Using Translation in Language Teaching: Exploring Advantages and Disadvantages from Linguistic, Humanistic and Practical Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The use of Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) has had many ups and downs during the history. While it was dominant during Grammar Translation Method (GTM), by the advent of the "Direct Method" and "Reform Movement", its use was completely prohibited in language classes based on the assumption that using L1 in foreign/second language classes can cause interference. However, recently some scholars have called for the revival of TILT as they believed that translation can facilitate the process of language learning and preserve learners' identity. The aim of this study was to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of using TILT from linguistic, humanistic and practical perspectives. For so doing, a questionnaire was distributed among 122 Iranian EFL learners to examine their perceptions in this regard. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners had a positive attitude toward the use of TILT which further substantiated the benefits of 'judicious' use of students' L1 in language classes. The results were discussed and the recommendations were made.

1. Introduction

The use of Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) has been considered as a controversial issue for centuries. In the 16th century, translation was used for teaching Greek to Latin speakers or vice versa (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985), and its use continued to be dominant during the heydays of Grammar Translation Method (GTM). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), GTM became dominant from the 1840s to the 1940s and nowadays, the modified version is still used in some parts of the world.

However, in the mid and late of the 19th century, gradually some disapprovals of this method arose in several European countries. In this era, the communication and oral proficiency became the first priority in language learning. Therefore, the 'Reform Movement' which emphasized the spoken rather than the written language was introduced by some phoneticians and linguists who had some experiences in language teaching (Cook, 2010). The 'Reform Movement' was manifested in Berlitz Schools and Direct Method in which the use of students' mother tongue was banned (Cook, 2010). As a basic pillar, the Direct Method rejected the use of L1 in language classes based on the assumption that it can cause interference and accordingly procrastinate the process of language learning.

Cook (2010) referred to Direct Method as an umbrella term for all language teaching methods in which the use of L1 is prohibited. One of these methods which was popular for a long time was Audiolingual Method (Howatt & Smith, 2014). According to Machida (2011), this method made a revolution in second language teaching as it made a shift from written language to spoken language. Audio-lingual Method had

roots in Structural Linguistics and its principles "drew mainly from B. F. Skinner's model of human behavior" (Laviosa, 2014, p. 19).

After World War II, the Communicative Language Teaching was developed which had a significant influence on foreign language teaching. In this method, the focus was "on meaningful input in L2 (exposure to L2 in realistic situations)" (Machida, 2011, p. 741), and the use of students' mother tongue in the language classes was forbidden.

However, during the past two decades, some scholars in the fields of Language Teaching and Translation Studies (such as Cook, 2010; Laviosa, 2014; Pym, Malmkjær & Gutiérrez, 2013) have called for the revival of the role of TILT. For example, Laviosa (2014) identified three areas supporting the role of translation as learning and testing tool:

a) theoretical considerations in favor of using various forms of translation for language teaching purposes;

b) Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies on the effectiveness of translation as part of form-focused instruction;

c) the elaboration of translation-based language teaching methodologies (p. 2).

Previous studies have tried to examine the use of TILT from different perspectives such as linguistic, humanistic, and practical aspects which are briefly explained in the following section.

1.1 Linguistic Aspects of Translation

Lavault (1985) cited in Carreres (2006), investigated the use of TILT in France. The result indicated that even in the communicative era, teachers used translation for clarifying rules and presenting examples. Furthermore, Carreres (2006) mentioned that translation could be applied productively in advanced stages. Also the author indicated that many innovative approaches had emerged which highlighted the necessity for making a bridge between Language Teaching and Translation Studies.

1.1.1 Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, and Interlanguage

From 1940 to 1960, the contrastive analysis was popular as a tool for explaining the learners' errors. It mainly focused on comparing the two languages for identifying the similarities and differences between them (Keshavarz, 1999). It was believed that by comparing the two languages, the students' mistakes and errors could be predicted easily. Lado (1957) maintained that "those elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult" (p. 2). Van Els (1984) defined three basic objectives for contrastive analysis as follows:

a) Providing insights into similarities and differences between languages;

b) Explaining and predicting problems in L2 learning;

c) Developing course materials for language teaching (p. 38).

Based on Lado's ideas, Lightbound (2004) referred to positive and negative transfer. According to his idea, positive transfer refers to the similarities between the first and second languages, so if the two languages have more in common, the target language can be learned easily, and if they have less in common, learning the new language is difficult because of negative transfer or interference.

Strevens (1965) maintained that appropriate materials for language teaching were those which make an appropriate comparison between the mother tongue and the target language. In addition, Politzer (1968) referred to contrastive analysis as an important contribution of linguistics to language teaching.

However, the emphasis on the role of students' L1 as the main source of learning problems was questioned by the advent of 'Error analysis' proposed by Corder and his colleagues during the 1960s (Kayum, 2015). According to the proponents of Error analysis, making errors is an integral part of language learning process, and sources of error are not just the learners' L1, and they may have many other sources such as interlingual interference, overgeneralization, attitude, aptitude, motivation and so on (Keshavarz, 1999; Shastri, 2010).

According to Schachter (1974), the proponents of error analysis found that in Contrastive Analysis, teachers and linguists totally focused on "predicting what the learner will do, and have not paid enough attention to the study of what the learner actually does" (p. 206). Similarly, Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, and Wilde (2002) claimed that recent studies show that "only a minority of errors are attributable to mother tongue interference" (p. 136).

In order to emphasize the unique features of learners' language, the notion of "Interlanguage" was coined by Selinker (1972). It was defined as "the separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language
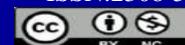
norm" (Selinker, 1972 p. 214). Based on Selinker (1972), EFL learners build up a language system, which differs from both the target language and their mother tongue.

1.1.2 Cognitive Approach

Leonardi (2011) believed that translation is connecting two different cultures. Therefore, according to him translation is a cognitive activity. Besides, Schäffner (1998) quoted in Leonardi (2011), claims that translation and related exercises could be beneficial as cognitive components for foreign language learning:

a) To improve verbal agility;

b) To expand students' vocabulary in L2;

c) To develop their style;

d) To improve their understanding of how languages work;

e) To consolidate L2 structures for active use;

f) To monitor and improve the comprehension of L2 (p. 21).

1.2 Humanistic aspects of own language use and translation

1.2.1 Motivation and Anxiety

Motivation is a multi-facet phenomenon in second language learning context. It mainly consists of learners' communicative need and their attitude toward learning a new language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The first component deals with the extent that language learners want to be proficient in language in order to fulfill their professional ambitions, and the second part deals with learners' attitude toward communication in the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Levine (2003) investigated the correlation between the use of translation and students' anxiety and motivation. For doing so, the researcher developed two questionnaires that measured students' and teachers' perceptions about the use of the target language and translation in foreign language classes separately. The findings revealed that learners felt less anxious and were more motivated when their own language was used more often in the classroom.

Furthermore, Cook (2001) believed that L1 makes a link between second and first languages. This can help learners to compare the grammatical structures of their native language with the target language in order to deepen their learning. Besides this, some researchers believe that learning some parts of English grammar is very difficult for students without explicit instruction (Williams, 1999). In this case, the use of translation can help learners to focus more on the grammatical rules which can facilitate their learning.

1.2.2 Identity

Norton (2013) defined identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). With the rise of globalization, the importance of learning an international language has been raised. By the increasing needs and desire for learning English, some sociological and sociolinguistic concerns have been emerged; one of them is related to learners' identity (Norton, 2013). It is believed that the spread and promotion of English language can result in demotion of nonnative leaners' language and identity, and the 'judicious' use of L1 in language classes can to some extent compensate for that (Cook, 2010).

1.3 Practical Aspects of Own Language Use

1.3.1 Time Efficiency

Some teachers believed that the use of translation in language classes can save time. For instance, Stibbard (1994) claimed that TILT can save time and promote students' motivation. Sometimes, for explaining some grammatical rules or defining some words, teachers can refer to students' mother tongue to save time. However, some researchers disagree with this idea and believe that translation is a difficult skill, which required more time and exercises (Carreres, 2006; Wilkins, 1974)

1.3.2 Bilingual Dictionaries

Bilingual dictionaries are vital aids for presenting an equivalent for new words in the target language. Stein (1989) emphasized the role of bilingual dictionaries as follow:

When the bilingual dictionary is used for comprehension, it provides quick general understanding, which is a positive feature. Indeed for certain kinds of words, such as the names of plants, animals, cultural institutions, technical and scientific terms, the bilingual dictionary is indispensable. Without it, it is very difficult to get a precise understanding of such words (p. 41).

He also stated that students in beginner levels needed more access to bilingual dictionaries rather than intermediate and advanced levels as it helped them to feel more comfortable and confident.

2. Methodology

2.1 Instrumentation

The instrument that was used in this study for data collection was a

questionnaire. The questionnaire was originally developed by Nihan Erdemir (2013) in "*Reconsidering Translation and Mother Tongue in English Language Teaching*". The questionnaire was slightly modified and translated into Persian which was the native language of the participants. The first part of it was about the demographic information such as gender, age and number of years of language learning. The second part of the questionnaire asked EFL students' perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of TILT from linguistic, humanistic and practical perspectives based on Likert scale items. The obtained data were analyzed using SPSS version 23. Each statement used in the questionnaire had a counter-statement to ensure that students did not give random answers.

2.2 Participants
One hundred and twenty–two pre-intermediate Iranian EFL students answered the questionnaire. Among 122 EFL participants, 79 were female and 43 were male. The mean of their age was 14 years, and the mean of their language learning experience was 3 years.

2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis
The researchers distributed the questionnaire among the participants after having their consent for participation in his study. The collected data were entered into SPSS version 23 to be analyzed. The findings are presented in the following section.

3. Result
The aim of this study was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using TILT from linguistic, humanistic, and practical perspectives. In order to answer this question a questionnaire consisting 20 items was distributed among 122 participants. Then, frequency and descriptive statistics were used for examining the participants' views about the advantages and disadvantages of TILT from linguistic, humanistic, and practical aspects.

3.1 Linguistic
Items number 1,2,3,4 and their counter statements 11, 12, 13, and 14 of the questionnaire were about the linguistic aspect of TILT. In addition, Items 10 and 20 were about contrastive analysis that was the subset of linguistic part.

The result of the descriptive statistics related to the advantages and disadvantages of using TILT from the linguistic perspective is presented in Table 1. As indicated in the Table, the participants generally believed that the use of TILT had more advantages from the linguistic perspective.

Table 1: The benefits of using TILT from the linguistic perspective

Items		Frequency			
		Totally agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
1	I understand better when the English language teacher sometimes orally translates the language tasks to Persian.	38	46	25	13
2	I do not need translation activities from English to Persian to understand better what I am reading.	10	48	50	14
3	When I undertake a task in an English lesson, instructions can sometimes be given in Persian to make clear what I am doing.	43	33	31	15
4	When English is spoken, I do not translate any words or sentences in my mind.	11	16	56	39
10	Translation activities in the classroom confuse me, so they are useless.	3	7	56	56
11	I do not need oral translation to understand English language lessons.	13	40	44	25
12	Translation activities from English to Persian should be sometimes done so that I can understand better what I am reading.	60	51	7	4
13	Before undertaking a language task, the teacher should give classroom instructions only in English.	32	40	41	9
14	When the teacher speaks English, I translate some words or sentences in my mind.	47	55	12	8
20	Translation activities are useful because they help me realize the differences and similarities between English and Persian.	59	41	10	12

3.2 Humanistic
Items 5, 6 and 7 and their counter-statements were about humanistic aspects of TILT. Items 5 and 15 were about the motivation aspect. Items 6 and 16 were about the anxiety level, and items 7 and 17 were about learners' identity.

Descriptive statistics about the benefits of using TILT from a humanistic perspective is presneted in Table 2. As shown in the Table, generally students believed that the use of TILT had more advantages rather than disadvantages from the Humanistic perspective.

Table 2: The benefits of using TILT from the humanistic perspective

Items		Observed frequency			
		Totally agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
5	When the English language teacher sometimes speaks Persian, I feel motivated to participate in classroom activities.	30	43	26	23
6	I feel relaxed when I am supposed to use only English in language tasks.	22	32	47	21
7	When Persian is used as a means to teach English in certain situations in the classroom, it accepts my linguistic and cultural identity.	19	47	37	19
15	I feel motivated to express my opinions and feelings when only English is supposed to be spoken during the whole course time.	27	35	38	22
16	I feel really anxious when I am supposed to use only English in language tasks.	19	52	29	22
17	I do not feel any enforcement into my linguistic and cultural identity when only English is used in the classroom.	9	30	39	44

3.3 Practical
This aspect is about students' attitude towards translation. Items 8 and 18 were about time efficiency, and items 9 and 19 were about bilingual dictionaries.

The result of the descriptive statistics related to the advantages of using TILT from

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the practical perspective is presented in the Table 3. As indicated in the Table, the participants believed that TILT had more advantages from the practical perspective.

Table 3: The benefits of using TILT from the practical perspective

	Items	Observed frequency			
		Totally agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
8	When new vocabulary and idioms are translated into Persian by the teacher, it is a waste of time.	8	13	46	55
9	Bilingual dictionaries, which are both in English and in Persian, help me to understand better.	53	56	8	5
18	It is time-saving when new vocabulary and idioms are sometimes translated into Persian by the teacher.	21	41	40	20
19	Bilingual dictionaries, which are both in English and Persian, make it difficult to understand the new words.	12	10	46	54

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine EFL learners' perceptions about the use of TILT from linguistic, humanistic and practical perspectives. Based on the frequency of students' responses to each item of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the advantages of using TILT from linguistic, humanistic, and practical perspectives were more than its disadvantages from participants' perspectives. The findings are in line with the results of some other studies conducted before which showed the beneficial effect of using translation in language classes (Chang, 2011; Cianflone, 2009; Koletnik Korosec, 2013; Lee, 2013; Lee, Schallert & Kim, 2015; Navidinia & Toushe, 2017; Navidinia, Nazarloo, & Esmaeili, 2018; Vaezi & Mirzaei, 2007).

In this study, 10 questions were about the Linguistic Aspect of TILT that has two subsets namely Cognitive and Contrastive Analysis. As far as the Cognitive Aspect is concerned, the result of this study revealed that students had a positive attitude towards using TILT. These results were consistent with Erdemir's (2013) study which investigated the perceptions of tertiary-level learners and nonnative language teachers towards own-language use and translation from linguistic, humanistic, pedagogical and practical aspects in English language teaching. He concluded that Turkish students had more positive attitudes towards the use of translation in English language classrooms than that of those in Austria. He also concluded that learners in beginner and intermediate levels favor translation more than advanced levels in both countries.

Furthermore, the result of this study indicated that students had a positive attitude towards Contrastive Analysis. The result is

in line with Lado's (1957) ideas which refer to the importance of Contrastive Analysis by making students aware of the similarities and differences between the two languages.

Also, the findings of the study about the Humanistic Aspect of TILT which was divided into anxiety and motivation are in line with Levine's (2003) study concluding that students feel less anxious and more motivated when their own language is used more often in the classroom. The participants in this study believed that using translation could increase their motivation and preserve their identity, and this is generally in line with the results of Erdemir's (2013) study. Furthermore, is it is in line with the Cook's (2010) ideas maintaining that the use of TILT can preserve language learners' identity in this global village.

The findings about the students' perceptions about the Practical Aspect of own language use was divided into two parts, namely time efficiency and bilingual dictionaries. As far as saving time is concerned, the result showed that Iranian EFL learners considered the use of TILT as a time saving technique, which is in line with Stibbard's (1994) study showing that translation can save time and promote learners' motivation.

In the second part which was about 'using bilingual dictionaries', the result revealed that Iranian EFL learners believed that bilingual dictionaries were more helpful than monolingual English dictionaries. This result is in line with Stein's study (1989) which indicated that in elementary levels, students need more access to bilingual dictionaries rather than intermediate and advanced levels as it helps them to feel more comfortable and confident.

The present study tried to shed some lights on the EFL learners' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using TILT. The findings can have some implications for language teachers and syllabus designers. Although monolingual teaching is still dominant and acceptable in many EFL contexts, the findings of this study showed that EFL learners believed that the use of TILT can have many positive effects on their learning from different perspectives. Therefore, it is suggested that EFL teachers try to use students' mother tongue 'judiciously' in the class.

The study had some limitations. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire. Therefore, the results are

valid to the extent that the participants answered the questions honestly and accurately. It is suggested that the future studies conduct interviews besides collecting data by using questionnaires in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the learners' perceptive about the use of TILT.

Acknowledgment

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