

# Prospective English Language Teachers' Views on Translation Use in Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract**—The importance of using mother tongue and translation in foreign language classrooms cannot be ignored and translation can be utilized as a method in English Language Teaching courses. There exist researches advocating or objecting to the use of translation in foreign language learning but they all have a point in common: Translation should be used as an aid to teaching, not an end in itself. In this research, prospective English language teachers' opinions about translation use and use of mother tongue in foreign language teaching are investigated and according to the findings, some explanations and recommendations are made.

**Keywords**—Exposure to foreign language, translation, foreign language learning, prospective teachers' opinions, use of L1.

## I. INTRODUCTION

TO understand the importance of translation use in language learning, it is crucial to define “mother tongue” and “target language”. A first language can be defined as the language that has been learnt from birth by individuals or they can speak the first language easily in a particular period called as critical period. As for a target language, it can be considered as the language someone tries to study and learn except for their mother tongue or at schools, the language teachers try to teach. In some departments in some universities, education is given in a foreign language such as English or German. All the courses or some courses can be completely in the foreign language. The language used in the classrooms in these courses may sometimes include only the foreign language but sometimes it may require using the mother tongue. There are different perspectives over the subject about whether the mother tongue should be used in the courses or not. In a lesson except for language learning, the usage of mother tongue is needed. For instance, for the department of Mathematics, the mother tongue enables students to understand the subjects better, and feel motivated and secure in the classroom but if their mother tongue is not used, they will feel that they cannot understand any subject and they may graduate from the university as a person who is not specialist in his field. However, this situation can change in foreign language learning because it is the aim to learn the language and it may be better to be exposed to the target language as much as possible.

Using mother tongue in language classes leads us to using translation in language learning. In earlier stages of language

learning, translation is a useful type of exercise for language learning and teaching. From the perspective of the students, they think in their mother tongue when they start learning because they need learned patterns to transfer their former language knowledge to the new one. Therefore, they have to think in their mother tongue and then translate it in the target language. When they obtain sufficient knowledge of the language, they think in the target language and this becomes an accelerating effect on using the target language in practice because they do not waste time translating the sentences from the mother tongue to the target language.

Translation has a great place in maintaining deep structure of a foreign language. It requires not only getting the message but also conveying its meaning appropriately in target language. That's why translation use in foreign language teaching has been a matter of debate. Linguists have developed their methods and approaches depending upon translation use. They considered also some other things such as level of students, their intelligence types, proficiency of teachers and so forth. These criteria are determinants of translation, as well.

Some researchers oppose using translation because “...translation teaches learners about language, and doesn't really help them how to use it or it fosters the excessive use of the mother tongue.” [1]. When both students and teachers use translation, it may cause some negative results. Considering the perspective of students, they learn grammatical patterns and rules of the language while using translation but this cannot help them to use the language in practice. As for teachers, they may reluctantly focus on language rules and may not show the way how students use the target language; thus, learning slows down. On the other hand, others advocate that learners need translation in order to learn grammar rules or enhance their learning skills. From this perspective, using translation in a balanced way may be useful for students to learn the language accurately. Furthermore, whereas some teachers consider translation as a teaching method in foreign language courses, many CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) teachers who believe that communication should be the main focus in language teaching think native language should be controlled and in order to promote students' foreign language learning. The more students are exposed to the foreign language, the easier and faster they learn to use the language. In the past, translation was an option in some English language teaching owing to the fact that translation was regarded as an aid to teaching and learning. For instance, Grammar Translation Method used in the past to teach classical languages, Latin and Greek. This method was used to

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make the students have the opportunity of understanding and getting pleasure from literature of foreign language. The main focus was on some skills like reading and writing but communication skills were not important. Grammatical rules came first in teaching foreign language. Nowadays, this method is still being used. However, knowing a foreign language consists of not only being familiar with the rules or vocabulary but also using what is learned while speaking in target language. There are different opinions about translation use in language learning but whatever the views on this matter are, use of L1 (mother tongue) in EFL (English as a foreign language) should be employed in a careful and sensible way [1].

England has had a great place in whole world's economy since Industrial Revolution. As a result of globalization, English and so translation has gained importance [2]. Hence, there are several researches conducted about roles of translation. When translation is applied adequately and effectively, it is a useful tool for language learning and teaching [3]. "It helps learners to comprehend, remember and produce a foreign language." [4]. The translation method in teaching vocabulary to elementary level ESL (English as a second language) learners may be effective [5]. They need to know the meanings of vocabulary first so that they can build a knowledge of vocabulary.

Translation has been a subject for many researches. It is a debatable subject because there is no shared opinion about whether translation is used in language learning and if it is used, how much it should be utilized from. This is an important matter for language teachers; therefore, it concerns English Language Teaching departments in universities because they educate language teachers. It is crucial to know the prospective language teachers' views. The fact that they will be the future possible teachers makes their opinion valuable. For this reason, the main purposes of this research are 1) to analyze prospective English teachers' opinions of translation use in foreign language learning in Hacettepe University, department of ELT, 2) to clarify whether the use of translation tasks promote foreign language learning, 3) whether translation reduces students' exposure to the foreign language.

## II. METHODS

### A. Participants

Translation had a great role in foreign language in the past and it did not lose its validity and importance in today's world. For some teachers, translation use is indispensable and it is mainly included in foreign language learning. This situation may stem from their education given in the universities that they have graduated from or their own preference as a teaching method. Therefore, it is very essential to learn prospective language teachers' opinions and this research was conducted in Hacettepe University ELT (English Language Teaching) department in order to obtain the students' views in the department. The participants' ages ranged between 19 and 23 at second and third grade students. In this research,

personal information such as participants' sociocultural status, gender and so forth were not asked in accordance with the subject of the research.

### B. The Instrument

Previous articles about translation use in the foreign language teaching contribute to the way this article was written. Likert-scale questionnaire was used to know respondents' views on translation use. Survey questions of this research were prepared as five-scaled type in the light of the research questions. Fifty students were participated in the study.

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

Considering problems in the foreign language teaching in Hacettepe ELT department, the translation use in ELT was chosen as the research subject. Several research questions that were appropriate for the subject were written and three of them were preferred to research. They include student's views on translation use in foreign language teaching, students' exposure to foreign language and effects of use of translation tasks on students' learning English. Articles whose subjects are related to this article and that can be reference to this study were searched via Internet journals, articles and online libraries. They were examined in terms of their content and results. Survey questionnaire was prepared in reliance with research questions. The group to which questionnaires would be applied was determined so that the study serves its purpose.

## III. RESULTS

The usage of mother tongue and translation in foreign language may cause less exposure to foreign language for students but in Turkey, some students at some schools need to hear their mother tongue to understand what the teacher try to teach and using mother tongue fosters their learning. However, the more students are involved in the target language, the easier and faster they learn how to use it. Participants' views vary and do not have a common point in the use of translation while being taught foreign language. 42% of the students are negative and 40% of them are positive towards translation use. 32% of the participants think that teacher should use the mother tongue while teaching a foreign language because it helps students feel that they can understand the language and so they are motivated for the lesson. When students do not understand the lesson because of the usage of target language, a teacher should handle the situation in a sensible way. Teaching the parts that students do not understand using mother tongue (Language 1) may be the solution. In a supportive way to this, most of the participants in the questionnaire share the same opinion about this matter. Because of some reasons such as in order to attract students' interest or make them to feel they share common points with teacher, a teacher may utilize from mother tongue and target language together. 72% of the participants think a teacher should use both L1 and L2 while teaching a foreign language whereas a minority of the participants does not have the same opinion. What is more, 52% of the participants are negative

towards the idea that students learn English effectively thanks to translation.

Using mother tongue (L1) could be useful in terms of students when it is used as a facilitator. It should not be used for a reason such as to save time, teach the subject easily and quickly. In this matter, 58% of the participants think that it is not time-saving when the courses are being taught with L1 because the lesson may end quickly but there is no productive results teacher gets in terms of foreign language learning.

Teaching a lesson like Mathematics in a foreign language like in some universities may prevent students from understanding the lesson accurately and easily because they need to understand the language first and then perceive the lesson. However, if the lesson is foreign language teaching, this could change. They need to be exposed to the target language to be used to hearing it and use it on their own later. About the question whether lecturing in L1 makes students understand the lesson easier, the participants do not have an exact opinion.

Motivation is one of the most important key factors for teachers to enable students to be interested in the subject and feel ready to learn. There are various ways to motivate students such as making students know that what they learn is valuable for them or making them believe they can be successful. Using mother tongue sufficiently not completely and making students understand the lesson enable them to feel motivated for the lesson. According to the participants, lecturing in only L1 does not make students feel motivated and 50% of them believe that this does not increase students' participation.

Students sometimes feel anxiety because of some reasons such as having anxiety as a personal characteristic but when they do not understand a subject and so they feel not ready to participate in the lesson. In language classrooms, when the students do not understand the target language the teacher uses, they feel shy and insecure while answering a question or participating the lesson. Using mother tongue adequately could decrease the level of anxiety. When the results obtained

from the questionnaire analyzed, from the psychological point of view, mother tongue removes learning barriers such as anxiety according to 42% of the students.

Learning grammar rules sufficiently helps students to understand the target language better and use it accurately. Grammar rules can be taught deductively or inductively. In the deductive way, students are given the rules and then asked to apply them to other examples. "Inductive teaching and learning is an umbrella that encompasses a range of instructional methods including inquiry learning, problem-based learning, discovery learning and so forth." [6] In the inductive way, students are given examples and asked to discover the rules on their own; thus, they internalize the rules. If translation is used in grammar teaching, it includes deductive teaching and this is not student-centered. Therefore, they are not involved in the process and learning cannot be permanent. According to majority of the participants, grammar rules should not be given through translation.

Teaching and learning vocabulary do not often arouse interest as much as grammatical rules, reading or writing [7]. However, knowledge of vocabulary is one of the basic need for understanding and speaking a foreign language. In vocabulary teaching, different kinds of methods can be used. For instance, language games are a good way to teach and learn vocabulary. As a classical method, using translation in vocabulary teaching may be useful in some levels. In beginner levels, translation can be used for teaching vocabulary but in an advanced level, instead of translation use, target language should be used and thinking in the target language should be enabled in terms of students. 74% of the ELT department participants in the questionnaire think that vocabulary should not be taught through translation. Furthermore, 52% of them think that translation is used in beginner classes and most of them in advanced classes, translation should not be used. As a result, students' level of English plays an important role in the use of translation. As student's level develops, translation should not be used.

TABLE I  
STUDENTS' VIEWS ON TRANSLATION USE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Attitudes	S.D. (Strongly disagree)	D. (Disagree)	N.S. (Not sure)	A. (Agree)	S.A. (Strongly agree)
Teacher should use the mother tongue while teaching a foreign language.	10%	32%	18%	28%	12%
Grammar rules should be given through translation.	14%	52%	20%	10%	4%
Vocabulary should be taught through translation.	18%	56%	10%	12%	4%
Translation should be used in beginner classes.	4%	22%	22%	40%	12%
Translation should be used in intermediate classes.	12%	26%	36%	24%	2%
Translation should be used in advanced classes.	38%	34%	8%	6%	14%

Learning a foreign language is very different from learning a second language because one can use their second language in their daily life but a foreign language is mostly restricted to the area such as a classroom. Therefore, it is the classroom environment where foreign language learners are exposed to the target language and use it. If the learning mostly consists of translation use or tasks, it causes negative results in learning and speaking the target language. Translation use helps

students to have a deeper knowledge and have a facilitator effect on learning. However, giving students a great number of translation tasks in classrooms may prevent them from focusing on speaking in target language. However, the participants do not have the same opinion about this matter. Whereas 38% of them do not think that students can hardly concentrate on the language when given translation tasks, 28% of them believe students have difficulties on focusing on the

language when given translation tasks but most of the participants believe that the translation activities reduce exposure to the target language.

Trying to learn a foreign language is affected by many factors such as age, social backgrounds or interests of learners. These factors may facilitate or slow down the learning process. In regardless of these, when a person starts learning a foreign language, they are inclined to think in their mother tongue and then in the target language. It is easy for them to match the patterns of the new language with the ones they have already known in their mother tongue. Translation tasks support students to think in their mother tongue and reduce their concentrating on the target language. In a supportive way, according to a majority of the participants, translation decreases exposure to the foreign language and so it prevents students from thinking in the target language.

In the past, there were methods like "The Grammar Translation Method" focusing on grammar rules or translation but then, contrary to what was believed, communication has become a key in language learning because there is no point in learning the rules or vocabulary of a foreign language unless the language is used for communicating in the foreign language. Therefore, a foreign language teacher should create positive and safe learning atmosphere for students to make them feel motivated and use the foreign language in order to communicate. If translation tasks are used more than needed,

students do not have an atmosphere to practise the language they are learning. In the questionnaire, 68% of the participants believe that translation decreases the students' chances of being able to communicate in the foreign language.

Exposure to the foreign language is very crucial in learning it. The more learners hear the target language, the more they internalize it and so they can understand and use the language easily. Even subconsciously, they can learn the vocabulary and their pronunciation. The participants in the questionnaire were asked about the relationship between using mother tongue in classroom and the learners' familiarity of the sounds in the target language. 74% of the participants are positive towards the idea that using L1 reduces familiarity with different sounds in target language.

In order to speak a foreign language in a fluent and accurate way, a person should have a sufficient knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. However, a very deep knowledge of them may be an obstacle while speaking in the target language because they feel they need to use correct grammar rules and vocabulary to speak but with a much less knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary, a person can sometimes use the foreign language easily and this enables a good communication. If translation use causes this situation, it becomes an obstacle for a fluent communication. According to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of the participants think that translation hinders fluency L2 (foreign language).

TABLE II  
STUDENTS' EXPOSURE TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Attitudes	S.D	D.	N.S.	A.	S.A.
Translation prevents students from thinking in target language.	2%	8%	12%	38%	40%
Using mostly translation does not give students a chance of communicating in the foreign language.	2%	20%	10%	46%	22%
Translation hinders students' fluency in L2.	8%	8%	20%	48%	6%

A good and well-educated teacher should know how to teach a foreign language to the students of different levels because if the teacher does not take students' level into consideration, he loses the motivation and interest of them. It can be said that translation use in a foreign language has some advantages if used properly but these tasks should also be appropriate for students' level. For instance, for beginner learners, the text in the target language should be easy in terms of vocabulary and content because they should need to understand the text and vocabulary easily in order to be successful at translation tasks. According to the results obtained in the questionnaire, most of the participants support the idea that students' level has a great importance in giving translation tasks.

In a foreign language lesson like other lessons, it is very important for a teacher to interest students in order to make students ready for learning. At some schools in Turkey, there

is a common opinion of students that they do not need to be interested in English language lesson because they cannot use it in real life. In such a situation, it is very hard to feel them motivated for the lesson without giving students a reason for learning English. In addition to this, language games, listening and speaking activities should be carefully prepared and organized for the classroom so that the students are interested in foreign language learning. Although translation is useful when it is used properly and adequately, translations tasks may be boring and reduces the students' interest in the lesson. Therefore, a teacher should draw the line between being boring and just entertaining not educating for translation tasks. The participants are asked whether translation tasks are boring or not and when the results are examined, whereas according to only 22% of the students, translation tasks are not boring, 52% of the participants find translation tasks are boring.

TABLE III  
EFFECTS OF THE USE OF TRANSLATION TASKS ON STUDENTS' LEARNING ENGLISH

Attitudes	S.D	D.	N.S.	A.	S.A.
Students' level is of the utmost importance in giving translation tasks.	0%	12%	24%	50%	14%
Translation tasks are boring.	6%	16%	26%	44%	8%

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The use of translation and so mother tongue has been a matter on which there are a great number of researches. The reason why researches have been so much interested in this subject lies in the fact that there is no exact idea about translation use. The results show that the attitudes towards translation use are changing because of students' level, age, teachers' proficiency and so forth. The findings of this research have parallels in this idea. Most of the participants think that level of the students is of utmost importance in foreign language learner. A teacher should organize students' learning considering their level. About using the mother tongue, a teacher should avoid excessive use and aim to teach how to communicate in target language. For this to happen, a teacher should use activities including translation tasks to accelerate students' proper learning and communicate in target language by making them thinking in target language and creating a positive learning environment.

Previous researches indicate that translation may be effective when used in right place and time. For instance, translation can be useful in beginner level and while teaching vocabulary. However, the excessive use of translation reduces exposure to foreign language. It should be emphasized that knowing the advantages and disadvantages of translation use in foreign language teaching and learning, and using it in a sufficient quantity and in appropriate situations are very crucial.

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