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Review Article

The Effects of Translation as a Pedagogical Tool in Teaching Non-english Majored Students

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Abstract: Although teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has reached the post-method era, which means no single method is considered the best way of teaching, the use of translation and first language (L1) instruction remain a much avoided element in many English classrooms. Nevertheless, current studies in Vietnam have shown that both teachers and students are supportive of, or at least not against the idea of moderately using L1 in EFL classes. This study aims at further exploring the effectiveness of translation as a pedagogic tool in an EFL class for Vietnamese non-English majored students. After comparing the students' performance after learning through translation method and other methods with no use of L1, it seems that the students who were taught using translation tasks were able to use items of vocabulary and language structures they have just learned more frequently and precisely. It was also discovered that the act of translating not only provided the students with more learning opportunities but also enabled the teacher to monitor the students' progress more closely. Despite being a preliminary work, this study hopes to contribute as an evidence supporting the use of translation as part of a multi-section lesson of EFL.

Keywords: Translation, L1 usage, code-switching, non-English majored students.

1. Introduction

Translation is considered a controversial technique in foreign language teaching, as it is often associated with the "old-fashioned" Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Despite being one of the early approaches of English language teaching (Navidinia & Hendevalan, 2019) [1], in the beginning of the 20th century GMT was soon replaced by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasised on the importance of meaningful L2 input (Machida, 2011) [2]. Drawing on Malmkjaer (1998) [3] and James (1989) [4], Chan (2015, pp. 82) [5] pointed out the three main criticisms towards GMT: i) It creates a misunderstanding that there is an exact equivalent of L1 in L2, both in terms of form and meaning; ii) It

underestimates the role of communication in the acquisition of a foreign language; and iii) The ability to translate should be seen as the objective of learning, not a preexisting competence. Because of these assumptions, monolingualism was the dominant approach in English teaching throughout the past century (Sheffler, 2013) [6].

After decades of trying to crown the most suitable methodologies, researchers admitted that English language teaching has now entered the post-method era, when there is "a shift from using methods in the purest sense to recognizing that the nature of language learning is complex and non-linear" (Galante, 2014) [7]. Along with this movement, books related to translation were published, and there has been a call for the resurrection of translation in language teaching (Laviosa, 2014) [8]. In her book, Laviosa (2014, pp. 2) compiled studies that advocated the use of translation in teaching into three major areas: i) Theories supporting the role of pedagogic translation; ii) Empirical evidence showing the effectiveness of translation in improving L2 skills; and iii) Introduction and evaluation of new methods involving translation.

As translation is reintroduced into English teaching and testing, it is often emphasised that the new version is not exactly the same as the one previously rejected by the world of educators. As Chan (2015) [5] put it, unlike the old method, which focused on identifying correspondence, the new approach would help students realise the differences between the source and target language, and thereby being able to use both languages effectively. In addition, cultural factors are taken into consideration more seriously than ever, as it gives learners opportunities to explore another culture while at the same time learn about themselves through the language of others. The diverse transformation of meanings in different cultures, according to Chan (2015) [5], is something to be celebrated, not avoided. As part of the revival movement, Kaharuddin (2018) [9] proposed a new fusion methodology,

Communicative Grammar Translation Method, which aimed at combining the advantages of GMT and CLT to foster students' communicative competence while also securing accuracy in vocabulary and grammar. Translation is once again viewed as a possible valuable tool for English teaching and learning.

In Vietnam, although there are already plenty of studies to prove that teachers and students' attitude towards L1 usage in English lessons is not at all negative (Hiep, 2007; Nhan and Lai, 2012; Anh, 2012) [10-12], in-depth analysis of how pedagogic translation could be utilised is still lacking. Therefore, this research hopes to fill the gap by examining the role of translation in an English classroom in Vietnam and exploring ways it could be integrated into a communicative lesson. Since the scope of this matter is relatively broad, this study will only focus on university students whose major is not English. The following questions are raised:

i) How do translation tasks affect students' reception of the knowledge;

ii) How do translation tasks affect students' production of the knowledge.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Code-switching and the Role of L1 in the English Classroom

Code-switching, according to Gallagher, is "an umbrella term to describe switching between languages in the same stretch of discourse" (2020, pp. 2) [13]. Surrounding why code-switching happens in communication, two contradictory reasons are suggested. On the one hand, it is believed to be an ability available to only bilinguals or multilinguals, since it requires sophisticated linguistic and cross-cultural knowledge of two or more languages. On the other hand, it is a strategy used by non-native speakers when they forget a word in the target language, so it is treated as evidence of a learner's struggles in language learning (Edwards & Dewaele, 2007) [14].

The functions of code-switching in the classroom context are put into three categories: ideational, textual, and interpersonal functions (Halliday, 1994, as cited in Nguyen, Grainger and Carey, 2016) [15, 16]. The first function, ideational, refers to the action of explaining and translating in order to help learners understand a word or a grammar point better. According to Puspawati (2018) [17], it is to the teachers' belief that the language used in the transmission of knowledge should be understandable to learners. Second, textual functions include transiting between class activities and changing topics. Üstünel and Seedhouse (2005) [18] went on and expanded this function into classroom-management, stating that L1 is often used by teachers to make sure that class instructions are followed precisely. Finally, interpersonal function comprises building relationships and negotiating identities between teachers and learners, and among learners themselves.

In theory, monolingual approach is considered the right way to teach English as a second language (Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2014) [19], especially to supporters of the communicative paradigm (Üstünel and Seedhouse, 2005) [18]. According to Krashen and his hypothesis about comprehensible input (1981) [20], for acquisition to happen, it is essential that learners are exposed to a large amount of input. Therefore, reducing L2 exposure by any means would equal wasting opportunities for resourceful input. In researching the practice of using Yakudoku, a method involving non-oral instruction of English in Japan, Gorusch (1998) [21] found that if students are asked to translate an English passage into Japanese, they would allocate most of their attention on their native language rather than English, which should have been the focus. Due to the thought that the target language should be the sole language in learning in order for EFL to achieve the highest effects, until the end of the 20th century, L1 has been constantly treated as the unwanted element in the language

classroom as well as teaching materials (Gallagher, 2020) [13].

On the other hand, an array of research to support the judicious use of L1 in foreign language teaching is also available. For example, Arenas-Iglesias (2016) [22] reported that both the teachers and students participating in the study felt that the use of L1 did not hinder their learning, whereas using only L2 could lead to negative feelings and increase their level of anxiety. In addition, Kern (1994) [23] discovered that while reading in L2, learners often go through a scaffolding process called mental translation, in which they quickly note the meaning of a word or phrase they encounter into L1 in order to better understand the text. This means there is no use trying to prevent students from using their mother tongue, which can enhance comprehension. Other examples of studies in favour of the role of L1 include Spahiu (2013) [24] and Atkinson (1987) [25].

2.2. The Effects of Translation in EFL

2.2.1. The Linguistic Aspect of Translation

Literature to support the role of translation in English teaching is abundant, but most are focused on receptive knowledge (reading) rather than productive one (speaking). Reading is the skill thought to often benefit from translation activities, since the cognitive process used while translating has positive impacts on comprehension of the text (O'malley and Chamot, 1990, pp. 3) [26]. An action study conducted early in Taiwan showed that in comparison to an immediate written recall task, a translation task was more effective in ensuring understanding of the text (Chang, 2006) [27]. In Lee's study (2013) [28], 35 university students in China were given a reading passage, followed by a translation exercise, then a post-test in order to determine whether translating helped them understand the text better. The result indicated that both English and non-English majored students improved on their reading performance thanks

to the translating task. In Bangladesh, survey results from Kabir's research (2020) [29] also suggested that the majority of teachers and students both shared a positive view of using translation to develop reading skill.

In addition to the reading skill, there is evidence proving the positive influence translation has on the learning of vocabulary and grammar. For instance, Latsanyphone & Bouangeune (2009) [30] have experimented teaching new words using L1 and without L1, and the result was that the group which received instruction in L1 (both when the words are in isolation and in context) achieved higher test results. Similarly, when Navidinia, Nazarloo and Esmaeil (2018) [31] compared the performance of two groups of Persian students, it was indicated that the group taught with images and translation of the words outperformed the one that learned through only images and instruction in L2. Both studies were conducted on students of low proficiency, the reason of which was cited as followed: at the first stages, students learn L2 lexical items through the lexicon of their mother tongue before being able to directly access their L2 lexicon later on (De Groot & Van Hell, 2005, as cited in Navidinia & Esmaeil, 2018) [31, 32]. Although these studies can be viewed as a positive contribution to the argument in favour of translation, in both procedures teachers were the one to directly provide equivalents of the words in L1. Thus, further research to demonstrate how translation can engage students' cognitive process and promote learner autonomy is needed.

Grammar is another aspect where empirical evidence of translation's merits is most visible. It is more difficult to study, though, because while vocabulary can be taught simply by providing corresponding terms in L1, grammatical structures require teacher's instruction, be it implicit or explicit. Koletnik, whose works have substantiated the stance that translation is a useful tool in teaching vocabulary and grammar (2012, 2013) [33],

[34], proposed the use of an eclectic method involving translation. The classroom procedure she suggested was that students would be given a text (for example, a letter) in L2 and asked to translate some highlighted expressions into L1 (2012) [33]. They would then be provided texts, in both L1 and L2, and have to find the equivalents of some phrases, followed by a task requiring them to identify collocation and possible errors in the texts. The procedure ends with the students having to produce a piece of writing of the same genre. Although no scientific statistics were presented, the researcher assured that the students' exam results and classroom discussions showed success in helping students reach specific learning objectives. Meanwhile, Lee, Schallert & Kim's study (2015) [35] indicated that attainment of grammatical knowledge was possible even without explicit instruction of the grammar point in advance. It was said that text-level translation can enable learners to gain grammatical knowledge, as they had to contemplate and figure out the suitable structures to convey the meaning from one language to the other.

2.2.2. The Humanistic Aspect of Translation

Apart from linguistic gains, there are beliefs that using translation in EFL also brings about advantages in terms of humanistic aspects. This includes factors such as the learners' motivation, anxiety, and cultural identity. When asked about the actual experience of using L1 and translation in the English classrooms, the majority of students and teachers in Navidinia, Akar and Hendevalan's study (2019) [36] expressed that they feel more motivated when translation is used. This conclusion was similar to that of Erdemir and Seildhofer (2009) [37], who added that translation is more favoured by low-level students compared to the advanced ones.

Regarding cultural awareness, it is believed by many educators that learning a foreign language is not only about being able to use the language, but also about understanding the

culture embedded in it, like Campbell has stated: "language is the main vector of culture, and that the evidence of cross-cultural difference is found in communicative practices" (2002, pp. 70) [38]. As intercultural knowledge is crucial in the era of globalisation, translation is thought to be a way to raise learners' awareness of their culture as well as others (Machida, 2008) [39]. How translation plays a part in that process is demonstrated by Ekoç's research (2019) [40], who explored the significance of translation as a class activity by assigning exercises that involve translating films and songs to a group of Turkish students. Through observation, analysis of the participant's translation and interview, the study concluded that translation not only expanded the learners' vocabulary range and grammatical knowledge, but also reinforced discovery of cultural features in the source and target language (for example, the differences in how animal sounds are portrayed, or how idiomatic expressions are translated). Ekoç's standpoint, however, is that translation should only be treated as one in many practice activities teachers can resort to, and that it should be used moderately to avoid the excessive amount of L1.

2.3. The use of L1 in an EFL Class in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the curriculum reform in 2002 has significantly changed how English is taught here, and one of the changes was to maximise the communicative factor in English teaching. The learning objective thereafter has been specified as enhancing communicative competence in all four skills (Van, 2010) [41]. Although no official policy on the medium of instruction in the English classroom has been introduced, many institutions as well as teachers have made an attempt to completely remove mother tongue from EFL education (Hoang, Jang and Yang, 2010) [42].

Despite the common belief that an English-only environment would better facilitate learning, empirical evidence shows constraints in implementation of such approach. Hiep (2007) [10] argued that unlike immigrants in Western countries who develop their English skills through communication with native speakers on a daily basis, students in Vietnam do not feel the need to speak English in the classroom, as they all share the same L1. This casts doubts on the genuineness of the tasks they are asked to do. Nhan and Lai (2012) [11] pointed out that it is inevitable that Vietnamese students think in both their L1 and L2, so code-switching should be seen as a natural part of the lesson. Moreover, as they have witnessed various advantages code-switching brings to both teachers and learners, their viewpoint is that L1 is necessary for better learning outcomes, especially with low level students. Anh's work (2012) [12] yielded a similar conclusion, but she added that Vietnamese should be used reasonably and according to each class's specific conditions.

As can be seen, research on the role of L1 in Vietnam is largely focused on code-switching and medium of instruction. Details about the effectiveness of translation activities in English teaching, and how they can be carried out await more thorough examination.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study included 55 EFL learners who are non-English majored students currently enrolled in two different classes of the same English course at their university in Hanoi, Vietnam. The language proficiency level of these students is A2 - A2+ (according to the CEFR). The English course they are taking aims to provide them with not only general English skills but also the communicative abilities in social sciences topics in English which are related to their majors, like psychology, history, and tourism, etc The students are divided into two groups in accordance with the classes that they have signed up for.

3.2. Procedure

The procedure is designed with an aim to test the effects of pedagogical translation on the learners' acquisition of the target language, specifically on the complicated academic topics of the course. To eliminate the impacts of other factors and focus solely on the differences brought about by the translation method, two groups will both experience the same treatment in turn (Denscombe, 2014) [43]. The details are illustrated in the following Table 1:

In each session, the control group will learn the new words through tasks like matching and guessing from the context, in which the use of L1 is kept at the minimum level. Meanwhile, the experimental group will be introduced to a translating exercise, and it is expected that they will discover the meaning of the same set of new words as they translate. Subsequently, both groups will be asked to complete a quiz and write a paragraph.

Table 1. Information about the classes' profile and teaching procedure

	Class A (29 students)	Class B (26 students)
Session 1: The topic of History	Learn vocabulary with translation	Learn vocabulary with other methods
Session 2: The topic of Economics	Learn vocabulary with other methods	Learn vocabulary with translation

The aim of the quiz is to test the students' receptive knowledge of what previously learned, whereas the writing task is designed to see their abilities to produce the vocabulary they have been introduced to earlier.

4. Results

4.1. Research Question 1: How do Translation Tasks Affect Students' Reception of the Knowledge?

As previously explained, after learning the vocabulary, the students of both classes were given a timed quiz to check their retention of knowledge, and this was conducted consistently in both sessions. The quizzes consisted of mostly multiple-choice questions, arranged in the ascending level of difficulty, and a gap-filling question at the end. The overall results of the students' performance were compiled in the following chart:
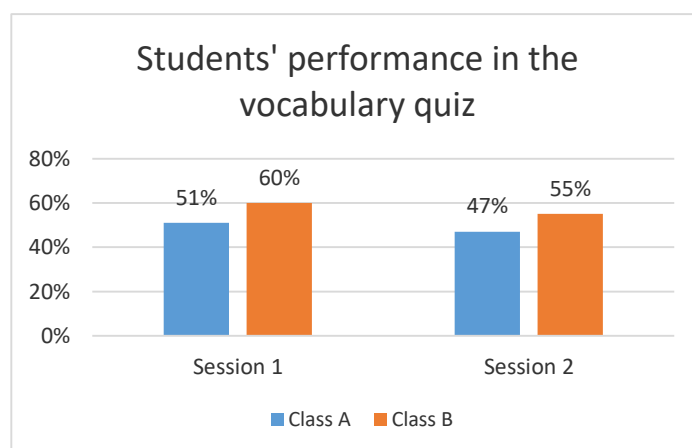

Figure 1. Students' performance in the vocabulary quiz.

In the first session, the accuracy level of Class A's students was 51%, slightly lower than Class B's 60%. In the second session, at 47%, Class A's students continued to score worse than the students from Class B, who achieved 55% in the level of accuracy. As can be seen from the chart, Class A (who were taught with translation in Session 1 and with other methods in Session 2) underperformed in both sessions, in comparison with Class B, who were taught with other methods in Session 1 and with translation in Session 2. The fact that Class B outperformed in the posttest of both sessions regardless of which method they were taught with, does not point towards the superiority of any method, but rather suggests that Class B's students might be slightly more proficient than their counterparts. This, unfortunately, means that there is not enough evidence to interpret whether translation is any more effective in helping learners acquire and retain the knowledge than methods which involve less usage of L1 do. More work should be done to determine whether the outcome would be clearer if the learners were monitored in a

longer period of time and under stricter conditions.

4.2. Research Question 2: How do Translation Tasks Affect Students' Production of the Knowledge?

Following the vocabulary quiz, the students in both classes were asked to submit a written paragraph about the topic they had been taught. The writer successfully collected 29 written papers from Class A and 26 papers from Class B. In the second session, 29 students from Class A submitted, while only 23 from Class B did (1 student was absent, and 2 were unable to turn in their writing due to network errors). The students' works were then carefully examined to identify the target lexical items that were introduced to them either through translation method or other methods earlier. In both classes, there were several students who tried to use multiple target words and phrases. The following table will display the number of students in each class who tried to use the items of vocabulary in their own writing, as well as the total number of attempts.

Table 2. Summary of the students' attempts to use the learned vocabulary in writing

		Total number of students	Number of students who attempted to use the vocab	Total number of attempts
Session 1	Class A (translation method)	29	24	38
	Class B (other methods)	26	17	22
Session 2	Class A (other methods)	29	11	14
	Class B (translation method)	23	16	33

It is immediately noticeable that in both sessions, the class which learned the new vocabulary through translation (Class A in Session 1 and Class B in Session 2) produced a significantly larger amount of the previously taught words and phrases. The gap is especially

wide in the second session, as the experimental group used 33 target lexical items, twice as much as the number of attempts made by the control group. In addition, the students who were given a translating task also achieved higher accuracy when they use the taught

vocabulary in writing. In particular, the control group's accurate rate was 73% and 64% in session 1 and 2 respectively, whereas the experimental group seems to have a better grasp of the knowledge, recording the rate of 79% and 82%. It can therefore be concluded that in comparison with other non-L1 methods, the translation method had a greater impact on

encouraging the students to not only immediately use the target structures in their language production, but also use them more precisely. This finding is in favour of L1 usage in the EFL classroom setting, which are in line with other action studies by Latsanyphone & Bouangeune (2009) [30], Lee et al., (2015) [35] and Navidinia et al., (2018) [31].
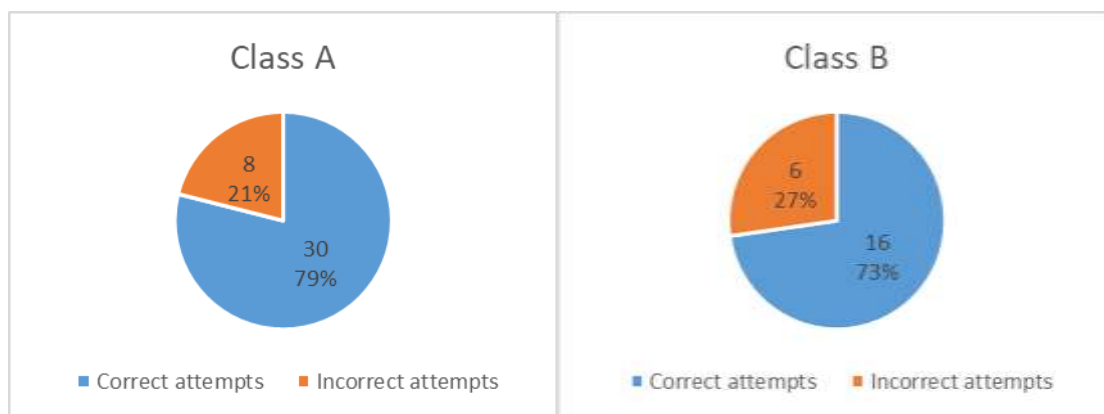

Figure 2. The number of correct and incorrect attempts in using in the learned vocabulary (Session 1).
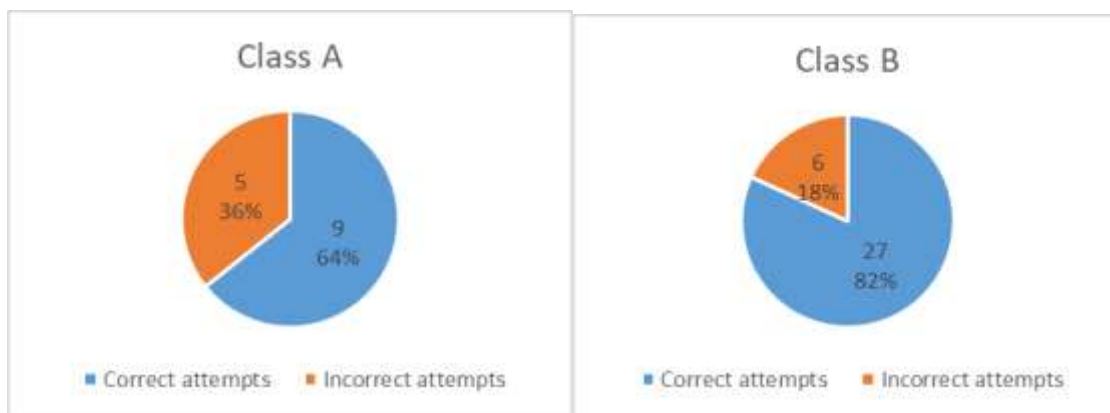

Figure 3. The number of correct and incorrect attempts in using in the learned vocabulary (Session 2).

Another discovery that was made during the analysis of the students' works was the fact that students in the experimental group tended to use the target words with more flexibility in terms of parts of speech. For example, in Session 1, although only the word "colonised" was introduced in the translation task, many students in the experimental group were able to

correctly use "colony", "colonial" and "colonialism" in their writing. On the other hand, the students in the control group mostly use the exact word that they learned - "colonised", which leads to a mixed result in their writing, and thus lowering the students' rate of accuracy. According to the writer's observation, during the translation task, similar

mistakes in part of speech were made, which allowed the teacher to point it out during the correction of the students' translation. The students in the experimental group were also more actively engaged, asking questions about the words and structures as they were completing the translating task. Meanwhile, there was no such chance in the class that learned through instruction in L2, so it was impossible for the teacher to expect and attend to the students' needs and lackings. This corroborates Machida's explanation (2011) [2], who stated that the act of translating provides the "ideal learning opportunities" (pp. 740), including the activation of noticing and testing of hypotheses. This means that while translating, the students are able to see for themselves what is correct and what is not, hence paying more attention to what they are reading. It is also said that while the learners are immersed in the input, focus on form is maximised, enabling the learners to retain the knowledge for longer (Cook, 2007, as cited in Navidinia et al., 2018) [31, 44].

5. Conclusion

Through thorough analysis and observation, this study has come to a conclusion about the effects of translation tasks on EFL learners of low proficiency. Although our first attempt to test whether the act of translation could lead to immediate improvement in the learners' reception of the knowledge has yet to reach a conclusive outcome, a close look at the learners' written works has shown a positive sign. In both sessions, the groups that were taught with the translation method used a significantly higher number of the target lexical items with precision, making their overall writing not only more complex but also more accurate. It was also observed that during the lesson, students in the translation group were more likely to ask questions about the knowledge and made a greater variety of mistakes, giving the teacher more opportunities to realise their lacking and elaborate further on the language point. As a result, it can be

concluded that students who learned through doing a translation task were more engaged, and thus could generally gain more knowledge from the procedure. Nevertheless, it should be noted that translation tasks were not treated as the sole method, but instead a part of the multi-section lessons. Teachers and educators are advised to use pedagogic translation creatively and only when it suits the objectives of the lesson.

Since the research was conducted on students of an actual English course in university, there were certain constraints in terms of time and the selection of students. In return, this has the advantage of showcasing the real situation of English learning in Vietnam's university, especially to non-English majored students, and suggest a way English could be effectively taught in this classroom context. This is a topic worth further exploration, and therefore should be looked into with greater care in the future.

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