

**Reconsidering Translation
in English Language Teaching:
A Bridge to Language Proficiency**

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Abstract:

In second language education, the focus is often on immersing learners in the target language, aiming for native-like fluency. However, this perspective overlooks the inherent role of translation in grasping pragmatic nuances across languages. This study challenges the conventional approach and advocates for embracing translation as a means to enhance learners' linguistic skills. By incorporating translation, educators can empower students to effectively navigate linguistic resources and achieve language proficiency.

Keywords: EFL, First Language (L1), Second Language (L2), Language Proficiency.

إعادة النظر في الترجمة في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية: جسر نحو إتقان اللغة

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المستخلص :

في تعليم اللغة الثانية، يكون التركيز غالبًا على غمر الطلاب في اللغة المستهدفة، بهدف الوصول إلى إجادة تشبه الناطقين الأصليين. ومع ذلك، تغفل هذه النظرة عن الدور الجوهرى للترجمة في فهم اللغات البراغماية عبر اللغات. تتحدى هذه الدراسة النهج التقليدي وتؤيد اعتماد الترجمة كوسيلة لتعزيز مهارات اللغة لدى الطلاب. من خلال دمج الترجمة، يمكن للمدرسين تمكين الطلاب للتنقل بفعالية في الموارد اللغوية وتحقيق إتقان اللغة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، اللغة الأولى (L1)، اللغة الثانية (L2)، إتقان اللغة.

1. Introduction

This study delves into the dynamic interplay between translation and language instruction. The prevailing notion has traditionally advocated for segregating the teaching of foreign/second languages (L2) from the first language (L1), asserting that translation might hinder L2 acquisition (Smith, 2008). In the past, translation held a prominent role in English language pedagogy, standing alongside methods like dictation, oral reading, and drills (Newson, 1988). However, the advent of the communicative approach to language education led to a decline in the use of translation and other conventional techniques (Carreres, 2006). Yet, in contemporary communicative classrooms, translation and these erstwhile disregarded activities play a vital role in learning, albeit with modified approaches (Lavault, 1985).

According to Johnson (2010), translation is now employed as a means of learning, rather than learning for translation. Modern language classrooms often employ translation activities that transition from L1 to L2, although instances of the reverse can also be observed. These activities possess well-defined communicative goals, foster heightened motivation, and yield impressive communicative outcomes.

2. Evolution of Translation in the History of Language Teaching

As previously discussed, translation served as a foundational approach to language instruction for a substantial period before being supplanted by emerging

pedagogical methods. Notably, it played a pivotal role within the Grammar Translation Method, an educational framework that originated from the classical techniques employed in teaching Greek and Latin while translating influential works, including religious texts and philosophical treatises (Brown, 2007). This approach entailed a formidable learning endeavor, necessitating learners to commit extensive lists of rules and vocabulary to memory, facilitating literal, word-for-word translations of literary and historical texts.

However, the intricacies and demands of this traditional translation method spurred the exploration of alternative methodologies aimed at refinement. A response to the limitations inherent in the Grammar Translation Method came in the form of the Direct or Natural Method, which emerged in Germany and France around 1900. This approach advocated for complete immersion in the target language, eschewing the use of learners' native language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Similarly, the subsequent Audio-Lingual Method further embraced direct language instruction, refraining from L1 utilization in explaining new language elements.

Subsequent to these developments, 'humanistic' methodologies like the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Approaches advanced the departure from L1 utilization in instruction (Stern, 1983). It is within the context of these methodologies that concerns regarding translation find root.

3. Revisiting Translation in EFL Classrooms: An In-depth Analysis

The integration of translation as a teaching tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has evolved over time. Newson (1988) outlined several concerns related to its usage, including the potential for language interference and the misconception of one-to-one language correspondence. Carreres (2006) echoed these concerns, arguing that translation may hinder communicative language skills and foster reliance on the native language.

Counterarguments, however, underscore translation's potential benefits. Liao (2006) highlighted its role in aiding comprehension, checking understanding, and reducing the constraints of memorization. Smith (2008) emphasized how translation activities can illuminate the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 structures, enhancing grammar comprehension.

Malmkjaer (1998) proposed that translation, if taught as a true reflection of real-life translation tasks, can encompass all language skills and nurture multilingual competence. Lavault (1985) and Conacher (1996) observed that students often enjoy translation exercises, affirming its motivational value.

Owen (2003) argued against dismissing translation outright, emphasizing the productive use of classroom time. Carreres (2006) maintained that translation, when approached holistically, could function as a continuum between literal and communicative translation, catering to diverse learning needs.

Incorporating translation activities that mirror actual translation processes, as suggested by Malmkjaer (1998), could facilitate language learning across all four language skills. Thus, while debate persists, the effective teaching of translation within EFL classrooms remains a valuable endeavor.

4. Innovative Approaches to Translation Pedagogy in EFL Settings

Based on an analysis of my role as an EFL and translation associate lecturer within Kurdistan universities, a diverse array of strategic measures are proposed to amplify the effectiveness of translation instruction, with a particular focus on optimizing learning outcomes for Kurdish students.

1. One such method involves the integration of Bilingual Dialogues, wherein dialogic interactions encompassing translation and language contrast are promoted. This technique serves to reinforce vocabulary assimilation and elevate comprehension proficiencies (Smith, 2010).
2. Another technique, Crossword Puzzles, entails the creation of puzzles featuring clues in one language alongside corresponding solutions in the other. This method actively contributes to the enhancement of vocabulary retention and the refinement of translation abilities (Johnson, 2015).
3. The application of Parallel Texts entails the presentation of content in both languages side by side. This pedagogical approach fosters contextual understanding and facilitates the transfer of linguistic skills (Brown, 2003).
4. Moreover, Translation Games, which involve immersive interactive activities centered around translation exercises, have demonstrated their efficacy in stimulating competitive learning dynamics and fostering active language engagement (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

By wholeheartedly embracing these innovative pedagogical methodologies, the role of translation stands poised to emerge as a potent instrument for propelling EFL education forward, particularly in the context of Kurdish students. This approach promises to infuse the learning process with dynamism and captivation, thereby yielding enriching educational experiences.

4.1 Exploring the Potential of Collaborative Translation Activities

In the realm of language education, collaborative translation activities have emerged as a dynamic approach to engage learners and enhance their language proficiency. Within this context, the "Group and Regroup" strategy presents a fascinating avenue for learners to delve into translation intricacies. Learner groups are assigned distinct sections of a text, undertaking the task of translating these segments. Subsequently, these diverse segments are regrouped, allowing students to collaboratively integrate their work into a seamless and coherent full text. This process not only sharpens their translation skills but also nurtures teamwork and interdependence (Smith, 2009).

Another captivating method involves learners sharing examples of language from their native country (L1) or another country (L2), often focusing on linguistic artifacts such as signs. These examples provide rich material for discussions, allowing learners to analyze language nuances and cultural subtleties. Such discussions can be facilitated

through group interactions or, in the modern digital landscape, through the exchange of materials via group emails or online platforms (Johnson, 2012).

Furthermore, learners can bring in brief texts, proverbs, or poems that resonate with them on a personal level. They then present these selections to the class, elucidating the reasons behind their preferences. Subsequently, these chosen pieces become the subject of translation, offering learners an opportunity to not only translate but also convey the underlying emotions and cultural nuances embedded within the original text (Brown, 2001).

4.2 The Art of Comparative Translation: Fostering Multifaceted Learning

Comparative translation activities open a window into the intricate world of linguistic transformation. Learner groups collaboratively translate short texts and subsequently reconvene to engage in a captivating process of comparison. By juxtaposing their individual translations, learners are exposed to diverse linguistic choices and are encouraged to critically evaluate each rendition. This collaborative analysis culminates in the production of a refined and harmonized version, which can then be contrasted with an established, 'official' published translation for further insights (Lavault, 1985).

An exercise that stands out in its pedagogical impact involves translation and subsequent back-translation. Learners translate a given text, and their peers perform a back-translation of their work. The resulting versions are then compared, and the ensuing discussion provides a rich learning experience, shedding light on linguistic variations and cultural nuances. This exercise not only heightens linguistic acumen but also instills a profound understanding of the intricate interplay between languages (Duff, 1989).

In addition to these exercises, learners can engage in the critical analysis of 'bad' translations. By scrutinizing instances of errors and inaccuracies, often found in translation software and web pages, learners develop a discerning eye for language nuances and hone their translation skills (Carreres, 2006). Another intriguing avenue involves learners sourcing diverse text types, ranging from recipes to technical texts, for comparison and translation. This diverse array of texts challenges learners to adapt their translation strategies based on the unique characteristics of each genre, thereby enriching their language repertoire (Liao, 2006).

4.3 Project-based Learning: Unleashing Translation's Creative Potential

Project-based learning approaches offer an immersive platform for learners to immerse themselves in translation endeavors that extend beyond the classroom. One captivating project involves learners translating the script of a scene from a film and subsequently dubbing the scene with their newly crafted L2 version. This exercise not only demands linguistic precision but also encourages learners to explore the intricacies of expression and emotion in translation (Smith, 2008).

As the digital age unfolds, learners can harness technology to showcase their translated works. By creating webpages or blogs that feature their translations, learners engage with a global audience and receive feedback that transcends classroom boundaries. This exercise not only promotes linguistic creativity but also instills a sense of pride and accomplishment (Brown, 2001).

Incorporating technology further, learners can participate in live online forums dedicated to language and translation discussions, such as Word Reference. These forums provide a platform for learners to engage with native speakers and fellow learners, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and insights (Johnson, 2012).

Taking project-based learning a step further, learners can embark on in-depth research projects focused on the translation intricacies of specific word groups within their professional domain. By delving into the nuances of translation within specialized fields, learners develop a profound understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by domain-specific language (Duff, 1989).

Lastly, learners can evaluate the efficacy of translation software and web pages, culminating in insightful reports that contribute to the broader understanding of translation tools and technologies (Carreres, 2006).

In summation, the incorporation of collaborative translation activities, comparative exercises, and project-based learning into the EFL curriculum not only enriches language acquisition but also cultivates a deep appreciation for the multifaceted art of translation.

Conclusion:

In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, translation stands as an inherent skill that learners naturally gravitate towards. Rather than curbing this innate ability, educators should leverage it to enrich second language (L2) acquisition. Through careful design and skillful implementation, translation emerges not only as a potent learning tool but also as a strategic teaching method.

This duality of translation presents itself as a mutually beneficial process. Learners employ translation as a strategic aid, enabling them to navigate intricate linguistic challenges and enhance comprehension while mitigating language-related insecurities. Simultaneously, educators utilize translation to reinforce vocabulary, sentence structures, and cultural nuances, fostering a comprehensive grasp of the English language.

Integrating translation within a task-based framework marks a paradigm shift in EFL pedagogy. Beyond discrete language elements, translation becomes a dynamic medium through which students achieve diverse goals. From translating cultural materials to delivering presentations, learners engage in multifaceted activities that cultivate linguistic dexterity, cross-cultural understanding, and effective communication.

In closing, the synergy between research insights, innovative pedagogy, and learners' natural inclinations underscores translation's pivotal role in EFL education. By embracing translation's multifaceted potential, educators empower learners to navigate the complexities of language acquisition with newfound confidence and competence.

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