

Translation as a means of Developing University Students Writing Skills (Case study: Batch "36" Department of English – University of Gezira - Sudan)

Shirien Gaffar Mohammed

Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to examine whether translation has a role in developing language writing skill, and language learning in general. The study problem, the questions, significance and the hypotheses of the study which can be summarized in : Using translation in an English language promotes language learning, language writing skill can be taught effectively through translation. Chapter two is the literature review in which the researcher defines the language writing skill and the concept of translation, the methods of teaching writing skill also translation and language teaching approaches. Chapter Three: is a research methodology in which the researcher describes the methods and the techniques used to collect and analyze the required data. Two written tests were given to English language students last semester, Faculty of Education University of Gezira. The results prove that students' performance is progressing. Ten types of error categories were identities in the written test. Two translation courses are not enough. It would be very useful to encourage students to work in groups and increase the number of assignments. Students' writing samples must be distributed to them for correction and analysis. Evidence provided by the written samples suggests that L1 play a role in the progress of English language learning. Understanding linguistics differences between students L1 and English may help the learners reduce the mother – tongue interference.*

Keywords: Translation/Writing Skills

1. Introduction

Language productive skills have a complementary role in developing language learning. Success in language learning is measured in terms of learning how to speak the language and the ability to write it. But students feel that classroom-based speaking and writing practice does not prepare them for real world (even at university level).

One of the solutions of this problem is translation; Newmark (1993: 58) supports this view adding that, translation has a role in developing the four skills, ancillary to and as a component of a language learning course. This study, will try to manifest whether translation can throw interesting light on the fortunes of the English language, and how many problems in language learning can be solved by translation, especially improving learners' writing skills.

1.1. The Research Problem

The researcher carries out this study in order to examine whether translation has a role in developing language writing skill at university level.

1.2. Questions of the study

- Can translation be used to teach writing skill?
- Can communicative competence be developed through teaching translation?
- What is the importance of teaching translation in an English language classes?

1.3. The Research Hypotheses

- Language writing skill can be taught effectively through translation.

- Communicative competence can be developed through teaching translation.
- Using translation in an English language classes promotes language learning.

1.4. Objectives of the study

The study aims to:

- Highlight the importance of translation in the English language teaching.
- Help teachers to be aware of the materials of improving learners' writing skill through translation.
- Enable syllabus designers to cater for the needs of the learners through translation.
- Put some recommendations to help teachers improve their teaching style and help students overcome errors.

1.5. Significance of the study

It is hoped that the findings, conclusions and recommendations reached at the end of this study will be useful to the teachers of English at University level.

1-6 Limitation of the Study

This study limit to investigate whether translation can promote the writing skill of English language students, Department of English, Faculty of Education, University of Gezira.

1.7 Methodology of the Study

A written test is used as a tool for collecting data in this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of translation

There are many different definitions of the word 'translation'; all of them are almost the same to a great extent.

- 1) Translation, as defined by Catford (1965:20) is the act of "replacing text material in the source language (SL) by an equivalent text material in the target language (TL)" where not only superficial semantic equivalents are sought but also a maximum of implied meanings and emotional and aesthetic effects are transferred.
- 2) Translation as defined by Bell (1991: 6) " is the replacement of a representation of a text in one language by a representation of an equivalent text in a second language".

But translators have to bear in mind that idea of a total equivalence cannot be attained. Language in Bell's words (1991:6):

Are different from each other' they are different in form' having distinct codes and rules regulating the construction of grammatical stretches of language and these forms have different meanings. To shift from one language to another is, by definition, to alter the forms. Further, the contrasting forms convey meanings which cannot but fail to coincide totally' there is no absolute synonymy between words in discover a lack of synonymy between languages?.

2.2 Translation and Language Teaching

For the past two decades or more, translation has been generally out of favour with language teaching community; yet for thousands of years this ancient craft had been right at the heart of language learning. Stressing the above introduction, Newmark(1993: 59) maintains that, the four language skills are practiced in foreign language, and therefore translation plays a supportive role only.

2.3 Teaching Writing Skills

Writing can be learned, Axelrod and Cooper (1997:4) maintain that : " In fact, while some people may seem to have a gift for writing, virtually any one can learn to write well enough to handle the writing required in college, at work, and in personal life . " Murcia and Mc Intosh (1979:89) state that:

" Composition involves the production and arrangement of written sentences in a manner appropriate to the purposes of the writer, the person or persons addressed, and the function of what is written, and it is a complex activity requiring a variety of skills; and there is no general agreement among teachers regarding the methods to be used in teaching it"

Murcia and Mc Intosh add that in the process of composition there are three principle areas of choice, these can be termed the areas of content, organization and expression, and the teacher needs to establish a set of criteria in each of these areas to determine how to evaluate a piece of writing (Ibid) state that :

In undertaking some form of content analysis of written work it is appropriate to consider whether the writer has dealt with the subject selected with a degree of adequacy giving his/her general abilities and the information available and whether as far as can be judged, she/he has said what she/he wanted to say with a measure of clarity.

About organization, Murcia and Mc Intosh mention that the teacher will examine the structure which is imparted to the content both within paragraphs and in larger units of discourse, and about expression. They (ibid) state that:

The teacher might concern himself/herself with the accuracy with which students use devices of punctuation and other orthographic conventions. Second, she/he might consider the extent to which what is written is contextually appropriate, and ask, for instance, whether the selection of items of vocabulary and syntax is appropriate to the level of formality of the passage, or the register adopted.

There are different approaches for teaching writing. Byrne (1988:22) suggests that : It was assumed that students made mistakes because they were allowed to write what they wanted, and accuracy oriented approaches have therefore, stressed the importance of control in order to eliminate them from written work. Students are taught how to write and combine various sentence types and manipulation exercises are used to give them the experience of writing connected sentences. Gradually the amount of control is reduced and students are asked to exercise meaningful choice. At a still later stage, they may be given a good deal of guidance with language and content, but allowed some opportunities for self-expression. This controlled-to-free approach was very much a product of the audio-lingual period, with its emphasis on step-by-step learning and formal correctness, and it is called focus on accuracy approach, in contrast; focus on fluency, this approach in Byrne's words: *"encourages students to write as much as possible and quickly as possible-without worrying about making mistakes, the important thing is to get one's ideas down on paper. In this way students feel that they are actually writing".*

Also there is focus on text, paraphrased from Byrne (ibid) that: This approach stresses the importance of paragraph as the basic unit of written expression and is therefore, mainly concerned to teach students how to construct and organize paragraphs. It uses a variety of techniques, singly and combination, such as forming paragraphs from jumbled sentences writing parallel paragraphs and developing paragraphs from topic sentences (with or without cues). And finally there is focus on purpose, that , in real life, there are reasons for writing. These are factors which have often been neglected in teaching and practicing writing. Yet, it is easy to device situations which allow students to write purposefully, for example; they can write to one another in the classroom or use writing in role-play situations.

In addition to that, Rivers (1988:83-89) suggests that: " Writing skills can be developed through class writing, group writing, individual writing and community writing, each contributing to the perfecting of the skill".

Firstly, the classroom writing consists simply of the student writing on the blackboard, a group of composition-created by all, corrected by all, savored by all. Secondly, small-group writing after developing the class writing technique and confirming that the students feel reasonably comfortable with the procedure as well as with their own ability to create in their new language, the instructor will wish to introduce them to individual composition. The same techniques as in class writing may be used, except that the students work in small groups, producing brief compositions, which they can then write on the board for the appreciation of their classmates. Thirdly, individual writing, having moved from class writing to group composition: the students are now ready to fly on their own and undertake sustained individual writing. The initial assignment should be brief- a short paragraph. Lastly, community writing, this activity calls upon the students to leave the shelter of the classroom and go into the community to interview, or otherwise contact, native speakers.

3. Previous Studies

'An investigation into students performance in paragraph writing at university level", which is conducted by Kawther Siddig(2014) the study is intended to examine the performance of the students at the university level, i.e. faculties of Education in writing a stand-alone paragraph with more emphasis on the structure ,coherence and punctuation of paragraph. The writer has concluded that the students have shown weak performance regarding structure ,topic sentence ,concluding sentence, coherence and punctuation of the paragraph. Accordingly ,the study has recommended that teaching writing skills should be accompanied with some techniques in order to motivate the students such as workshops activities ,group-works and providing students with a modal paragraph .

A research paper made by Kamal Hussein Elsadig in Salalah state (Sultanate of Oman) has focused on writing a free English composition aiming at helping secondary school students to attain a good mastery and command of writing English composition .The study concluded that English language teachers should focus on teaching controlled and guided composition effectively by adopting various appropriate techniques such as pupils substitute some words in a model paragraph so as to obtain a parallel new grammatically correct paragraph .

"Problems of writing English paragraphs at secondary levels "Ammar Musa (2011) aiming at investigating the problems that encounter students at secondary level in writing well connected English paragraphs. The study found out that the majority of the students performance is very weak .Besides all the students scripts include all types of linguistic errors .The study has recommended that:

-students at secondary level should be exposed to the highly recommended techniques for writing English paragraph such as using examples ,comparison and contrast .etc.

Also teachers at secondary level should be given special training courses to arrive at competence to impact knowledge of English language.

4. Data presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Error Analysis

A taxonomy for error analysis is in this research include the following categories and sub-categories: grammatical (prepositions, articles, verbs),syntactic (word order)(incorrect sentence structures),nouns ,lexicon (word choice),semantic, and substance(mechanics :punctuation, capitalization, and spelling), sentence fragments(incomplete sentences).

4.2 The Analysis of the Written Test

The total number in errors of the written test was 2250, which were listed in table (4.1) as follows:

Table 4.1: Total Errors in writing

| Written mistakes | Frequencies | Percentage |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|
| Spelling | 437 | 19.42 |
| Syntax | 140 | 6.22 |
| Verbs | 272 | 12.09 |
| Sentence fragments | 95 | 4.22 |
| Lexicon | 646 | 28.71 |
| Articles | 127 | 5.64 |
| Capitalization | 124 | 5.51 |
| Punctuation | 145 | 6.44 |
| Preposition | 176 | 7.82 |
| Nouns | 88 | 3.91 |
| Total | 2250 | 100.00 |

Table (4.1) can be summarized in the following figure:

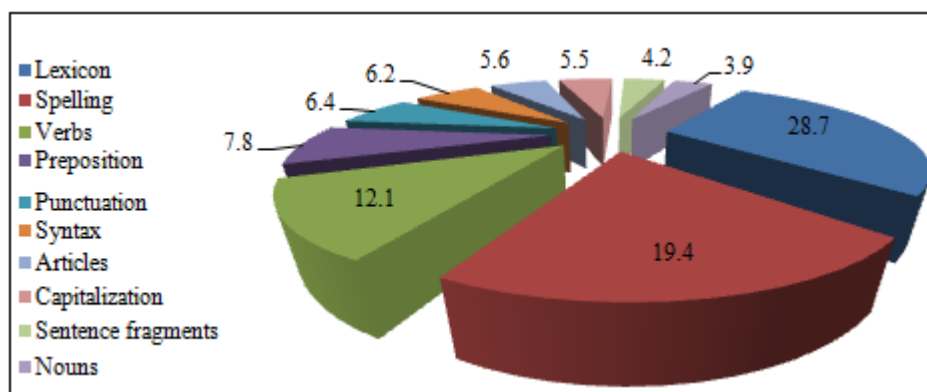


Figure 4.1

In figure No.(4.1) the highest error rates in this research occurred within the error category of lexicon, with 646 errors, an error rates of (28.7), correct word choice is based on a better understating of the SL, TL and culture . The wrong use of dictionaries constitute another area of errors that students were supposed to make unless, when translating, the students have to learn how to work out the various meanings of a word, considering the total setting in which the word is used. For example:

- a) The six African Peak (القمة)
- b) The Sudan Popular Liberation Army (الشعبي)

Spelling is the second highest error category with a total of (437) errors or an error rate of (19.4). The problem of spelling, has nothing to do with L1 transfer since Arabic is extremely different from English.

Verb is the third highest error category, with (272) errors; an error rate of (12.1). The major errors in this area the wrong use of the tense, and comes after that the wrong use of the auxiliaries. Since the perspective of tense and time is very different from English, also there is no equivalent of auxiliary do and no modal verbs, the researcher dues these errors for those differences.

Preposition, the fourth highest error occurrence in this research, with (176) errors, an error rate of (7.8). The errors involved omitting prepositions or using wrong prepositions.

The fifth highest errors in punctuation, occurred (145), at an error rate of (6.4). The misuse of the conjunction 'and' was prevalent in the students' written translation. For example:

- a) in peace and settlement and development.
- In English, items in a series are separated by commas, and the coordinate conjunction 'and' is used just before the last word. On the other hand, in Arabic, each item in a series is preceded by the conjunction 'wa' which is equivalent to 'and'. Syntax, the six highest errors, occurred (140), at an error rate of (6.2), were primarily based on the inappropriate transfer of LI syntax or word order. For example:

- a) The African six summit,
- Articles, the seventh highest errors, occurred (127), at an error rate of (5.6), the errors in articles involved the omitting of the article 'the', or using the article 'a' instead of 'the'. For examples:

- a) to became Vice at President.
- b) to end a longest civil war in Africa.

Due to the differences between the two languages, the errors came. In Arabic there is no indefinite article, and the definite article is used for days of the week, some months, some place names, and in many idiomatic expressions. The eighth highest errors, errors in capitalization, occurred (124), at an error rate of (5.5). In addition to capitalization for proper nouns, the primary capitalization errors were that the students forgot to capitalize the first letter of a sentence. For examples:

- a) in the end of last January.

However, in Arabic alphabet there is no capitalization.

The ninth highest errors, errors in sentence fragments, occurred (95), at an error rate (4.2) errors in sentence fragments (incomplete sentences), the researcher thinks that the students when they are translating avoid to complete the sentences which were difficult for them in order to avoid making errors. For example:

وتأتي اتفاقية السلام في نيروبي ، في أعقاب توقيع اتفاقية علي هدنة دائمة عشية العام الميلادي الجديد

Most of the students give an incomplete translation for this sentence. For example:

- a) The Peace agreement in niyropi came after a signing a permanent agreement.

The last errors are nouns, occurred (88), at an error rate of (3.9), the researcher noticed that the students had wrote the adjectives instead of writing the nouns so there is a confusion between adjectives and nouns.

For examples:

- a) international changeable.
- b) for successful of this long negotiation.....

4.3 Testing the Research Hypothesis

- a) The first hypothesis is that : " *Language writing Skills can be taught effectively through translation*".

According to the first table there is real progress in students' written test.

For the above results, the first hypothesis can be accepted.

- b) The second hypothesis is that: " *Communicative Competence can be developed through teaching translation*".

The components of communicative competence develop through effective practicing of writing and speaking and vice versa communicative competence develops writing and speaking. Since the results prove that there is real progress in students' performance in written test, this in turns lead the students towards communicative competence which developed through teaching translation. Thus the second hypothesis is accepted.

- c) The third Hypothesis is that " *Using translation in an English language class promotes language learning*".

Through the first and second hypotheses the researcher proves that translation develops both productive skills and communicative competence, therefore, these two areas develop language learning, so the third hypothesis also can be accepted that translation promotes language learning.

5. The Research Questions

- a) **Can translation be used to teach writing skill?**

Through this study the researcher proves that translation has an important role in English language teaching, because language productive skills (writing) can be taught effectively through translation.

b) Can communicative competence be developed through teaching translation?

Since the results prove that there is real progress in students' performance in written test this in turns lead the students towards communicative competence which developed through teaching translation. Also translation needs competent teacher since communicative competence is an essential objective with the teaching of it, so it requires very careful planning from these competent teachers to work through difficulties and the needs of the learners.

c) What is the importance of teaching translation in an English language classes?

Through this study the researcher proves that translation has an important role in English language teaching, because language productive skills (writing) can be taught effectively through translation, and communicative competence can be developed through teaching translation, therefore using translation in an English language classes promotes language learning.

6. Findings of the Study

The methodology of this research which was taken through the student's written test. According to the results of this research the students' error rates came as follow: lexicon, spelling, verb, preposition, punctuation, syntax, articles, capitalization, sentence fragments and nouns. The results proved that the students' performance in the second written test had progress than the first one. And according to these results, the researcher proves that translation has an effective role in developing language writing skill, communicative competence and English language learning in general.

7. Recommendations

To help teachers improve their teaching style in translation and help students overcome errors; here are some recommendations in a hope that they will be useful for both teachers and learners of English at the university level:

- a) In order to improve the language productive skills, students must translate written text.
- b) One translation course, and even two are not enough, it will be useful to introduce translation courses as a stable course from the third year until the graduation.
- c) Language laboratories would be useful, since it enables the students to listen to authentic material in which the real language is used.
- d) in the syllabus from the students first year until the second year.
- e) d-It would be very useful to increase the number of assignments for the sake of which the students would be reading a lot of English material and thinking in English, especially if they have to make oral presentation for these work.
- f) Students must be provided with the writing rules, and some samples of their writings need to be transcribed and distributed to them for correction and analysis. They would be learning from their errors.
- g) Understanding linguistic differences between students L1 and English may help the learners reduce interference from their first language.

References

- [1] Byrne, D. (1988): Teaching Writing skills. Longman Singapore Publishers, Singapore.
- [2] Catford, J. (1965): A Linguistic Theory of Translation. Oxford University Press, Britain.
- [3] Murcia, M and Mc Intosh, L. (1979): Teaching English as s Second or Foreign Language. Newbury House Publishers, USA.
- [4] Newmark, P. (1993): paragraphs on Translation . British Literary Cataloguing in Publication Data.