

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language is no doubt a challenging task for non-native speakers, especially if the language is distinctively different in terms of grammar, structure and pronunciation. Learner's beliefs have been found to greatly influence their determination and attitude towards learning the language and also the learning strategies that they use. One of the strategies commonly used in language learning is translation. Thus, the present study is mainly aimed and designed to identify students' beliefs of using translation as a strategy in foreign language learning and also to investigate the underlying reasons as to why they think this strategy is useful for them. A total of 100 samples from Universiti Putra Malaysia were chosen to help complete this study. Data collection was carried out using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT), which was originally designed and developed by Liao (2006). It consists of three parts with a total of 33 questions, including the demographic questions to ascertain the samples' background and open-ended structured questions to assess their opinions on the use of the translation strategy. The results of this study reported that the students mostly have positive beliefs about the use of translation as a learning strategy as they think it makes them understand the learning process and the language better. Although there are a small number of students that prefer to learn foreign language without the use of translation, they do not disagree with the matter of it being a useful strategy for new learners. It is hoped that the findings of this study will clarify the importance of the use of translation as a strategy in learning language and also how learner's beliefs would influence it.

Keywords:

translation, learning strategies, foreign language, language learning, students' beliefs, factors

INTRODUCTION

Ever since long ago, communication is considered essential in one's life. When there is communication, there will be language involved. However, according to Simons & Fennig (2018), there are about 7097 language spoken throughout the world today. This poses a problem as to how people with different language background would understand each other and also as to how messages would be conveyed, either by written text or spoken. Therefore, translation plays an important role in solving this problem. It can help in exchanging information and messages between languages (Owji, 2013). As to the meaning of translation, there are many definitions posed by various scholars. According to Wiratno (2003), translation is a process of transferring message from the Source Language (SL) into the Target Language (TL). Cook (2010) describes translation as a method of conveying oral and written messages from writing to speech or from one language to another. From this, it can be understood that translation deals with two different languages. The main objective of translation is to aid the communication process. This is done by interpreting the messages received in one language to another (Al-Musawi, 2014). Also, the meaning of a word or a sentence is conveyed appropriately in terms of linguistic, semantic and pragmatic by using translation as medium.

Hazlina Abdul Halim & Ang (2015) stated that for learners learning a foreign language, translation can be used as a strategy in learning. This strategy may help to aid their learning process and also help them in acquiring the new language. Hazlina Abdul Halim *et al.* (2016) confirmed that

foreign language learners equally admitted that using the strategy helped them to better understand a concept, a situation or a text. Moreover, Al-Musawi (2014) believes that translation is an efficient way for learners to develop their communicative competence. Another important thing to note about translation is in finding the equivalence in SL to TL (Abdul Ridha, 2014). This is because finding the right equivalence between the two languages will influence how the information is transferred.

The issue of using translation as a strategy in learning a foreign language has always been in debate in the academic world and it is considered a controversial topic. Most of the previous studies in this domain have all focused on using this strategy in learning English. There is a distinct absence of attention on the study of other foreign language such as French, German, Japanese et cetera. Furthermore, not many have discussed the reasons as to why learners think this strategy is useful in learning a foreign language. Hence, this study is conducted to investigate learners' beliefs in the use of translation as a strategy in learning foreign language and the underlying reasons why they think it is useful for them or why they think it is not useful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Fernández-Guerra (2014), translation is considered an activity that naturally occurs and takes place in the world. It is an act of communication that transcends languages and cultures. Cook (2010) stated that "being able to translate is a major component of bilingual communicative competence. The method of using translation as a strategy in foreign language learning has been a highly debatable issue. While there are numerous scholars who agree to the method, there are also a number of scholars who disagree. Cohen (2001) claims that the use of translation is proven to be successful in learning language and also using language in terms of writing, reading, listening and speaking. Learners can mobilize the strategy if they concentrate on how to use it effectively. Pourfarhad *et al.* (2018) suggested that translation students can improve better if they employ different translation strategies.

Additionally, Cohen (2001) mentions that there are two types of translation strategies, namely mental and written. Mental translations occur when learners feel comfortable translating in their mind. By doing this, learners are more flexible and open to intuitive flashes and would allow any translation pattern that may emerge. On the contrary, written translation is more tangible and can be more accurate as learners can see and gauge on their own translation and they can opt for other different approaches to translate it. Even so, although language learners and instructors realized that using mental translation while reading a text in the TL is unavoidable, both seem to have the opinion that translation is an undesirable "crutch" (Kern, 1994). When a situation occurs where a learner's objective is to become fluent in a foreign language, they are often encouraged to think in the TL as frequent as possible during the language learning and language use process (Cohen, 2001). Artar (2017) concluded that by looking at the literature in this field so far, it can be found that even though much has been said on the matter, not all arguments for and against translation actually specify substantial evidence.

Horwitz (1988) conducted a study to investigate students' views about translation. The results of the study indicate that 75% of students learning Spanish and 70% of students learning German mostly think that learning a foreign language is equivalent to learning how to translate the TL from English. Weschler (1997) also argues that referring to SL while learning TL does not deter thinking directly in the TL. The belief that thinking in the mother tongue will result to the occurrence of weird combinations of the native and foreign languages that students could not use in daily life is strongly disagreed upon.

According to a study done by Liao (2006), he explored the beliefs of college students on the role of translation in learning English using a developed survey. The aim of the study was to identify the strategies of translation that students use to learn English, to investigate the relationship between students' beliefs and the use of translation, and to assess the extent to which students' background

variables relate to their beliefs about translation and its strategic use. In order to realize his objectives, he employed survey questionnaires and qualitative interviews. The findings show that students often use translation to learn English in terms of vocabulary words, reading and listening comprehension, writing, idioms, grammar and also speaking. It is suggested that “learners used a variety of strategies involving translation, including cognitive, memory, compensation, social and affective strategies,” and that “more proficient learners tended to report negative beliefs about translation and less use of translation, compared with their less-proficient peers”. Other than that, Ashouri & Fotovatnia (2010) conducted a study on Iranian EFL learners’ beliefs on translation. They also analyzed whether risk-taking and ambiguity tolerance influence the learners’ beliefs. The results of the study conclude that only the risk-taking factor affected learners’ beliefs and learners who are keen in taking risks had a more negative belief about translation.

Likewise, Bagheri & Fazel (2011) investigated on the use of translation strategy in writing by Iranian university students. 40 students who were learning English as a foreign language were randomly chosen. The students who participated were all students of Shiraz Azad University. Two questionnaires and one guided interview were employed. The questionnaires and interview were originally developed by Liao (2006) but have been adapted and modified to suit the Iranian context. The investigation’s findings indicate that Iranian university students believe that translation from Persian to English helped them considerably in terms of the acquisition of their writing skills. They also showed medium to high use of translation strategy in learning to write in English.

Even though the results are quite parallel with Liao’s (2006) findings, Bagheri and Fazel (2011) identified a few negative facets of using translation strategy to write in English. One of them is “translation can be erroneous because of multiple meanings of certain terms” and that “students are likely to produce Persian-style English,” and may “depend heavily on translation which may impede their progress in learning English writing”. Recently, Karimian and Talebinejad (2013) also conducted a study on Iranian English learners’ use of translation as a strategy to learn English. This is to discover how their native language is used as a learning strategy. A total of 170 students were taken as samples for this study. The criteria set for the samples was that they have to be students learning English in language schools. An ITLS questionnaire, developed by Liao (2006), was adapted and used alongside qualitative interviews with the samples. Findings of the study suggested that translation is used for the purpose of memorizing and acquiring English, for better comprehension of the language, self-assessment and to mingle with other people who could speak English as well. Moreover, these strategies are used to reduce learners’ anxieties and worries in class and increase their self-confidence so as to enable them to relax. The researchers also found that the learners understand their teacher better with the help of referring to Persian-English dictionary. This encouraged them to ask questions in the classroom and boost their self-esteem in regard to learning what they did now know in English.

Bong *et al.* (2018) did a study on students’ beliefs on translation strategy in learning German language. The objective of the study was to investigate the role of translation in aiding the students, which are non-native speakers, to learn German as a foreign language and to determine students’ beliefs about using translation in learning a foreign language. 60 respondents from a public university participated in her study. The respondents were all Malaysian undergraduate students learning German as a foreign language. Bong *et al.* (2018) employed a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to collect data. Based on the data obtained, the results showed that using translation as a strategy is believed to be an effective mean in learning the German language by majority of the students. Nevertheless, there are a small number of students who claim that they prefer learning the language without the help of translation, but they seem to agree that their learning strategy has been greatly influenced by translation, particularly in class when they have trouble understanding what their lecturer is saying in German.

According to an investigation led by Kobayashi & Rinnert (1992) on students’ perception about writing in second language through translating as compared to writing directly in the second

language, it is observed that 88% of the higher-proficiency participants, who were Japanese, favored writing direct in English over translation. 53% of lower-proficiency also preferred direct composition. The justification that they gave was because they wanted to be able to think directly in English. Of little difference to Kobayashi & Rinnert (1992), Prince (1996) conducted a research on the use of translation in learning second language vocabulary. His findings showed that using translation in learning vocabulary was greater in terms of the quantity of words learned. It is also emphasized that students mostly believe that it is more efficient to learn new words through translation as it is easier to see the new words' equivalence to their native language.

Wen & Johnson (1997) executed a comprehensive qualitative study to distinguish the differences between high and low achievers in using translation as a strategy. 10 students studying English in China were taken as samples. The data was collected through interviews, diary studies and strategy use while doing a task that comprises of reading. They concluded that suppressing the use of translation resolutely and consciously would be best for Chinese students. However, Hsieh (2000) sees it in another way. In spite of what Wen & Johnson (1997) had concluded, Hsieh (2000) reported that Taiwanese students' English have benefited from translation in terms of reading strategies, vocabulary learning and cultural background knowledge. He used a questionnaire to collect his data. 85% of the respondents believed that they pay more attention to the coherence and context of the English text by translating it while 73% conveyed that they discovered their native language's importance through translation. In general, translation had an appropriate effect on the students' English learning.

Mollaie, Taghinezhad & Sadighi (2017) investigated on the perceptions of learners and teachers in using translation as a strategy in learning English in an Iranian setting. Through the data collection and analysis, it can be found that the answers were not as 100% positive as some samples believed that using translation when learning a foreign language was beneficial but only up to a certain point. They argued that it is only effective when it comes to grammar and vocabulary as it can make the learners understand the meaning better. Moreover, some teachers also claimed that translation is very time-consuming and that the mother tongue would often interfere with learning another language.

Aside from that, the effectiveness of employing the grammar translation method when teaching and learning English was studied by Khan & Hafiza Sana Mansoor (2016). Grammar translation method is considered a very old and classic method which is still widely used in foreign language learning. According to Khan & Hafiza Sana Mansoor (2016), they noted that the difficulty in mastering the English language is due to the lack of English-speaking community. Thus, making it hard for them to learn the language through methods such as direct method and audio-lingual method. In this case, using translation with grammatical rules in teaching has become far easier and beneficial for both teachers and also learners. Also, the grammar translation method has become significantly helpful in developing and enhancing learners' reading and writing skills.

Hence, this study attempts to explore and identify student's beliefs in using translation as a strategy when learning a foreign language and to further discuss the reasons they choose to use it as a learning strategy.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 100 respondents of undergraduate and postgraduate students from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) have been chosen to take part in this study. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling regardless of their gender, ethnicity and courses but it can be seen that all of the respondents are students currently pursuing their studies at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, UPM. The age range criteria set for the respondents of this study is from 18 to 40 years old. Both quantitative and qualitative method has been employed in this study.

The instrument used in this study is an online questionnaire. The questionnaire is distributed via an online platform which is TYPEFORM. It is divided into three sections. The first section has four questions with the purpose of eliciting the respondent's demographic data such as gender, age, ethnicity and the foreign language they are currently learning. The next section is referred to as the Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT) which consists of 24 questions. The questions are in the form of a five-point Likert scale where the respondents are required to choose one answer that is closely related to their beliefs, by adapting Liao (2006)'s questionnaire. The last section of the questionnaire consists of five open-ended questions. This qualitative section is created to assess the respondent's reasoning as to why they think translation strategy is useful or not useful for them and to further support the quantitative data collected in the previous section.

The respondents were approached and given the online link to the online questionnaire and asked to answer the questionnaire on their mobile smartphones, laptops or tablets. In cases where they do not have smartphones, tablets or laptops, the researcher was required to lend a smartphone to allow them to answer all the questions. This is done with the respondents' full consent. Besides this, the online link was also distributed through WhatsApp. After all the data has been collected, a full report was generated by TYPEFORM in Microsoft Excel format and the data is analyzed. The mean, standard deviation and percentage for each of the answers for the questions in the first and second section were calculated in Microsoft Excel in order to summarize the respondents' responses to the IBT. The analysis was based on Oxford's related classification (1990) for understanding the mean scores on instruments with a response scale ranging from 1 to 5. Average scores of 3.5 to 5.0 ($3.5 \geq M \geq 5$) were defined as high means, 2.5 to 3.4 ($2.5 \geq M \geq 3.4$) were medium means, and lastly, 1.0 to 2.4 ($1.0 \geq M \geq 2.4$) were low means. As for the answers to the five open-ended questions, the answers were all analyzed and scrutinized to identify recurring themes. The findings are discussed further in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and findings of the respondents' belief in using translation as a strategy when learning a foreign language and the underlying reasons behind their beliefs. Microsoft Excel is used to calculate and complete the analysis of the data collected. The percentage of the answers from the respondents, mean and standard deviation of the answers are calculated and tabulated in order to fulfill the research objectives.

Descriptive Analysis of the Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT)

For section one of the questionnaire, the demographic data of the respondents were analyzed. It is found that 85% of the respondents are female and only 15% are male. 63% of the respondents are from the age range 18 to 22 years old, 36% are aged from 23 to 27 years old and only 1% is aged 28 to 40 years old. As for their ethnicity, 48% are Malay, 40% are Chinese, 3% are Indian and the remaining 9% from other ethnicities.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic

		No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	15
	Female	85	85
Age	18 - 22	63	63
	23 - 27	36	36
	28 - 40	1	1
Ethnicity	Malay	48	48
	Chinese	40	40

	Indian	3	3
	Others	9	9

The second part of the questionnaire addresses the first objective of the study which is to identify the students' beliefs in using translation as a strategy in learning foreign language. This section contains 24 items to assess the respondents' beliefs. The mean and standard deviation are calculated and tabulated for each question in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation for IBT Items

No. of Items	Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation
1.	Translating helps me understand textbook readings.	4.43	0.64
2.	Translating helps me write foreign language composition.	4.15	0.78
3.	Translating helps me understand spoken foreign language.	4.24	0.86
4.	Translating helps me speak foreign language.	3.94	0.91
5.	Translating helps me memorize foreign language vocabulary.	4.05	0.96
6.	Translating helps me understand foreign language grammar rules.	3.56	1.16
7.	Translating helps me learn foreign language idioms and phrases.	1.53	1.14
8.*	Translating does not help me make progress in learning foreign language.	2.42	1.37
9.	Translation helps me understand my teacher's foreign language instructions.	4.05	0.83
10.	Translation helps me interact with my classmates in foreign language class to complete assignments.	3.90	0.91
11.	The more difficult the foreign language assignments are, the more I depend on Chinese/Malay/English translation.	4.08	0.88
12.	Using Chinese/Malay/English translation helps me finish my foreign language assignments more quickly and save time.	4.20	0.75
13.	Using Chinese/Malay/English translation while studying helps me better recall the content of a lesson later.	3.86	0.87
14.	I like to use Chinese/Malay/English translation to learn foreign language.	4.19	0.77
15.*	The use of Chinese/Malay/English translation may interfere with any ability to learn foreign language well.	3.36	1.05
16.*	Chinese/Malay/English translation reduces the amount of foreign language input I receive.	2.94	1.24
17.	At this stage of learning I cannot learn foreign language without Chinese/Malay/English translation.	3.63	0.98
18.	I think everyone has to use Chinese/Malay/English translation at this stage of learning.	3.81	0.91
19.	I will produce Chinese/Malay/English-style foreign language if I translate from Chinese/Malay/English to foreign language.	3.60	1.03

20.	I prefer my foreign language teachers always use foreign language to teach me.	3.76	1.03
21.	I feel pressure when I am asked to think directly in foreign language.	3.83	0.88
22.	I tend to get frustrated when I try to think in foreign language.	3.41	1.00
23.*	When using foreign language, it is best to keep my Chinese/Malay/English out of my mind.	3.33	1.03
24.	I believe one needs to be immersed in a foreign language speaking culture for some time before he/she is able to think in foreign language.	4.12	0.86

* Items 8, 15, 16 and 23 were designed as negatively worded.

Based on the results tabulated in Table 1, 18 items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 24) were found to have the highest means ($3.5 \geq M \geq 5$). This shows that majority of the respondents agree that translation is useful as a strategy in learning foreign language and is regarded as the respondents' most common belief. Only 2 items (items 7 and 8) have relatively low means ($1.0 \geq M \geq 2.4$), which is considered as the least common belief held by the respondents, whereas the remaining 4 items (items 15, 16, 22 and 23) have medium means ($2.5 \geq M \geq 3.4$) which are labeled as common beliefs of the respondents. Broadly speaking, it can be said that majority of the respondents have positive views towards using translation as a strategy in learning and improving the foreign language that they are currently learning.

From the data collected, it is noticed that 51% of the respondents claimed that translating helps them understand textbook readings, which is the highest percentage for this study. This means that more than half of the respondents believe that translation helps them the most in terms of reading.

On the other hand, it is found that 80% of the respondents claimed translation never help them to learn foreign language idioms and phrases. This is perhaps due to the fact that idioms are subjected to the culture of the language thus it may mean differently than what it is translated as.

Underlying Reasons That Influences Students' Belief

The findings from section two of the questionnaire is further supported by the open-ended questions from the last section of the questionnaire. This part addresses research the second objective, which is to discuss the reasons behind why students' rationale on whether translation strategy in learning foreign language is good or not for them. From the responses, it was found that the responses are mostly inclined towards a more positive reasons and beliefs rather than negative. "Does? Why?", 75% of the respondents believed that translation will help to learn the foreign language structure/grammar. Some of responses are as follows:

Yes, because I could relate and have a better grasp what I am reading/listening.

Yes, because it helps me have a better understanding.

Yes. In a sense, a bit. Because grammar structure is more like a formula. If I understand the formula than I may construct the words.

Yes. I understand better by comparing both languages' grammar and sentence structure.

Majority of the respondents also expressed translation help them in completing their class assignments, as it helps them to better understand the context of the assignment and helps them construct sentences easier and faster. Added to this, 76% of the respondents expressed positive views

of translating the foreign language to their mother tongue while the other 15% disagreed. Some of the responses are as follows:

It depends. As a student whose major is English, it's better for him/her to reduce the rate to translate foreign language to their first language.

Yes, it is. I can understand the content and the structure of the sentences.

Not necessarily. Depends on how frequent I see the words.

Besides that, most of the respondents conveyed that translation helps them in increasing their lexical vocabulary and also understand the grammar and structure of the language better.

It helps me to understand the structure and grammar of foreign language better.

Makes me learn how to construct sentences and memorize words better.

Increase my vocabulary

Last but not least, for the last question “Would you recommend translation as a strategy to new foreign language learners?”, a vast majority of the respondents (95%) recommended translation as a good learning strategy to other learners. This is because they say it would help new learners in acquiring the language faster and so that they may understand the language better.

SUMMARY

To summarize the findings above, it is confirmed that most of the students have positive beliefs in using translation as a foreign language learning strategy. Out of 24 items in the IBT questionnaire distributed, 18 items were found to have high means (3.5 \leq M \leq 5) and only 2 items have the lowest means (1.0 \leq M \leq 2.4). Based on this, it can be deduced that students mostly believe that translation is a useful and supporting method that aids them in learning language and they make use of it as one of their learning strategies. The strategy is mostly used in terms of acquiring new vocabularies, in writing and also reading. As a matter of fact, the results obtained from this study are coherent with Liao's (2006) study where Taiwanese students believed that translation played a positive role in the process of them learning English. Moreover, the general results of this study also support Bagheri & Fazel (2011), Raeiszadeh et al (2012), and Bong *et al.* (2018), findings that, students most frequently use translation to learn English vocabulary words, idioms, phrases, and grammar, to read, write, and speak English, and to check their reading and listening comprehension. However, the findings from Mollaei, Taghinezhad & Sadighi (2017) contradicts to this study's findings as they are not all positive. It is found that some teachers consider that translation is not always helpful, and it is time-consuming.

CONCLUSION

This current study is an attempt to investigate students' belief in using translation as a strategy in learning foreign language and the reasons that influence their beliefs. Based on the results obtained, it is seen clearly that translation strategy is a common method that students use to learn a new language. They believe that the strategy helps them acquire all language skills so a majority of them have positive views about using it as a strategy in learning language. However, this study has its limitations in various aspects as it only takes into account certain variables. In other words, the language learners may not be well presented as this study focuses on foreign language generally and not a specific language.

In conclusion, this study is beneficial for students as it shows them the importance of using translation as a learning strategy, especially in learning a new language and also hope that it would help them learn foreign language more efficiently. Besides that, it is also beneficial for teacher and language instructors as it helps them be aware of their students' beliefs. Teachers and instructors should encourage their students to make use of translation strategically and effectively in order to help them learn in classroom context. In addition to that, this study is beneficial to researchers as it supports the findings of previous research of the same scope. Lastly, it is hoped that future research would focus on other aspects of the same field such as taking into consideration of gender differences or even the respondents' ethnicity in order to see whether such aspects would influence their beliefs.

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