

Translation as a Teaching Tool in EFL Classes at the University Level

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ABSTRACT

The current research aims at studying students' attitudes towards the instructors' use of translation in EFL classes at university level. It hypothesizes that students have a positive attitude towards instructors' use of such a means. The research is limited to a sample of 47 male and female 2nd year students at the department of English language, college of Languages, Nawroz University during the academic year 2020-2021. To study the sample's attitudes, a questionnaire that subsumes (20) relevant items has been designed and administered to the sample of students. The results show that students have positive attitudes towards their instructors use of translation in English as a Foreign language (EFL) classes at university level. In the light of such results, some recommendations have been put forward.

1. Introduction

The process of learning a language other than one's own is characterized by the availability of some already developed physiological and mental abilities. The latter makes the learner think of, and feel and behave towards the objects or phenomena around him, including the learning of the new language. In other words, there exist, on the part of the learner, positive or negative attitudes towards such objects or phenomena, and which are mostly determined by a set of relevant influential factors. There has been an ongoing debate concerning the usage and purpose of translation in language teaching since the 1980s, and there is an ever-increasing number of publications on the subject (Gutierrez-Colon, 2013). However, under the influence of a long period of exclusion from language classes, teachers are still unsure about the reasons for and methods for including translation into their instruction (Macaro, 2005). Although translation is becoming more valuable in light of the growing importance of plurilingualism and multilingualism, i.e., the increasing value of every language we know, and because of the adoption of the cognitive approach to learning, which involves building new knowledge on top of existing knowledge (L2 on L1), as well as the incorporation of various methods into language teaching to achieve this (Tekin, 2010). Given the inability of practitioners to draw unambiguous conclusions from theory or studies, it is necessary to gain insight into language for specific purposes teachers' current practice and views concerning translation in language teaching.

1.1 The Problem of the study

The problem of the present research stems from the controversy that has always been going on concerning the use of students' native language in EFL classes at university level. At the time instructors are supposed to deliver their lectures fully in EFL so as to fully embody the recommendations set by the educational authorities that no heavy use of students' native language is allowed in such classes, it is noticed that a noticeable duration of the time of the lecture is passed with instructors' use of translations. Such a use is viewed differently and to varied degrees by university students' majoring in EFL. At the time some students favour the use of translation and see it as a means to deepen and enhance their understanding and learning of the teaching materials, other students view it as a waste of the time that is supposed to be dedicated for the teaching of EFL and hence they lose more chances to think in the language and effectively learn it.

1.2 The Hypothesis

Students at the Department of English, College of Languages, Nawroz University have positive attitudes towards their instructors use of translation in EFL classes at university level.

1.3 Aims of the study

This research aims, in the first place, at identifying students' attitudes towards instructors' use of translation in EFL classes at university level. It further aims at shedding light on the concept of attitude in terms of its definition and components, and on translation in terms of its definition, types and merits and demerits behind its use in EFL classes.

1.4 Limits of the study

The present research is limited to the study of the attitudes of a sample of 2nd year students towards their instructors use of translation in EFL classes at the Dept. of English / Nawroz University during the academic year 2020-2021.

1.5 Value of the Research

This study is expected to be of benefit to EFL university teachers as it will enable them to be familiar with their students' attitudes towards the use of translation in teaching. Students are expected to benefit from the theoretical part of the research as they will be familiar with the merits and demerits of using translation in teaching EFL.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Translation

Hartmann and Stork (1972) define translation as the process of changing utterances (speech) and written materials (texts) represented by thoughts and arguments from one language into another language.

Translation was the basis of language teaching for a very long time, and then rejected as new methodologies started to appear. It was a key element of the Grammar Translation Method which was not a positive learning experience for many because

learners' memorizing huge lists of rules and vocabulary made them get involved in translating whole literary or historic texts word for word. The Direct Method was a response to the obvious problems associated with the Grammar Translation Method. In this method, the teacher and learners avoided using the learners' native language and just used the target language. Like the Direct Method, the later Audio-Lingual Method tried to teach the language directly, without using translation to explain new items. Subsequent methodologies such as the Silent Way and Total Physical Response and communicative approaches moved even further away from the native language, and from these arise many of the objections to translation.

2.2 The advantages and disadvantages of using translation in EFL classes

Translation was a significant part of English Language Teaching (ELT) for a long time, and then a significant missing part for a long time also. It is not utterly bad as a teaching technique. The idea that translation includes a 50% use of the native language when things are supposed to be said in the FL that is taught makes the people concerned have different viewpoints concerning the use of it in FL classes, especially at university level where students are supposed to be studying at an advanced stage. But when it comes to the matter of making learners understand the material with less effort and time, we can see advocates who strongly support the use of translation in FL classes. It is worthy to note that translation and other supposedly abandoned activities are now a feature of many communicative classrooms and successful aids to learning, although the approach to using them has changed. Besides translation, code-switching Nida (1975) stated that “with the acceleration of globalization, communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds has become increasingly important”. Hence, translation is seen to be an important “bridge” for intercultural communication. While Duff (1989, p. 34) explained that “teachers and students now use translation to learn, rather than learning translation”. Also, while some researchers such as Kern, 2008; Mallo, 2003; Wechsler, 1998; Wiersema, 2005 believe that translation is serving as an effective tool in the understanding of target languages, others such as Luo, 2007; Richards and Rodgers, 2001, see long-standing use of translation as an obstacle to the development of capacity of using the target languages (Chengdu, 2015, p.39).

With regard to the advantages of translation as a teaching tool, Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that translation has a long history in language teaching, it provides “equivalents” in the learners' mother tongue to help them learn syntax and lexis of the target language easily and effectively. It is viewed as the most acceptable and favorite model of language teaching which can be used as a convenient shortcut especially concerning grammar and vocabulary teaching. Chengdu (2015, pp. 38-39) adds that translation as a traditional and ancient teaching method is still applied by a great number of teachers in EFL classrooms and plays an important part in English teaching and learning. It is a teaching method that can serve a useful instructive means in English language acquisition. Hummel (1990) appreciates the role of translation as a teaching method in EFL and it is the most effective strategy and may contribute to a detailed and impressive memory encoding. He also points out that, for a group of learners who speak the same native language, translation would be the most effective strategy and may contribute to a detailed and impressive memory encoding. Translation could be a natural and essential activity often accompanied with language teaching and learning.

Jin and Cortazzi (2002) view translation as a highly valued approach for people to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers and to achieve an effective and successful intercultural communication. In order to affect the communication among people from various language backgrounds, translation is being used at almost any given moment. It serves as a means of information delivery in various situations, such as international conferences and summits, importations and exportations,

international customs, transportations and foreign affairs, etc. It is occurring in specific communicative settings for particular purposes and becoming an integral part of the modern society.

Quoting Kuhiwczak and Littau (2007) and Wechsler (1998), Chengdu (2015, p. 40) states that translation can not only help language learners understand a new language easily and effectively, but also provide them with the first experience of a foreign tongue and an exercise to better understand original materials.

Cook (2011, p. 1) argues that using translation is surely a natural and obvious means of teaching someone a new language. It can be used to aid learning, practise what has been learned, diagnose problems, and test proficiency. It is such a fundamental basis for language learning and a useful skill in itself. Translation allows learners to relate new knowledge to existing knowledge, promotes noticing and language awareness, and highlights the differences and similarities between the new and existing language. Many people also find the tackling of translation problems intellectually stimulating and aesthetically satisfying. It helps create and maintain good relations between teacher and student, facilitates classroom management and control, and allows students to maintain their own sense of first language identity, while also building a new bilingual identity.

Mallol (2003) states that for one thing, translation may be the easiest means of explaining the meanings of words, phrases and grammatical rules within the target languages. Learners tend to use their first languages to facilitate L2 (Second language) learning especially translating the meanings of L2 into L1 to get better understanding of L2, grasp the knowledge of L2 and memorize the relevant information. In addition, it is believed that language learners' strong competence in their mother languages can contribute to the enhancement of second language skills. Hence, language learners can make the most of their mother tongues to facilitate their second language learning (Luo, 2007). For another thing, translation can be serving an increasingly important function for people to understand and learn foreign cultures. It is believed that the process of translation offers an access to other culture. Luo suggests that translating the meanings of the target language into the native language is a good way to help students better understand the target language, grasp the knowledge of the target language and memorize the relevant information easily and effectively. This could also make students clearly see the relationship between language usage and grammar within both languages, learn both two languages thoroughly, deepen their understandings of both cultures and enhance their knowledge of language structures.

To conclude, translation helps learners understand learning materials better, aids in understanding the meanings of original messages, helps in developing an English thinking mode, enhances the proficiency in the use of English, provides learners with a better understanding of sentence structures, provides learners with a better understanding of the western cultures as the texts contain various idioms and native expressions, helps in reviewing textbooks and previewing upcoming texts and get the main meaning of new vocabulary, helps in grasping what the teacher would have taught in the class and receive new knowledge easily, saves the time of explaining English with English, enhances the understanding of various materials in the target language, helps to memorize vocabularies, facilitates in the process of language teaching and communication with students, makes it easy to communicate with their students, encourages learners to ask and propose questions in their native language based on their understanding of what their teacher stressed in the class, enables English language teachers could receive feedback on how much

their students grasped and understood what was taught during classes, enables language teachers and learners to have access to intercultural experiences and enriches learners' minds and broaden their horizons.

As for the disadvantages of translation and the possible problems with using translation by looking at possible negative impact on learners and then on teachers, translation teaches learners about language, but not how to use it, does not help learners develop their communication skills, encourages learners to use L1, often for long periods of class time, when the aim of modern teaching is to remove it from the classroom, uses skills unsuitable for all kinds of learners, is a difficult skill which must be done well in order to be productive and rewarding. Added to that, translation activities are tricky to set up and take a lot of preparation, especially anticipating possible problems, translation requires a motivated class, the teacher needs to have a sophisticated knowledge of the L1 and the L1 culture otherwise translation can create more problems than benefits. Translation is by definition text-bound, and confined to the two skills of reading and writing. This makes it hard to justify for many classes with time restrictions.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), translation hampers the improvement of students' speaking skills because of its emphasis on the understanding of grammatical rules and the meanings of the target language. It is believed that the long-standing use of translation probably stops language learners from thinking and conveying their ideas and thoughts in the target language, and also increases the difficulties in the development of thinking styles in the target language.

Luo (2007) suggests that translation should be limitedly in the process of language acquisition because translation used as a teaching method reverses the language learning process. Freeman (2000: 44) explains that the natural order of learning a language should be "listening, speaking, reading and writing", which is the way how children learn their native languages in natural surroundings.

Finally, Chan (2004) states that the attempts that are seeking a compromise to bring the two contradicting viewpoints together entail that translation should be considered as an index of one's proficiency in a language and as an exercise that involves various aspects including cultural backgrounds, individual comprehensions and language competency. These factors require translators not only possess a profound knowledge of the source language to perceive the meaning in different contexts, but also to have the ability to recreate the messages in the target language precisely. Besides, translation also concerns linguistic, textual and social systems that are related to both languages and cultures. Therefore, language teachers should enrich their knowledge in both mother tongue and the target language as well as improve their language competence including translation skills to achieve an effective and successful language teaching objective.

2.4 Attitude

At the inception, there have been three earliest definitions of attitudes which can be traced back to the early decades of the past century. Lickert (1932: 9) defines an attitude as "a disposition to the attitude objects". On his part, Allport (1937: 6) says that it is not difficult to trace the common thread running through the diverse definitions of attitude. In one way or another, each regards the initial feature of attitude as a preparation or readiness for response. He further defines attitude as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related". As such, 'attitude' is incipient and preparatory rather than overt and consummatory. It is not behaviour, but the preconditions of behaviour.

Attitude is further viewed to be resistant to change but not immutable, and is not amenable to direct observation (Harpin, 1979, p. 38). Brown (2000) states that the term attitude is more general than the other terms, namely position, posture, and policy that refer to the personal feelings. Based on the preceding realizations, attitude is a theoretical concept that outlines someone's degree of like (positive stance) or dislike (negative stance) towards an object, an idea, an event, or people. It is also viewed as a learned habit for reacting to social provocations Brown (2000, p. 180) views attitudes to be like

all aspects of the development of cognition and effect in human beings, develop early in the childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitude of contact with people who are "different" in any number of ways, and of interacting factors in the human experience.

On this basis, attitudes are crucial in the study of social psychology since they affect the attention and the judgment that someone might express to a particular subject.

Attitudes have become an important field of study by psychologists for a long time. Immediately after the establishment of social psychology, the concept of attitude stood by itself as a focal point of both study and research. Lambert and Lambert (1964, p. 150) state that "the study of attitudes has become a major concern over the years because it is a complex psychological phenomenon that has tremendous social significance". This supports the view that attitudes are of more interest to social psychologists than other varieties of social motives as they, i.e., attitudes, play a key role in directing and channeling social behaviour. Sherif (1979, p. 2) points out that studying attitudes means talking about what a person has learned in the process of being a member of a family, a group, or a society at large and in such a way that makes him approach his social world in a consistent and characteristic, rather than in a transitory and haphazard way. It means talking about a person who is no longer neutral in sizing up the world around him as he is either attracted or repelled, for or against, favourable or unfavourable, especially when his behaviour toward the persons, groups, institutions, notions, and things in his environment takes on a consistent and characteristic pattern as he becomes socialized; a point that indicates how attitudes towards any phenomenon or object in the environment make the persons involved either be attracted to or repelled from it, and take over a certain way of thinking, feeling, and behaving towards the phenomenon or the object in question (Ahmed, 1989; Alzebaree, 2020).

3. Procedure and Data Collection:

To bring about the aims of the current research, a questionnaire of 18 items that represent different practice techniques of the four linguistic skills and of much relevance to the topic of the present research paper was designed (See Appendix). The two samples of students were asked to give their responses according to a 5-point scale that ranges from "To A Very Low extent" to "To a Very High Extent" in terms of the free practice techniques they do outside the classroom setting.

3.1 Population and Sample of the Research

To collect data for the current study, (60) 2nd year students participated from the department. of English language / College of Languages / Nawroz University/academic year 2020-2021. Due to some reasons, 13 students were excluded, therefore, a sample of (47) students were selected from the population mentioned above.

3.2. The Research Tool

A questionnaire comprises 18 items have been adopted in the current study in order to obtain precise responses from the participants of this study. Before distributing the questionnaire to the students, it was given to a number of jury member, then they were asked to state their responses according to a 5-point scale that ranged from (A very low Extent to (A Very High Extent) by ticking in the square of the option that best applies to him and her(See Appendix I). The options given were as follows: A Very Low Extent (VL) / A Low Extent (L) / Undecided (U) / A High Extent (H) / A Very High Extent (VH)

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

The data collected via the questionnaire administered to the sample selected for the current research were analyzed in terms of frequency, percentages, and the Weighted Arithmetic Means (WAM) of the recurrence of responses to each item. To make the contents of Table 1. more understandable, the items of the questionnaire are ranked according to their mean scores from the highest to the lowest:

Table 1. The items of the questionnaire ranked according to their mean scores from the highest to the lowest

No.	Items	Mean	Option
8	Instructors should use translation of the difficult points only.	4.37	VH
9	The less instructors use translation, the better is students' understanding.	4.02	VH
7	In EFL classes, the use of translation should be limited to vocabulary only	4.01	VH
17	If I was opted, I would never attend an EFL class with translation.	3.92	H
18	Translation in EFL classes helps in better understanding, analysis and knowledge of the materials taught.	3.8	H
14	An EFL class with translation is very boring.	3.71	H
5	It is beneficial to use translation in EFL classes of linguistics.	3.51	H
11	Translation minimizes students' chances to think in English	3.53	H
12	Translation complicates matters rather than simplifying them in EFL classes.	3.24	H
13	In EFL classes, only weak instructors make much use of translation.	3.24	H
15	Instructors should be officially informed by the Dept. authorities not to use translation in EFL classes.	3.2	H
10	Translation should be totally eliminated from EFL classes.	2.9	M
4	I want everything in the EFL class to be translated into my native language	2.8	M
2	Classes with translation are very beneficial.	2.8	M
6	It is beneficial to use translation in EFL classes of literature	2.7	M

16	EFL Classes with much translation are almost deprived off any foreign culture elements understanding.	2.6	M
3	Translation in EFL classes is a waste of time.	2.4	M

Broadly speaking, the (18) items of the questionnaire have obtained mean values that range from (2.4) as the lowest mean score and as the only mean score that is below the mid-value (2.5), and (4.37) as the highest mean score. Although these results are good indicators of the positive attitudes that students have towards the use of translation in EFL classes at university level, we will go a step further and study the sample's attitudes in terms of two main points, namely "translation as a process" and "The benefits derived from the use of translation". Tables 2. and 3. will separately and successively attend to the two points already referred to.

table 2. The items of the questionnaire on "translation as a process" ranked according to their mean scores from the highest to the lowest

NO.	Items	Mean
8	Instructors should use translation of the difficult points only.	4.3
7	In EFL classes, the use of translation should be limited to vocabulary only	4.1
17	If I was opted, I would never attend an EFL class with translation.	3.9
14	An EFL class with translation is very boring.	3.7
13	In EFL classes, only weak instructors make much use of translation.	3.2
15	Instructors should be officially informed by the Dept. authorities not to use translation in EFL classes.	3.2
10	Translation should be totally eliminated from EFL classes.	2.9
4	I want everything in the EFL class to be translated into my native language	2.8
Average Mean		3.48

The (8) Items of the Questionnaire on "Translation as a Process" have obtained mean scores that range from (2.8) as the lowest mean score to (4.3) as the highest mean score. This indicates that the sample of students favour instructors' use of translation in EFL classes at university level and accordingly the hypothesis set for the current research which states that "Students at the Department of English, College of Languages, Nawroz University have positive attitudes towards their instructors use of translation in EFL classes at university level" is accepted.

To further validate the hypothesis already referred to, students' attitudes are going to be accounted for in terms of the benefits entails from instructors' use of translation in EFL classes. Consider Table 3:

Table 3. the items of the questionnaire on the “benefits derived from instructors use of translation” ranked according to their mean scores from the highest to the lowest

	Items	Mean
9	The less instructors use translation, the better is students' understanding.	4.0
18	Translation in EFL classes helps in better understanding, analysis and knowledge of the materials taught.	3.8
5	It is beneficial to use translation in EFL classes of linguistics.	3.5
11	Translation minimizes students' chances to think in English	3.5
12	Translation complicates matters rather than simplifying them in EFL classes.	3.2
2	Classes with translation are very beneficial.	2.8
6	It is beneficial to use translation in EFL classes of literature	2.7
16	EFL Classes with much translation are almost deprived off any foreign culture elements understanding.	2.6
3	Translation in EFL classes is a waste of time.	2.4
Average Mean		3.2

The (9) Items of the Questionnaire on “The Benefits derived from the use of translation” have obtained mean scores that range from (2.4) as the lowest mean score to (4.0) as the highest mean score. The former mean value, which is the lowest and the only one under the mid-point (2.5) stands for the item: “Translation in EFL classes is a waste of time” tells about the sample's favour of the use of translation since this negative item on translation has obtained the lowest mean score. The other mean scores, in spite of the variation, indicate EFL students favour of translation.

This indicates that the sample of students favour instructors' use of translation in EFL classes at university level and accordingly the hypothesis set for the current research which states that “Students at the Department of English, College of Languages, Nawroz University have positive attitudes towards their instructors use of translation in EFL classes at university level” is accepted.

5. Conclusion

Based on what has been discussed in results and findings section of the present study, It can be concluded that participants showed positive attitudes towards the use of translation in EFL classes at the university level. Also, this study reveals that translation is an integral part, in some cases and with certain contexts, of teaching the English language at the university level. In addition, there is a significant lack of a more innovative method to incorporate translation into the process of language teaching classrooms. As a result, more research should be carried out, more discussions should be conducted, and a closer

examination of the outcomes of translation studies should be done to clarify how to effectively use translation to improve language teaching and learning.

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