

**Towards a Translation Skill:
The Difficulties Encountered by Iraqi Pupils at the Primary
Stage in Learning English as a Foreign Language**

**Assist. Lecturer
Tahseen Ameen Faysal
Dept. of Translation
College of Arts / Tikreet University**

The Value of the Research

Language is the most important human cultural discovery. By means of language, man is still able to preserve and keep culture, tradition and civilization (Al-Hamdani, 1982:16).

Many countries; therefore, gave a great interest to the language learning since it is the way by which, we can express our feelings, is also the best way of communicating with other cultures, so it is necessary for any individual in the society (Abdil –majeed, 1961:15).

As for translation, everyone knows that it is an activity which requires at least two languages .i.e., the source one(SL) and the target one(TL). The first language for anyone, there is no doubt, is his mother tongue, while the second language is any foreign one. Learning a foreign language is not easy as it may be thought.

Language is not only made up of words, which include letters, as some may think. Letters are usually pictures of sounds, not the sounds themselves. Sometimes, as in the case of English, letters do not picture sounds accurately (Al-Hamash, 1976:1). So, one can imagine the amount of difficulty the learner of the

language in question can face, especially the two main activities, i.e. reading and writing.

It is worth noting that, to learn any foreign language, there are four important and necessary skills to be taken into account, i.e., listening being understood, speaking, reading and writing (See crafton,1983:31-46)(Al-Khazraji,1975:29)(Hilmi,1980:23).

Translation is supposed to be the fifth skill to gain, after mastering the four skills mentioned above (Al-Ni'aymi, 2005:1). In addition, it is a normal outcome if the learner perfected learning the foreign language. Therefore, it is important to detect the difficulties that encounter learners of English as a foreign language, since it is dealt with as that in Iraq.

Linguistically and psychologically, the individuals' linguistic development is affected and influenced greatly by so many different factors, some are related to the environment, some to the genetic heredity. Such factors are for example, general health, maturity, age, intelligence, sex, individual's order among his brothers and sisters, number of members. does the family consists of, educational and cultural level of parents, the encouragement to speak and communicate with others, the socio-economic state and finally, the domestic environment of the family(Nassir,1981:145) (Al-fakhri,1982:156).

Learners of foreign languages are presupposed to face so many various problems and difficulties. For example, we can see that children, who speak many different languages other than English in one classroom in an American school, suffer from difficulties in their learning of English. That is because of the dissimilarity of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds or due to the possibility of

listening and speaking only their native language instead of English as soon as they come back home (Greene and Pretty, 1971:115).

The child who learns a foreign language encounters the difficulty of being unable to cope with the process of listening to any person other than his family members who speak his mother tongue. The importance of these four skills in the process of learning; especially, the reading skill, depends largely on the oral experiences which need the child to be accustomed with the speech sounds even before recognizing the graphic symbols (the alphabet) of the given language. The ability to read is also influenced badly by the linguistic background of the concepts and general information the child has, i.e., the interference of his mother tongue. So the new word that the child learns may be felt meaningless if he does not know what it stands for (Ching, 1976:4-5).

It is worth mentioning that in some older methods of teaching foreign languages, reading was given more importance than oral work. Reading was used as a medium through which all language aspects were introduced (Al-Hamash, 1976:1). As for writing, with regard to teaching English as a foreign language, dictation can play a vital role as an extremely useful teaching device (Shani, 1977:63).

Aims of the Research

Teaching and learning a foreign language are not easy tasks, especially because the foreign language shows considerable dissimilarities to the mother tongue of the learner (Hilmi, 1980:42).

So one can predict how much the learning difficulties and problems that learners of English as a foreign language are expected to be encountered. To point out such difficulties, the present study aims at providing answers to the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties the pupils of the sixth class at the primary stage in Iraq encounter in the process of learning English, as their teachers of English envisage them?
2. Are there any differences of a statistical value which can be found according to viewpoints of the teaching staff of the English language, concerning the degree of the difficulty with regard to gender (whether the school is for boys or for girls)?

The limits of the Research

The present study is concentrated on the difficulties expected to be encountered by the sixth class primary pupils in learning any of the skills previously mentioned of the English language. No one may deny that reading is traditionally an important task of teaching children a foreign language in the primary stage. As for writing, the inconsistencies in the spelling system represent a clear barrier to both native and foreign (non-native) learners, as there is no one-to-one sufficient precise correlation between the phonemes and the graphic symbols. The encoding-decoding processes are confusing to the users (here the learners) (Hann, 1971:25).

The present study also includes to question the English language teachers (men/women) of the primary schools for both (boys and girls) who have been practicing teaching the English language for the 6th class within the boundaries of the city center of Mosul for the academic year (2008-2009), for at least three years ago.

The Definitions

To understand some terms used in the present study, definitions of such terms seem necessary.

1-Difficulty:- It can be defined as a thing that stands as a hindrance, obstacle or impediment in the way of achieving the aim needed to be obtained, so passing through such obstacle requires physical and mental efforts(Ibrahim,1977:10).

2-Reliability:- The reliability of a test refers to the consistency of the scores obtained by the same individuals on different occasions or with different sets of equivalent items(Alzobaie,1982:16).

3-Validity:-Is sometimes defined as the truth fullness of a test. Does the test measure what it purports to measure? In order for a test to be valid or truthful, it must first of all be reliable (Ibid:17).

The Research Procedures

The present study is based on data and information that have been got through questionnaires. Thus the procedures used in the study include:-

The Population of the Research

The English teachers (men/women) at the primary schools for (girls and boys) in the center of the city of Mosul who have been spending at least more than three years in teaching English for the pupils of the 6th class are included by the present study. There are (317) teachers distributed at (313) schools, as follows:-
A- (149) schools for girls, (59) of them are on the right bank of the Tigris whereas, (90) are located on the left bank.

B- (164) schools for boys, (66) situated on the right bank, while the rest (98) are on the left bank of the Tigris.

The Sample of The Research

1- Schools' Sample

A random sample of primary schools level has been selected, which represents (30%) of the total number of the population (313) schools, distributed on the center of the city of Mosul according to the sex of the school (girls/boys), and according to the geographical location, (left/right) banks of the Tigris.

(96) schools as a sample seems adequate for the current study which can cover the whole city center. (45) for girls, and (51) for boys, on both sides of the city center of Mosul.

2- Teachers' Sample

English teachers of the primary stage who have been teaching English for at least three years at 6th class level, so the schools' sample has been chosen for the purpose of the study. Hence, the total number of the teachers' sample will be (96) teachers, (45) of them are for girls' schools, and (51) are for boys' schools, which represents the number that meets my need in the study (See Appendix: 1).

The Research Instrument

The present study depends on a short – answer questionnaire to achieve (access) to the difficulties the pupils of the 6th class primary schools encounter in their learning of the English as a foreign language. The items of the questionnaire have been obtained from:- Information has been got by means of an open – ended questionnaire distributed on an elementary school teachers compromised of (6) teachers (men/women), one teacher at each school, selected randomly from the city of Mosul. The questions raised in the elementary open – ended questionnaire are:-

- What are the difficulties the 6th class primary schools' pupils encounter at listening skill?
- What are the difficulties the 6th class primary schools' pupils encounter at speaking skill?
- What are the difficulties the 6th class primary schools' pupils encounter at reading skill?
- What are the difficulties the 6th class primary schools' pupils encounter at writing (spelling) skill?

So many questions have been added by researcher, got from different sources, studies and researches related to the subject matter of the present study, besides, questions formed by the researcher.

Research Validity

The truth of the instrument is one of the most important characteristics of any given test which means that the test must measure actually what it is originally designed to measure (Abin lebdah, 1979:220).

So the draft of the questionnaire was submitted to a number of specialists and language experts who added, omitted and revised many items of the final form of the questionnaire, this was done to achieve fully the validity of the items. So, the items which have got (80%) agreement by the specialists and language experts are given inclusion in the final form of the questionnaire (see appendix:2).

Research Reliability

Consistency and stability mean that the test gives the same results if it is re-applied on the same sample at the same conditions (Al-Ghareeb, 1977:653). The researcher has tested and re-tested the questionnaire to measure the reliability of the research instrument,

and that questionnaire is distributed to a random sample consisting of (6) teachers, one teacher in each school, as it is shown in table (1). The questionnaire has been applied as a test firstly at 2/3/2009, then it is re-applied for the same sample two weeks later, 17/3/2009, as it had been referred by Adams who says that the interval between the two applications must not exceed two or three weeks (Adams, 1966: 85). Finally, the reliability coefficient of the test has been found through Pearson's correlation coefficient which is 0.79 (Al-Bayyati, 1977:183).

The Statistical Tools

The present study uses the following statistical tools:

A- Pearson's correlation coefficient to find the instrument's reliability through

$$r = \frac{n \sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{[n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Where

n = the number of the sample

$\sum x$ = the sum of the test degrees at the first time

$\sum y$ = the sum of the test degrees at the second time

(ibid:281)

B – Arithmetic mean is used to obtain the value of each item. The present study uses Fischer equation as well.

Results and Interpretation

The results that have been reached at, and the interpretations to some of these results are given here. To achieve this aim, the present study highlights the difficulties that the pupils at the primary stage have encountered in general, arranged in downward order according to their degrees of difficulty. Only the first three items at the scale of the degree of difficulty [see Table (1)] will be discussed.

As for the first aim of the study, the difficulties the pupils of the sixth class primary stage in Iraq encounter, are reflected in the answers of the pupils' teachers of English and that is illustrated in Table (1) given below:

Table (1): shows the responses of the English teachers arranged in downward order according to degree of the difficulties illustrated by S^2 value.

No. ¹	Items	S^2 value
23	The omission of the silent h in dictation as in hour.	2.4791
33	The spellings of the letter that represent the sound /ʒ/ correctly, e.g., usually, pleasure.	2.4062
24	The spelling of the different letters that represent the sound /ʃ/ correctly, e.g., sure → shur.	2.3647
26	The omission of the silent w in dictation as in write.	2.3333
12	The pronunciation of /ʒ/ correctly in such words as usually, pleasure.	2.3229

¹ This number represents the number of the item in the questionnaire.

Towards a Translation Skill: The Difficulties Encountered by ...
Assist. Lecturer Tahseen Ameen Faysal

34	The confusion in dictation between different pictures, i.e., (letters, syllables) that represent /t/ ,e.g., helped → helpt.	2.3229
22	The spelling of the different letter that represent /k/ correctly, e.g., cat → kat , box → boks.	2.25
28	The omission of the silent k in dictation as in knife.	2.25
5	the pronunciation of the silent w as in write.	2.1979
1	The pronunciation of the letters p, b similarly as in lamp, lamb, but, put.	2.1875
29	The omission of the silent l in dictation as in could .	2.1875
19	Distinguishing in writing between q, p, and vice versa.	2.1562
17	Distinguishing in writing between p, b, and vice versa.	2.1458
6	The pronunciation of the silent k as in knife , know.	2.1354
30	The spelling of the different pictures of /t/ correctly, e.g., /helpt/→ helpt not helped.	2.125
31	The spellings of the letters that represents vowels correctly.	2.1145
10	The pronunciation of the silent h as in hour.	2.1041
18	Distinguishing in writing between d, b, and vice versa.	2.0934
2	The pronunciation of C which represent different sounds ,i.e., /k/ , /s/ , /ʃ/ correctly .	2.0833
13	The pronunciation of S which represents different sounds , i.e., /s/, /ʃ/, /z/ correctly.	2.0833

32	The confusion between the letters i, y, in dictation.	2.0729
20	Distinguishing in writing between the letters q, g, and vice versa.	2.0625
25	The omission of the silent r as in car ,ruler in dictation.	2.0625
27	The omission of the silent e as in write ,give ,take in dictation.	2.0625
8	The pronunciation of the silent l as in could.	2.0416
14	The pronunciation of ed of the regular past tense form of the verb correctly,i.e., helped→ /helpid/ not /helpt/.	2.0416
21	The spelling of the different forms (letters) that represent the sound/s/ correctly as in city→sity.	2.0208
9	The pronunciation of the vowels correctly.	1.9791
35	The confusion in dictation between the different forms (letters, syllables) that represent the sound /z/, e.g., has→ haz.	1.9791
11	The pronunciation of the letter g which represents (pictures) the different sounds ,i.e.,/g/, /dʒ/ correctly.	1.9687
4	The pronunciation of the silent r as in car,sugar.	1.9062
15	The pronunciation of the different sounds of the letter i correctly as in sit , site.	1.8229
3	The pronunciation of the different letters that represent /k/ correctly.	1.7708
7	The pronunciation of the silent e as in give , take.	1.6979

Towards a Translation Skill: The Difficulties Encountered by ...
Assist. Lecturer Tahseen Ameen Faysal

16	The pronunciation of the different sounds of the letter y correctly.	1.6458
----	--	--------

The results show that the items 23,33,24 and 26 which are related to the writing (dictation) skill come firstly in the scale of difficulty, i.e. they take the first four scales respectively. This may be due to the fact that English conventional alphabet is deficit or inadequate, i.e. there are no sufficient graphemes to stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the phonemes, which presents an impediment to both native and non-native (foreign) learners. Owing to a lack of precise correlation between phonemes and graphic symbols, i.e. the encoding –decoding processes are confusing to users. The decoder suffers because most of the graphemes represent more than one phoneme and vice versa (Hann, 1971:25).

The same can be said concerning the items 34,22,28 and 29 which occupy the 6th , 7th , 8th and 10th orders in the scale of degrees of the difficulty , as they are related to dictation (ibid).

As for the item 19 which occupies the 12th order in the scale of the difficulty. The reason may be due to optics, i.e. the pupil can not see the shape of a given letter well or s/he does not pay a great attention to this matter.

With regard to items 12 , 28, 5 and 1 , which are related to the phonetics and phonology since they are concerned with pronunciation. The reason behind the difficulty may be due to the difference between the phonemic systems of both Arabic and English. In Arabic, each letter has only one phoneme, while English has 45 phonemes that can stand for only 26 graphemes (Ladefoged, 1975:143).

Recommendations

Depending on the results which have been reached , the following points are recommended:-

- 1- Great interest must be given to dictation activity which is greatly related to the skills of listening, reading and writing since the learner is obliged to show ability to recognize the use of any of these three skills through it .
- 2- English teachers must also give the pupils at this stage some knowledge and information about phonemic system of English , especially those points concerning the sounds that have more than one graphic symbol, or those sounds that have no Arabic equivalence, or those letters that stand for more than sound such as s, g, c .etc.
- 3- Much more attention must be paid to letters that have silent occurrence at the beginning or at the end of the English words, to make the pupils be aware of this case in different skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

To achieve the second aim of study which is the question "Are there any differences of statistical significance in the degree of difficulty in respect to sex of school sample (boys/girls) according to the view points given by their teachers of English?" the researcher has used T-test to distinguish whether schools of boys or those of girls suffer more difficulty than the others.

The results of T-test shown in Table (2) illustrate that there are no such statistical values concerning all items except (14), which indicates [The pronunciation of ed usually found at the end of the regular past tense form verb ,e.g. helped→/helpid/ not /helpt/]

T-test of the item (14) was of high value especially for boys, i.e. the pupils of 6th class primary schools for boys suffer more than their counterparts of girls with regard to this point.

Table (2) shows that the T-test value of item (14) is 3.981295673 , which is of significant value at the level 0.01.

- *It is difficult to determine the reason behind this difference between boys and girls since the teachers of English are women in both types of schools. But, one can conclude that the women teachers of English have more interest in teaching girls than teaching boys, or come to conclusion that girls are more interested in learning English than boys, at this stage at least.*

Suggestions

Further studies and researches can be done with regard to the difficulties and problems that the learners of English as a foreign language may encounter at different levels of their learning in different areas of language learning, such as (grammar) for instance, and the correct use of everyday English .

Table (2) shows the statistical means, variance and the T-test values for the responses of English teachers.

Item No.	Sex of the school	Statistical means	S ² value	T-test value
1	Boys , girls	2.176 2.200	0.4745	0.17033
2	= =	2.078 2.188	0.6312	0.67696352
3	= =	1.784 1.600	0.4832	1.294220633

Item No.	Sex of the school	Statistical means	S ² value	T-test value
4	= =	2.039 1.755	0.6409	1.734518496
5	= =	2.058 2.355	0.7356	0.693133971
6	= =	2.098 2.177	1.01159	0.384043625
7	= =	1.862 1.666	0.5748	1.238222185
8	= =	2.000 2.088	0.6132	0.549461586
9	= =	1.960 2.000	2.0841	0.135474152
10	= =	2.411 1.755	1.8157	2.271475298
11	= =	2.235 1.666	1.3317	2.410820059
12	= =	2.172 2.266	0.4971	0.645385868
13	= =	2.137 2.022	0.5465	0.760603802
14 ¹	= =	2.370 1.933	0.4982	3.981295673
15	= =	1.823 1.822	0.5106	0.006842508
16	= =	1.558 1.711	0.4212	1.102664664

T-table at the level 0.01=2576 . So it must be taken in consideration ! ¹

Towards a Translation Skill: The Difficulties Encountered by ...
Assist. Lecturer Tahseen Ameen Faysal

Item No.	Sex of the school	Statistical means	S ² value	T-test value
17	= =	2.196 2.088	0.6137	0.674064461
18	= =	2.117 2.066	0.5968	0.322783629
19	= =	2.137 2.177	0.5810	0.256582867
20	= =	2.137 1.977	0.6278	0.987336191
21	= =	2.196 1.822	1.8402	1.348015291
22	= =	2.274 2.222	0.4461	0.380665016
23	= =	2.509 2.444	0.5837	0.415981715
24	= =	2.509 2.200	0.4250	2.317500041
25	= =	2.137 1.977	0.5427	1.061929787
26	= =	2.274 2.400	0.5634	0.820763155
27	= =	2.117 2.000	0.4393	0.863099756
28	= =	2.294 2.200	0.9614	0.468739472
29	= =	2.117 2.266	0.4690	1.063789206
30	= =	2.196 2.044	0.4463	1.112463787

Item No.	Sex of the school	Statistical means	S ² value	T-test value
31	= =	2.117 2.211	1.0617	0.446049109
32	= =	2.117 2.022	0.4923	0.662009797
33	= =	2.549 2.244	0.4356	0.259496289
34	= =	2.294 2.355	0.4990	0.422216597
35	= =	1.901 2.066	0.5631	1.075095177

Appendix (1) shows the reliability sample distributed according to the six of the school pupils and its location in the city center of Mosul.

Sex of the school pupils	The right bank side of Mosul	The left bank side of Mosul	Total
Girls ' schools	18	27	45
Boys ' schools	22	29	51
Total	40	56	96

References

- Al-Hamash, K. I. (1976) "***Oral Work in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language***", IDELTI.
- Al-Khazraji, K.S. (1975) ***Modern Approaches to the Teaching of Reading and Their Application to the Reading Sections of the New Primary Courses***
- AL-Ni'aymi, H.S. (2005) "***A Pragmatic Approach of Acquiring the Fifth Skill (Translation) in the Process of Learning and Teaching English***". Tikrit University journal of Humanities , Vol. 12 , No. 4 May, 2005.
- AL-Zobaei A.J. & AL-Hamdani M. ***Test Construction***. Dar AL-Kutub, University of Mosul.
- Ching, D.C. (1976) ***Reading & Bilingual Child***, IRA, Newark, Delaware.
- Fischer, E. C. (1955) ***A National Survey of the Beginning Teacher***. New York, Holt
- Crafton, L. K. (1983) ***Teaching Reading with other Language Arts***. IRA, New York, Delaware.
- Greene, H.A. & Pretty, W. T. (1971) ***Developing Language Skills in Elementary Schools*** Allyn & Bacon, inc. , Boston.
- Hann, P. (1971) ***Spelling, Structure & Strategies***. Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Hilmi, U.M. (1980) ***The Problem of Certain Peculiarities of English for Speakers of Arabic*** IDELTI, Iraq.
- Ladefoged, P. (1975) ***A Course in Phonetics***. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, inc.

Nassir, A. M. (1981) *Child Language Acquisition* IDELTI,.

Shani, A.R.M. (1977) "*The Place of Dictation in the Oral Approach to the Teaching of Foreign Languages*" . IDELTI,.

المصادر العربية

إبراهيم، يوسف حنا (١٩٧٧) صعوبات الدارسين والمعلمين والمشرفين في مشروع محو الامية
الالزامي في قضاء الحمدانية و الحلول المقترحة لها رسالة ماجستير، كلية التربية -
جامعة بغداد

أبو لبدة، سبع محمد (١٩٧٩) مبادئ القياس النفسي والتصميم التربوي، الاردن - عمان،
جمعية عمال المطابع التعاونية

البياتي، عبد الجبار توفيق واثناسيوس (١٩٧٧) الاحصاء الوصفي في التربية وعلم النفس،
بغداد، مؤسسة الثقافة العمالية.

الحمداني، موفق (١٩٨٢) اللغة وعلم النفس. الموصل، دار الكتب للطباعة والنشر، جامعة
الموصل

الدنان، عبدالله (١٩٨٤) الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة الكويتيون في تعلم لفظ اصوات اللين
في اللغة الانكليزية. المجلة التربوية، العدد (٤٢) السنة الاولى، المجلد الاول،
سبتمبر ١٩٨٨.

الغريب، رمزية (١٩٧٧) التقويم والقياس النفسي والتربوي، القاهرة، مكتبة الانجلو - مصرية.
الفخري، سالمة داؤود وآخرون (١٩٨٢) سيكولوجية الطفولة والمراهقة. مطبعة جامعة بغداد
عبد المجيد، عبد العزيز (١٩٦١) اللغة العربية اصولها النفسية وطرق تدريسها، الجزء الاول،
الطبعة الثالثة، دار العارف بمصر.