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Exploring Translation via Language Translator Devices as a Strategy for English Language Learning

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the perceptions and practices of English Partner Academy students in employing translation, particularly through the Language Translator Device as a strategy for learning English. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study involving five students from an engineering background at the English Partner Learning Academy. Using interviews and observations, the study explored how these learners utilise translation tools, including digital translator devices, to support their English language acquisition.

The findings reveal that students perceive translation as a highly beneficial tool in enhancing their understanding of vocabulary, sentence structure, and meaning in English. Notably, participants reported frequently using language translation devices during various learning tasks, including reading texts, writing assignments, and preparing for presentations. These practices were aligned with multiple language learning strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, and compensatory approaches.

The study highlights that digital translation tools not only assist learners in bridging linguistic gaps but also foster independent learning by offering immediate feedback and access to multilingual resources. However, it points out the importance of critical and guided use of such tools, ensuring that learners do not become overly reliant on them at the expense of immersive and communicative English practice.

Overall, the research suggests that when used thoughtfully, language translator devices can serve as an effective pedagogical aid, helping learners build confidence and competence in English. The findings explicitly promote greater awareness among educators about the potential of technology-assisted translation strategies and encourage their integration into English language instruction in a balanced and pedagogically sound manner.

Keywords: Translation; English learning; learning strategy; Language translator devices, second language learning; digital tools; pedagogy.

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Exploring Translation via Language Translator Devices as a Strategy for English Language Learning

Introduction:

For many years, the role of translation in the development of language learning has been largely overlooked, despite its potential to support learners in acquiring a new language. Traditionally, both language educators and researchers have viewed translation as an unsuitable method in classroom settings. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), translation has often been blamed as one of the main obstacles to effective language learning. This viewpoint is rooted in the belief that teaching and learning a target language, especially English, should be conducted exclusively in that language, deliberately minimising or excluding the learner's mother tongue. This monolingual approach to language instruction is grounded in the assumption that maximum exposure to the target language, without interference from the native language, leads to better acquisition outcomes (Almoayidi, 2018). Advocates of this perspective argue that the use of translation can lead to inefficient learning by encouraging rote memorisation of vocabulary and grammar that may not be immediately useful or meaningful. Furthermore, it is feared that this method could overwhelm learners cognitively, limiting their ability to internalise and apply the new language naturally (Liu & Shi, 2007).

Among the various tools available, language translator devices, including mobile apps, electronic dictionaries, and AI-based translators, have emerged as practical aids in second language acquisition, particularly for English learners. These devices allow users to instantly convert words, phrases, and sentences from their native language into English, making learning more accessible and interactive.

Despite their growing use, the role of translation through a language translator device as a pedagogical strategy in English language learning has long been a topic of debate. Traditional language teaching methodologies, especially those influenced by the direct method or communicative language teaching, discourage the use of the learner's first language in the classroom. Translation, in particular, has been criticised for potentially hindering immersion and delaying natural language acquisition. However, recent studies suggest that translation, when used strategically, especially through digital tools, can support vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and learner confidence, particularly at the early and intermediate stages of learning.

Language learners often exhibit a natural tendency to comprehend unfamiliar linguistic input by associating it with their existing linguistic knowledge, typically their native language (Cook, 2007). This tendency is particularly evident among adult learners, who frequently rely on their first language as a foundational tool in the process of acquiring a second language. Such reliance is even more pronounced among beginner or lower-proficiency learners, for whom the use of the first language can create a more supportive and less intimidating learning environment (Pan & Pan, 2012; Mutlu, Bayram, & Demirbüken, 2015; Putrawan, 2019).

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) characterise this reliance as a cognitive learning strategy common among adult learners, whereby they consciously draw upon structures and patterns from their native language and integrate them with newly acquired foreign language vocabulary. This perspective is supported by Hidayati (2012), whose study found that incorporating Bahasa Indonesia in English language instruction at the university level can facilitate students' understanding of grammatical structures and vocabulary, while also providing emotional support through feedback and encouragement. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the importance of regulating the use of the first language to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of English instruction.

Furthermore, Harmer (2007) argues that translation constitutes a natural and often necessary step in the process of foreign language acquisition, particularly among beginner learners such

as Indian adults, who frequently depend on translation into their native language to make sense of English input. This viewpoint aligns with a growing body of literature that recognises translation not only as a cognitive aid but also as a legitimate learning strategy in the context of second language acquisition (Aktekin & Gliniecki, 2015; Al-Musawi, 2014; Asgarian & Musayeva Vefalı, 2015; Bagheri & Fazel, 2011; Calis & Dikilitas, 2012; Dagilienė, 2012; Kuluşaklı, Boynukara, & Genc, 2018; Liao, 2006).

A clear understanding of the term “translation” is crucial in the context of this study to prevent any misinterpretation. According to Al-Musawi (2014), translation is a widely adopted learning technique among foreign language learners, defined as the process of conveying the intended meaning of words or sentences at linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic levels. In this study, translation is specifically examined as a language learning skill that involves converting English words, phrases, texts, and spoken content into Tamil, and vice versa, in both written and oral forms.

Learners’ use of translation as a language learning strategy can be grouped into six main categories: cognitive, affective, social, compensatory, memory, and metacognitive strategies (Al-Musawi, 2014; Liao, 2002; Mollaei, Taghinezhad, & Sadighi, 2017). Among these, translation is most commonly associated with cognitive strategies, where learners actively process, interpret, and convert foreign language input by drawing on their first language. This approach allows students to analyse unfamiliar English content—such as new vocabulary—by translating it into their native language, Tamil, thereby facilitating deeper understanding. For example, translating complex English terms into Tamil helps learners comprehend written texts more easily.

From an affective perspective, translation can serve as an emotional support mechanism, especially for learners with lower proficiency. By reducing confusion and the fear of misunderstanding, translation through the Language Translator device helps ease the anxiety often experienced when engaging with a new language. This sense of reassurance can motivate students to persist in their learning journey, even if their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar is limited. The use of digital translation tools can help struggling learners navigate and understand challenging texts, thereby boosting their confidence and reducing stress.

In educational contexts such as Tamil Nadu, the strategic use of translation into the mother tongue and vice versa can thus be a powerful aid in supporting English language learning, especially among beginner-level students.

Real-time Translation through a language translator device can also function as a social strategy when students collaborate to complete English tasks through mutual assistance and discussion. Mollaei et al. (2017) describe this strategy as involving interactions where students, particularly those with lower English proficiency, actively seek help from peers by asking for the meaning of English words or sentences. These interactions often involve clarification, correction, or confirmation from peers with advanced proficiency.

Additionally, translation through a language translator device serves as a rapid strategy when students are required to produce English texts. In such cases, learners often first construct and organise their ideas in Tamil and then the device translates them into English to compensate for their limited English proficiency (Liao, 2006). This strategy is also evident when students attempt to translate unfamiliar English content by using contextual or linguistic clues to infer meanings.

Translation through a language translator device also plays a role as a memory strategy, where students associate English vocabulary with their Tamil equivalents to enhance memorisation. For example, they might recall the meaning of an English word by mentally connecting it with its Tamil translation.

At a more advanced level, translation through a language translator device can function as a metacognitive strategy, particularly among high-proficiency learners. These students use the

Language Translator device to review or evaluate their language output. For instance, while drafting a speech or a written text in English, they may translate it into Tamil to ensure the accuracy of structure, vocabulary, and grammatical arrangement.

The resurgence of interest in translation has prompted numerous studies that support its usefulness in foreign language education, especially at the higher education level. Fernandez-Guerra (2014) advocates for the inclusion of translation in the foreign language classroom, citing its motivational benefits and its value in helping students compare linguistic systems such as those of English and Tamil. Similarly, Dagilienė (2012) and Al-Musawi (2014) argue that translation is a viable strategy for language learning among College students. They emphasise that it contributes to the development of communicative competence by fostering interaction and collaboration.

Other empirical studies that support the use of translation as a learning strategy include those by Liao (2002), Bagheri & Fazel (2011), and Asgarian & Musayeva Vefalı (2015). Collectively, these studies reveal that most learners of English as a second or foreign language, especially at the higher education level, hold positive attitudes toward the use of translation by Language Translation devices or apps, particularly in the era of Artificial Intelligence, especially those with lower proficiency. For instance, Al-Musawi's (2014) research showed that translation helped less proficient Arab university students acquire English vocabulary more effectively while also reducing their language anxiety.

However, in literature and language, the researcher finds the gap regarding in-depth qualitative investigations into how adult learners in higher education contemplate real-time translation by the Language Translator device to support their English learning. To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach within the Tamil Nadu EFL higher education context, focusing on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs. The researcher examines students from a higher education context in various parts of Tamil Nadu who learn English at the English partner academy. The aim is to explore how adult learners employ real-time translation-related strategies using the Language Translator device to enhance their English language skills, thus offering fresh insights into the evolving role of translation as a legitimate and effective learning method in higher education.

Research Method:

The researcher used a qualitative case study method. This approach was chosen because it helps to explore and explain a specific situation in a real-life setting (Yin, 2003; Latief, 2012). This fits well with the purpose of the study, which is to understand how students from a higher education context in various parts of Tamil Nadu who learn English at the English partner academy use translation, especially now when digital tools and the communicative way of learning English are commonly used. For data collection, this research used a single-case design approach. This type of design allowed the researcher to explain individual experiences and social interactions using a specific theory, and then relate those findings to a wider context (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 2018). In this study, the researcher collected data through interviews to answer the research questions. The data were then analysed using theoretical approaches to better understand how ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students use translation as a learning strategy. Because the study had a small scope, the results were treated as an example rather than a representation of the entire student population. This approach is consistent with the single-case design, where the researcher focused on one specific case, a faculty within the academy, based on its geographical context.

The single-case design helped narrow the research focus while still offering meaningful insights that could be useful for future studies in similar contexts (Yin, 2018). As a result, this case study provided a detailed and in-depth look at the translation practices through a language translator device and the learning strategies of ESP students in the academy. The findings are

not meant to be generalised but rather to give a current perspective on how the translator device is used as a learning strategy in the English partner academy

Due to the limited scale of the research, five students from the academy were selected as participants. The researcher used a snowball sampling method, based on the procedures suggested by Best & Kahn (2006) and Bryman (2016). An online questionnaire was shared via WhatsApp to identify the final five participants. This questionnaire gathered information about the students' English proficiency (e.g., TOEFL scores from the academy), their learning habits, and whether they frequently used the Language Translator Device for translation when learning English.

The chosen participants included two students with low proficiency, one with pre-intermediate proficiency, and two with intermediate proficiency. All of them reported learning English outside of the classroom and regularly using the Translator devices as part of their learning. These five students were then invited to take part in a series of interviews to explore their thoughts and experiences with using Language Translator Devices for translation in English learning.

Characteristics of the participants

Table 1-Pre test

S. No.	Names	TOEFL Score(Academy)	Age	Periodic Assessment No
1.	Vinu.M	320	20	1
2.	Binsy.K	322	19	1
3.	Subha.P	400	19	1
4.	Jerrine.P	490	21	1
5.	Lucas.P	360	19	1

Table 2-Post Test

S. No.	Names	TOEFL Score(Academy)	Age	Periodic Assessment No
1.	Vinu.M	400	20	5
2.	Binsy.K	387	19	5
3.	Subha.P	490	19	5
4.	Jerrine.P	540	21	5
5.	Lucas.P	420	19	5



Results and Discussion:

The students' positive perceptions of translation using the Language Translator Device indicate that it serves as an effective strategy for second language acquisition. On the first assessment, they scored fewer marks than on the post-test. However, in the post-test, they find a drastic change in the marks they have secured. Post-test marks were proof of how the language translator device helped them to learn English in an appropriate way. In particular, lower-proficiency participants expressed a strong reliance on the Language Translator device's translation, viewing it as a quick and accessible means to comprehend English materials. For instance, the notable use of this device is to decode unfamiliar vocabulary. This finding is consistent with previous research by Putrawan (2019) and Mutlu et al. (2015), who observed that students with lower proficiency levels tend to rely on translation to facilitate language learning, as it allows them to engage in classroom activities. Moreover, translation was found to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, as supported by Aktekin and Gliniecki (2015) and Liao (2006). Hence, translation using Language Translator devices helps in learning the English language. The Researcher finds that this device helped students to learn the English language on their own.

In addition, both higher- and lower-achieving students acknowledged that this device supports their learning process both within and beyond the classroom context. Notably, higher-achieving students reported using the translator device more frequently outside of formal academic settings. For example, participants such as Subha and Jerrine stated that they improved their English skills by watching English-language videos and movies on platforms like YouTube. In such instances, they would often consult Tamil translations to better understand unfamiliar English terms. These findings suggest that the use of a translator device is a natural extension of learners' efforts to enhance language proficiency outside the classroom. This observation aligns with the findings of Kuluşaklı et al. (2018), who reported that exposure to audiovisual media in the target language contributes significantly to foreign language learners' comprehension and engagement, regardless of whether the activity takes place within or outside the classroom.

Furthermore, students perceived translation using the Language Translator device as an inherent and inseparable aspect of English language learning. According to Dulay et al. (1982), Cook (2007), and Pan (2012), the use of learners' first language during second language acquisition is both habitual and natural. Students often resort to translation spontaneously, with

or without teacher guidance, as a compensatory strategy to bridge gaps in their understanding of the target language. When faced with difficulty in constructing grammatically accurate English sentences, learners tend to rely on their first language to identify the closest equivalents, as noted by Asgarian and Musayeva Vefalı (2015). This practice further highlights the indispensable role of the first language in foreign language learning, a perspective reaffirmed by Kuluşaklı et al. (2018), who emphasised its value as a supportive resource rather than an obstacle.

On the other hand, participants, particularly those with higher English proficiency, expressed less favourable perceptions of translation using the Language Translator Device, especially when it was used as the primary classroom activity. For instance, students like Subha and Jerrine noted that their instructor regularly required them to translate English texts in every class session. This instructional approach closely resembles the traditional Grammar Translation Method, wherein the teacher exercises full control over the teaching-learning process by analysing the target language through translation (Vermes, 2010). Although this method can support reading comprehension (Usadiati, 2010), it was not well received by students, as the classroom activities were largely limited to reading and writing, leaving little room for communicative or interactive language use.

This finding corresponds with the study conducted by Kuluşaklı et al. (2018), which found that students often rely on their first language to comprehend texts and plan written. Several participants admitted to translating nearly all their English reading materials into Tamil and drafting their writing assignments in Tamil before translating them into English. This heavy dependence on translation undermines the core objective of language learning and may hinder genuine language acquisition. Chandra and Yuyun (2018) emphasize that while online translation can be helpful as a supportive tool, its overuse may negatively affect learning outcomes. When used appropriately, translation can aid students in improving reading and writing performance; however, when it becomes the main strategy, it can obscure learners' actual competencies and slow down their progress.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that translation may contribute to inaccurate learning. While Chandra and Yuyun (2018) argue that translation does not necessarily harm students' writing performance, careless and excessive use, particularly of online tools, can lead to errors and misinterpretations that impede the learning process. Over half of the participants reported using online translation for full sentences or even entire paragraphs, raising concerns about their awareness of translation accuracy. Medvedev (2016) acknowledges the essential role of translation in bilingual classrooms but warns that its use must be carefully monitored by educators. Without guidance, students risk becoming overly dependent on inaccurate or contextually inappropriate translations. Because Cultural dialects can't exactly be translated. In response to such issues, some instructors reportedly chose to prohibit translation altogether in the classroom. According to the participants, their lecturer discouraged the use of translation to avoid negative impacts on learning. However, despite these restrictions, students, particularly those with lower proficiency, continued to rely on the device's translation due to their limited understanding of English. This suggests that a more effective solution is needed to manage students' use of translation in language learning, one that acknowledges their needs while preventing counterproductive dependency.

The Language Translator Device, A tool to learn English:

The findings revealed that participants engaged in various translation-related activities during English learning, which align with several types of language learning strategies. Primarily, translation was identified as part of a cognitive strategy, as students frequently engaged in activities such as watching English videos or movies with Indonesian subtitles and using online dictionaries to translate unfamiliar words or sentences. These actions reflect an effort to process foreign language content into the first language to enhance comprehension. This finding

supports Liao's (2002) argument that translation serves as a cognitive strategy when learners compare and analyze their first and target languages to check the accuracy of their understanding. Such strategies are particularly beneficial for students aiming to expand their English vocabulary both within and beyond the classroom.

In addition, the use of translation was recognized as a memory strategy. The participants indicated that their ability to retain English vocabulary was often influenced by the frequency with which they encountered English words in reading or listening contexts. While high-achieving students were able to memorize vocabulary without relying on Indonesian translations—especially if they were already familiar with the words—low-achieving students often depended on translation to remember English terms. This finding aligns with earlier research by Liao (2006) and Mollaei et al. (2017), who observed that translation helps learners retain the meanings of English words and phrases. Similarly, Calis and Dikilitaş (2012) emphasized the value of translation in supporting vocabulary retention in the target language. From a compensatory strategy perspective, translation was found to help students overcome gaps in their English knowledge, particularly in writing tasks. The participants described using Indonesian during the early stages of writing, such as brainstorming ideas and arranging sentences before translating them into English. This approach corresponds with the findings of Bagheri and Fazel (2011), who noted that translation can aid learners in organizing and articulating their ideas. Aktekin and Gliniecki (2015) also highlighted that learners often think in their first language before initiating writing in a foreign language, further supporting the compensatory function of translation.

As an effective strategy, translation contributed to managing learners' emotional responses during the language learning process. Many low-proficiency students reported that translation increased their motivation and made them feel more comfortable when learning English. High-achieving students also found translation useful, particularly when helping their peers understand difficult vocabulary, as it reduced their anxiety about providing incorrect explanations. These findings align with those of Al-Musawi (2014) and Mutlu et al. (2015), who concluded that translation can reduce learners' anxiety and stress, especially when completing tasks assigned by teachers.

Lastly, translation functioned as a social strategy, promoting collaborative learning among students. This strategy emphasized peer interaction and the sharing of language knowledge. Participants described engaging in activities such as seeking explanations from classmates about English materials and working together to determine word meanings or complete English assignments. These collaborative efforts illustrate the role of translation in supporting social learning and fostering cooperative environments for English language development.

Conclusion:

Historically, the use of translation as a language learning strategy has been viewed with scepticism, often regarded as an inappropriate tool in the process of acquiring a new language. Its role in foreign language learning has been a subject of debate among language educators and researchers, with conflicting perspectives regarding its pedagogical value. While some scholars and practitioners argue against its use, others support its inclusion in the learning process. However, recent studies (Al-Musawi, 2014; Asgarian & Musayeva Vefalı, 2015; Dagilienė, 2012; Liao, 2006; Mollaei et al., 2017; Pan & Pan, 2012; Putrawan, 2019) have reintroduced translation as a strategic tool that supports students in foreign language learning. The present study aimed to explore students' perceptions of using language translator devices as a learning strategy and to examine how they utilise translation-related strategies in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). Data collected through interviews indicate that the translator device plays a significant role in participants' English learning experiences. Students perceive translation using a translator device as an efficient and natural component of

foreign language acquisition. They highlighted that translation enables them to understand English materials more quickly and helps bridge gaps in their knowledge.

In addition to these positive perceptions, some participants also acknowledged the potential drawbacks of the device. Concerns were raised regarding overdependence on translation tools, particularly AI-integrated translators, which could lead to the formation of ineffective learning habits. Despite these concerns, the participants outlined a variety of translation-based activities through the Language Translator devices that support different aspects of their language learning. These included understanding difficult vocabulary, reducing anxiety, constructing English texts, enhancing vocabulary acquisition, assisting peers, and evaluating their learning. These functions of translation through the portable device correspond with its use as a cognitive, affective, compensatory, memory, social, and metacognitive strategy.

This study employed a single-case design methodology to investigate the experiences of a specific group of students who used Language Translator devices for translation as a learning strategy. The findings revealed both positive and negative perceptions of translation and its role in the English learning process. Notably, low-proficiency students demonstrated a stronger reliance on translation, viewing it as a crucial tool for their language development. In contrast, high-proficiency students acknowledged the usefulness of translation but emphasised the importance of limiting its use to avoid long-term dependency. For these students, real-time translation through the device was primarily useful for vocabulary acquisition and improving comprehension of English content.

Based on these findings, the study contributes important insights into the strategic use of translation in EFL contexts, particularly in higher education in Tamil Nadu. Translation remains a valuable and supportive strategy for students with lower proficiency levels, while higher proficiency learners tend to use it more moderately. In line with Ali (2012), it is recommended that educators in higher education not completely prohibit the use of translation in the classroom. Rather, translation can be effectively integrated into instruction as a supplementary tool for checking comprehension, rather than being the central method of teaching.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given that this study focused exclusively on students' perspectives and their strategic use of translation, several areas remain open for further investigation. Future research could incorporate teachers' perspectives to compare their views with those of students regarding the appropriate extent of translation use by the Language translator device in language learning. Additionally, observational studies could provide more in-depth insights into how translation strategies are applied in real-time classroom settings. To enhance the generalizability of findings, future research could also employ quantitative methods, involve a larger and more diverse sample, and include students from various academic disciplines to better outcome in the role of translation through I-integrated Language Translator Devices in higher education EFL learning across Tamil Nadu.

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