent with Liao's (2006) research, which indicates that students perceive translation as beneficial for improving their English proficiency in writing, speaking, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions. Additional research has demonstrated that students recognize the significance of translation as a valuable tool for aiding their English language acquisition (Aktekin and Gliniecki 2015; Dagilienė 2012; Karimian and Talebinejad 2013). The present study further revealed that EFL learners perceive translation as a valuable tool for facilitating their interaction with peers in completing tasks, comprehending English grammar rules, and retaining lesson content for future reference. Additionally, they hold the belief that in order to possess the ability to think in English without translation, an individual must undergo a period of immersion in an English-speaking culture. In essence, they hold the belief that translation plays a pivotal part in their EFL learning. Conversely, they reject the notion that acquiring English as a foreign language through translation

leads to the production of English that resembles Vietnamese style. However, what is intriguing is that they do not perceive that they experience frustration when attempting to engage in English thinking.

This discovery indicates that individuals have a desire to think directly in English, yet they also hold the belief that translation aids in their English language acquisition. This phenomenon could be attributed to the participants in this study, who are second-year students, exhibiting lower levels of proficiency in their EFL skills, thus relying heavily on translation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Vietnamese EFL learners have the belief that translation aids in their understanding and acquisition of EFL abilities, as well as other areas of EFL such as writing, speaking, vocabulary, idioms, and phrases. EFL learners employ translation as a learning approach to acquire English language abilities encompassing speaking, reading, writing, listening, vocabulary, grammar, idioms, and phrases. Hence, the empirical evidence clearly elucidates that translation remains present and inevitable in EFL learning as a method to acquire the language.

The results of this study also have ramifications for the instruction and acquisition of EFL. This study has demonstrated that translation holds a significant position in the process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition in Vietnam, which is consistent with findings from similar studies conducted in various countries. Vietnamese EFL learners have the belief that including translation into their EFL learning process aids in their acquisition of a greater depth of knowledge in English. Hence, it is imperative to permit the translation or incorporation of learners' native language (L1) during the early stages of EFL acquisition, as this facilitates their comprehension of EFL material. In the context of teaching EFL, it is advisable for teachers to allocate time for translation activities. This includes translating abilities, vocabulary, grammar, idioms, and phrases. This is particularly important for primary EFL learners. The inclusion of translation in language classrooms is considered to be a harmless practice, as stated by Pym and Ayvazyan (2017: 404). Hence, it is imperative to thoroughly examine L1 and translation as a strategy or methodology for teaching and learning foreign languages (Ramsden 2018).

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