

## Utilizing Translation to Boost EFL Learning at the Undergraduate Levels

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### Abstract

*The present research paper seeks to investigate the role of translation as an efficient learning tool to improve EFL learners' skills in broad general terms. Translation has been used for centuries by foreign language learners to facilitate language learning, but translation has played various roles under different language teaching methods. While some foreign language educators may consider translation as a critical means to ensure students' comprehension, other teachers may totally forbid or discourage the use of the native language and translation in the classroom. Thus, translation has long been neglected in second or foreign language (FL) classrooms because it was considered an inadequate reminder of old teaching methodologies, especially those associated with (or derived from) the grammar-translation method. This become increasingly evident mainly due to the beginning of Translation Studies as such and the direct, natural and communicative language teaching methodologies, which considered translation exercises as destructive for the development of the new language.*

**Keywords:** boost, translation, forbid, neglected, evident, communicative learning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars and educators have always tried to establish a link between EFL learning and translation in an attempt to find out the extent that translation can be useful in this domain. Translation in this context is

a means of teaching and learning. It is a tool to facilitate the process of acquiring the second language (L2). Translation in such a context is called pedagogical translation. The term pedagogical translation is suggested by Klaudy(2003:133) and Gile(1995: 52) as cited in Vermes (2010). Also J.P. Vinary and J. Darbelnet distinguished among educational translation, professional translation and linguistic research as cited in Cordero (1984). They all distinguished translation as a means of LFL, and call it the pedagogical translation, which varies from translation as a profession and they call it the professional translation. The interest of this study is the pedagogical translation.

Translation as a tool for language learning (L.L.) has always existed. It was first introduced as a method of teaching basing on the scholastic method (Hell, 2009); and the classical method, with which Latin and Greek were the only foreign languages to be learned in Central Europe in the medieval times. The Grammar Translation Method was emanated then. A lot of people now in the field do not encourage the use of translation in TEFL, putting in mind that method as it is, does not give much to the communicative competence of the learners, particularly in now the main purpose of learning modern languages is communication.

No one denies the importance of LFL especially English in this era, where it is the international language of science, technology and communication. English is the second language in terms of people who speak it as a native tongue. It is the most taught Lingua Franca in international circles. English is the language of "higher communication" in the third world countries (Zoghoul, 2003).

English language teaching tradition has encountered great changes. It is not like other subjects such as math or physics which have the same theories for years. Teaching foreign languages in general and particularly English has changed, developed and amended so much since its existence.

Language is as old as human history. Societies have enlarged and extended throughout the history so as cultures and languages, later the science of learning foreign languages have appeared, developed and strengthened, although the need to learn a foreign language by itself is as old as human history.

Translation has always been a part and parcel of LFL It was first introduced in the grammar translation method (GTM). Now translation is retrieved into L.L. as some authors and educators in the

field have strong beliefs about its role as a facilitating tool for the learning process. Although ELT and translation are two different areas of linguistics, they both have the same purpose that of communication. The study will review the relevant works of its history in the second chapter.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

With the growing importance of learner-centered method, researchers have attempted to lighten the load of language learning, and have investigated what is helpful for learners to achieve their objective in the most economical way. Among them, the use of translation and also its place has been a debatable topic. Although, most language educators are completely against the use of translation in English language classrooms, nowadays, this perspective is changing and more and more professionals have believed in the facilitating role of the students' native tongue in language classrooms. In most of Arabic countries, the mother tongue, Arabic, is the formal language of education. All students do their primary education in their mother tongue. If these students have an early exposure to the English language, it would make a big difference to them. Therefore, ignoring the use of learners' first language in English language classes could naturally lead to the students' de-motivation. The purpose of the present study is to deal with translation as a fruitful material in language classes and get rid of its reputation from what considered badly in GTM. Therefore, the challenging problem is to consider that whether translation use in EFL learning and EFL teaching is as facilitating or deteriorating matter.

## **3. OBJECTIVES**

This paper intends to explore the issue in question as aligned with a definite set of objectives including the following:

1. To make clear the pedagogical value of translation as a language learning tool.
2. To advocate some interesting translation tasks and techniques that will help motivate the learners through the use of translation acquire second language skills.

3. To find out the appropriate methods and techniques in connection with the application of translation skills in order to enhance second language learning.

#### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

##### **Questions of the study**

1. What is the pedagogical value of translation as a language learning methods?
2. How can interesting and motivating translation activities help the learners to acquire second language skills?
3. To what extent can the use of translation activities beside the appropriate methods and techniques, will enhance second language learning?

#### **5. HYPOTHESES**

1. Translation has a pedagogical value and can therefore help in foreign language learning.
2. Interesting and motivating translation activities help the learners to acquire second language skills.
3. The use of translation activities beside the appropriate methods and techniques will enhance second language learning.

#### **6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

This study is an attempt to help teachers to solve some of the problems of learning English language through utilizing authentic exercises of translation skills at university level. Again has the effect of drawing the learners' attention to the importance of studying cultural aspects of the target language as a means to enhance translation skills and this in turn will develop learning English language. The study also may have great benefits not only to those who are involved in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, but also syllabus designers and researchers who may get the most out of this research.

Translation exercises can weaken the linguistic system in both languages.

Translation has been handled as a method of teaching the language. It has encountered great debates about its role, some do not favor its use, among them Malmkjaer (1998), Modica (1991), Selinker (1992) and Dennis Newson (1998). Others believe it is important in L.L. Cordero (1984), Popovic (n.d.), Vermes (2003), Eadie (1999), Duff (1989), Lazar (1996), Atkinson (1993), Cunningham (2002), Shih-ChuanChang (2011) Cook (2007-2010) and Widdowson (2003), In the second chapter the researcher will deal with some of their ideas.

People in the field who do not favor translation in LFL rely on their negative perceptions about translation in the grammar translation method. The salient features of this method, according to Prator and Celce Murcia cited in Vaddariz (2012), are:

1. The mother tongue is the main medium of teaching.
2. Long lists of vocabulary are there in isolation.
3. Intensive explanation of grammar is given to the learners with rules of putting words together.

As mentioned above translation in L.L. is one of the old theories, it has been introduced since the 17th century in Europe but at that time learners had to learn by heart long lists of vocabulary and focus on grammar rules and syntactic structures and translate some literary works. There was no interest in the oral use of languages, as the purpose of learning Greek and Latin was not communication.

Now translation is introduced back in language classrooms as some EFL authors have strong beliefs about its importance in LFL. Duff (1989) states: "teachers and students now use translation to learn rather than learning translation". He gives reasons for the importance of employing translation in TEFL classrooms, he mentioned that translation develops accuracy, clarity and flexibility, it trains the learner to search (flexibility) for the most appropriate word (accuracy) to convey the meaning (clarity) (Duff; 1989/1996:7). Atkinson encourages teachers to use translation for learners in TEFL classrooms as there is always translation in their minds. Also Macau (2002) mentions that translation taken as a communicative activity can be diverse, imaginative and motivating. Another educator who encourages translation in the language classrooms is Beltran (2002), she says:[...] "translation could not only enhance the process of learning the language from a pragmatically and social point of view, but also contributes to a better and deeper understanding of the

second language and culture". More consideration will be shown for this issue in the Literature Review section.

The study will fill a gap in this topic of translation in TEFL, because when the researcher was looking for the literature and data on the topic few are found especially when Arabic is the mother tongue. Much is found when other languages such as German, Spanish, French or others rather than Arabic is the mother tongue. When literature is connected with Sudan the researcher found a nil research on the topic of translation in TEFL. The researcher's colleagues, some people in the field and some department heads reported nothing about a topic or a research of the kind. Nothing also was found in the university databases which are available for the researcher. A tour to some Universities' libraries in Sudan showed nothing.

This study will contribute in improving the level of the performance of foreign language. In Sudan English language is the main foreign language that is taught at schools, colleges and universities. No one denies the poor performance of English language among the university graduates.

## 7. DEFINITIONS OF TRANSLATION

Translation is the process of replacing the meaning from one language into another. One of the famed definitions is that expressed by Nida and Taber (1969: 12)

*Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.*

Bell (1991: 5-6), on the other hand, has emphasis on meaning and style when he translates the definition given by the French theorist, Dubois(1974):

*Translation is the expression in another language (or the target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences.*

## 8. TRANSLATION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The role that translation might play in language learning and acquisition has been the subject of debate in both Translation Studies

and language pedagogy. Despite the fact that language learning or acquisition is an obvious prerequisite for translation, very few experts in language pedagogy have felt inclined to recommend translation as a fruitful technique or assistance in language pedagogy, principally at beginner levels of the education system – even though many teachers have continued to find it beneficial. Harvey (1996: 46), for instance, clarifies the circumstances in France as in following statement:

*Until a few years ago, the use of L1, whether for the purposes of translation or grammar explanations, was officially outlawed in the classroom, although a number of teachers continued to engage in “undercover” translation .... The fact that the ban on translation was condemned back in 1987 by the APLV (Association des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes) in a special issue of Les langues modernes points to ... [a] gap ... between teachers faced with the day-to-day reality of the classroom, and official policy makers.*

## **9. TRANSLATION AS A PRACTICAL LANGUAGE-LEARNING TOOL**

During the latter half of the 20th century, translation has been employed a relatively debated role in second language teaching and learning. It was well thought-out as vital part of the grammar-translation method, besides the role which plays in the context of communicatively oriented approaches. In recent years, however, an increasing number of requests (e.g. Carreres 2007, Cook 2010, Howatt and Widdowson 2004) have been made for a more balanced theory test of the use of translation in FLT.

In line with the above observations, this idea eventually provide a great support to the statement that the time has come to reconsider translation as a practical language-learning tool which it can be used in the FLT classroom for future linguists and translators, particularly at an advanced level.

On the other hand, translation has been suffered the reputation of being an ill-suited aid in foreign language teaching and methodology. For most scholars, this deprived status was derived from the pre-eminent position of monolingual and communicatively oriented approaches in English language teaching (ELT), such as the audio-lingual method or communicative language teaching, within

which translation found no application or was even considered harmful.

The audio-lingual method and situational language teaching, which originated in the USA and UK in the 1960s, broaden the idea of foreign language learning as a process of - as Richards and Rodgers (2003:50f) put it - “mechanical habit formation”, maintaining that language skills (listening, writing, speaking and reading) were developed more efficiently in case the articles to be covered in second language (L2) were indicated in spoken form and with no resort to first language (L1). In this respect, the methods obviously excluded translation, and instead rested heavily on utilizing L2 exclusively, both within and beyond the language classroom.

One of language teaching approach is the communicative method, which leaned on the audio-lingual method and situational language teaching, gathered increasing attention in the 1970s and has occupied center stage in foreign language teaching to the present day. The main argument this teaching assumes is that learners need to be trained mainly for communicative states where second language (L2) will be only way to communicate, thus no alternative to first language (L1) (or translation) is necessary. In teaching communicative language, a native speaker of L2, occasionally with no lively awareness of the first language (L1), was also considered to be the best teacher and the ideal narrator. The communicative method was established basically on encouraging the use of non-contrived texts and examples, together with educational conditions which imitate real life.

The spread of international language schools, such as Berlitz (Cook 2010:7), as well as the worldwide marketing of course materials and textbooks by major international publishers including, amongst others, Oxford University Press (OUP) and Cambridge University Press (CUP), has made translation a dispensable and undesirable element because it does not necessarily contribute to their bottom line.

Translation as used by the grammar-translation method, which were designed primarily to improve students’ skills (reading and writing), and, at afterward stages, besides testing their knowledge. Cook (2010:10) indicates a prime example of what later came to be called a “synthetic syllabus” in which items to be learnt are



formulated, graded and presented to students in an ordered and cumulative way.

Since such translation is impossible without knowing vocabulary items, a few words were chosen by the instructor for the learners in each lesson with their meaning in second language. Therefore, the grammar-translation method indirectly permitted using one to one equivalence of the vocabulary items.

## **10. BRIEF HISTORY OF TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING TOOL**

There is a rapidly growing literature on the didactic role of translation in FLT. Recently, the method of using translation in English classrooms has been considered one of the most hotly debated issues—whether explicitly or implicitly—to different linguistic, psychological and pedagogical assumptions. Accordingly, a historical overview is crucial to reach rational conclusions about the role of translation in FLT and FLL; therefore, this may provide a general assistance to understand its current role in the Communicative approach as well as in the common framework of languages. Consequently, several schools of thought and methodologies have appeared such for instance, the Audio-lingual methods, the Direct Method, the Grammar-Translation as well as the Communicative approach.

## **11. THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD**

The Grammar-Translation method was originally established by German scholars (Howatt 2000: 131) and later on promoted by the American linguists, who make significant efforts to the usage of translation in FLT. Vermes (2010: 85), reports that the above mentioned method inherited the viewpoints of other traditional approaches, nevertheless at that time (19th century) it took place to be used along with modern languages. Vermes (2010: 86), also puts forward the view that the deficiencies of this approach are doubtlessly responsible for the general misapplication of translation in general and using translation in FLT in particular. Linguistics in 19th-century held the view that languages were subject to rules, which acceptable for communication between speakers. This is also one of

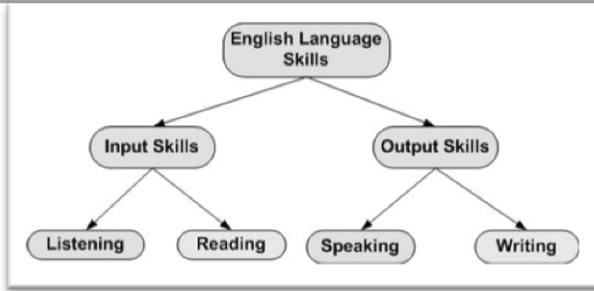
the implicit beliefs in the Grammar-Translation method, that is grammar rules has been created a formal code, of which proficiency in a language was assessed in terms of the lexical and grammatical accuracy (Enríquez Aranda 2003: 120). One of the basic techniques, he adds, in this method is to memorize the grammar rules and lists of vocabulary which support to promote deduction in general and translation and contrastive analysis in particular.

Some scholars have criticized this method for disregarding oral skills or interaction, due to the concentration on form and on written texts. In addition to be hardly motivating (Martín Sánchez 2010: 145). Bloomfield, who belongs to structuralism, stated that *“translation into the native language is bound to mislead the learner, because the semantic units of different languages do not match, and because the student, under the practiced stimulus of the native form, is almost certain to forget the foreign one”* (1933: 505). Because of all these criticisms, and others, this method has been ignored to be implemented as an educational tool in English classes.

## **12. THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION AND MOTHER TONGUE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING:**

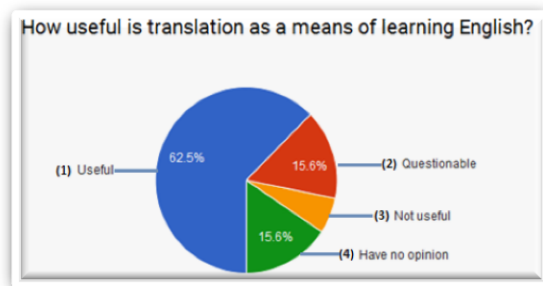
Our starting-point is to differentiate between two fundamental aspects, that is, the teaching of translation as a professional skill and the utilizing of the first language in English classes as supportive means in language learning.

In the last few decades, most methods in English language pedagogy dictate that L1 should be banned in English classrooms. Communicative approaches, in the past few decades, used to look at utilizing mother tongue or translation in English classrooms as destructive factor for learning process. Nevertheless, in recent times the mindset towards using translation and mother tongue in language classes has undergone a constructive alteration. Some recent linguistics every now and then identify translation as the fifth language skill along with the other four basic skills, that is reading, listening, writing and speaking. Other linguistics have classified them as input skills and output skills as shown in Figure.4



### 13. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:

The researcher uses the descriptive analyses method which considered as practical technique to identify the overall patterns of students' beliefs about using translation as a learning strategy in order to address the research questions. Participants responded to questionnaire's items, indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning their beliefs about translation.



The biggest slice of the above pie chart (2), approximately 56.3%, illustrates the students' attitudes who think that translation simplifies the learning process, reduces the tension towards the new language and minimizes time consuming when explaining new vocabularies. Whereas, 12.5% consider that translation skills only minimizes time consuming when explaining new vocabularies. Roughly the same number, that is 12.4%, reflects the idea that translation simplifies the learning process. About 18.8% indicate the learners' viewpoints that translation plays a great role in reducing the tension towards the new language.

**Table (1) Questionnaire’s items (pre- and post-test)**

No	Version	Means	S.D	T. value	Difference
1	Pre-test	10.9	9.5	6.5	Significance
2	Post-test	23.2	6.9	19.38	

The researcher calculated the means of pre- and post-test results (10.9 and 23.2) from a full mark (100) respectively and the standard deviation (9.5 and 6.9) respectively. The calculation shows that there is a significant difference in the students’ performance.

### Reliability of the test

The reliability of the test is calculated using the following ranks:

$$\text{Reliability} = 1 - \frac{6 \sum D^2}{N(N-1)} = .98$$

### CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the area of the role that translation might play in English language learning process. Translation in general, was and is still serves as a bridge from which the cultures cross to the rest of communities around the world, in other words, cultural exchanges are a way of building bridges between countries. Translation in particular, also acts as a tool for the progress and development of EFL students’ performance. Consequently, there have been some dispositions of using a mother tongue as a source to encourage EFL learners, since it is considered as one of the supporting factors in language pedagogy in order to improve learners’ capability in learning a new language. Translation method, on other hand, plays an important role in boosting the three crucial qualities of any language learning, that is, accuracy, clarity, and flexibility. Hence, translation can be provided not only as a tool for developing language skills, but also as a resource for the progression of second language acquisition.

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### Electronic Resources

Oxford English Dictionary Online: [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

<http://www.echoroukonline.com/ara/index.php?news=35535?print>.

Translation at the European Commission – a history  
[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/index_en.htm)

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