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The Relationship between Course Materials and Test Formats for Students of English Translation in Iran

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ABSTRACT

College students are always wondering if there is any relationship between the types of course materials introduced by teachers and the test formats they give. By knowing the existence or non-existence of such a relationship, they can be prepared better for a test and it may reduce their test anxiety. In this study, two universities that offer "English translation" programs at the B.A. level in Iran were randomly selected and examined. Here, the researcher looked at the kinds of materials for 47 courses in Mofid University (introduced by 15 teachers) and 42 courses in University of Kashan, then at the test formats used to assess the knowledge or skill of the students. After comparing the materials with the tests given, it was found that approximately 83 percent of tests in University of Kashan and 89 percent of them in Mofid University were of written form (essay type, multiple choice, etc.) and we came to the conclusion that there was no relationship between course materials and test formats for the students majoring in English translation. Rather, apart from teachers' preferences, it was the nature of the courses that decided the type of questions and led to different types and formats of tests.

Keywords: English Translation, Course Materials, Test Format, Essay type, Multiple Choice

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1. Introduction

One of the problems with which students are faced before taking any kind of examinations is the issue that they do not know what type of questions they are going to provide answers for. If we can find a way to inform the students of this issue, they may perform better on the examinations. Furthermore, their test anxiety will be reduced. The main purpose of this study is to seek for the relationship between the materials taught and the format of tests given.

The effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash. Backwash can be harmful or beneficial. If a test is regarded as important, then preparation for it can come to dominate all teaching and learning activities. And if the test content and testing techniques are at variance with the objective of the course, then there is likely to be harmful backwash. (Hughes, 2002).

Some students participating in this study stated that in courses that were taught more than one semester such as Linguistics and Advanced Translation, to name just randomly, because they were aware of this

issue (test type) and also were familiar with their teachers' objectives and criteria, they performed better in the second respective semesters. But what was going to be like if the teacher was to be changed? Suppose you are participating in a class in which you are being taught a new subject. A new subject means that you are completely unfamiliar with it. When it comes to be a test for assessing how much you have learned, you may be confused and lose your concentration. It happens due to the fact that you do not know what is going to be the type of questions needing you to be ready for. This is not because you have not learned the subject. Actually, aside from the content, different types of tests require different skills. That means you may perform differently on the same subject in different forms. For example, a multiple-choice test on a subject may lead you to a better result than an essay form of test on the same subject or vice versa.

It helps us to understand the discussion better if we begin with defining what a test is and to what types it has been divided. "Test" often connotes the presentation of a set of questions to be

answered (Farhady et al. 1994). A test consists of some units the smallest of which is referred to as an “item”. An item itself is composed of two parts: the stem and the response. The stem’s function is eliciting information from the examinee and it may come in the form of a question, a statement, or other varieties of linguistic constructions. Some examples of stems are:

- What is the main objective of translation studies?
- Explain the purpose of discourse analysis.
- The word “undo” contains a prefix.
- Calque refers to

As you can see, these instances of the stem require the examinees to provide the examiner with some information.

The second part of an item is the response and it refers to the information that is elicited from the examinee. The response can range from recognizing a single word to producing a comprehensive essay presenting a discussion on or an explanation of a complex issue. Thus, it is not a trivial job to choose the form of the stem and it needs great care to be taken.

2. Classification of Test Items in terms of Their Format

There have been several categorizations and classifications about the test format. In general, a test can be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal tests come in two forms: oral or written. Non-verbal tests are of pictorials, graphics, maps, etc. An oral test is a test that is answered orally (verbally) in which an examiner presents questions to the respondent in spoken form. One of the most well-known classifications is that which divides tests into essay type and multiple choice formats. Essay type tests are tests in which the test-taker is required to produce language elements, to write a response to fulfill the requirements of the item. In a test that has items formatted as multiple choice questions, respondents are asked to select only correct answers from among given choices or alternatives. Each one of those formats has its advantages and disadvantages.

When a test has good items, it does not necessarily mean that it is a good test. The reason is that a test as a whole is more than a mere combination of individual items. In fact, a test designer is supposed to be aware of the fact that having good items is necessary but not sufficient for a test to function satisfactorily.

As it was noted above, a test must have some characteristics in order to be acceptable and to be considered as a good test. These characteristics are *Reliability*, *Practicality* and *Validity* (Farhady et al. 1994). Reliability refers to the consistency of test scores. It means a test should offer similar results if it was given at another time, for instance when the same test is given to the same student at two different times in two different settings, it should not make any difference to the student whether he or she takes the test in one setting or the other. Practicality means that a test should be feasible and easy to take and score. As for validity, it refers to the extent to which a test measures what it wants and is supposed to measure. Validity is of several types which include content, face and construct validity.

2.1 Defining Materials

Although the term "course materials" generally denotes text books, course materials refer to any kind of resources such as books which are used to help, ease, and improve teaching and learning activities in the process of instruction. As Tomlinson puts it, materials are “anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language, including course books, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions (Tomlinson 2012).

2.2 Types of Materials

Course materials can be classified on their types just like the table below:

Table: 1 Types of Course Materials

Type of Course Materials	Example
Written	Textbooks, Pamphlets, Manuals, Flashcards
Audio	Cassettes, Audio Files
Visual	Charts, Real Objects, Photographs
Audiovisual	Slides, Videos
Electronic	Software, Video Games

2.3 Why Materials?

Materials meet a psychological need. Firstly, through texts, topics, tasks and visuals, materials can provide motivation for the learner which it is difficult or the teacher alone to sustain. Secondly, in the case of a set of course materials, they give learners and teachers at least a sense of ordered progression and, indeed, meet their expectation that learning involves materials. While there is a good deal of evidence that progress in a language is not steady and



systematic, the belief that one is making steady and systematic progress can itself can be important. (Mishan & Timmis, 2015)

Allwright (1990) believes that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do. O'Neill (1990), however, argues that materials may be suitable for students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, that textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons that textbooks are efficient in terms of time and money.

2.4 Research Question

As much as we searched, no researcher has ever asked about the relationship between the course materials and the test types in the field of English translation for students of B.A program of study. This made us more interested in this issue. College students are always wondering if there is any relationship between the types of course materials introduced by teachers and the test formats they give. This could make a quite big difference. When a student is aware of the existence as well as the nature of such a relationship, he or she can make plan for it and be prepared better for the test and it also may reduce his or her test anxiety causing him or her to have a better performance in the test.

Furthermore, it can also be helpful to investigate this issue in other fields and in other schools because nowadays we are facing with those who has not performed that well in their examinations and despite they are very talented, their abilities are not fully appreciated. If we can find a way to test certain ability quite properly and as it suits, we can go forward in investing on the right case.

It must be said that our observations through in Mofid University and University of Kashan, no significant and meaningful relationship exists between the type of materials taught and the type of tests given. Let's see how true this hypothesis turned to be.

3. Methodology

This study falls into descriptive kind of researches (finding out the relationship between two things, if any). In this case, we put evaluation strategies which may be

quite unique to some teachers, outside of our consideration.

By convenient sampling, two universities that offer "English translation" programs at the B.A. level in Iran were selected. Some graduated students of English translation from those universities were asked to write the materials used and the format of test given by their teachers throughout eight semesters. Here, the students were just asked about the courses that were specially designed for the major of English translation not those courses shared with other fields and majors.

First, the kinds of materials introduced by teachers were asked about. Then, we asked about the types of tests given to them as final exam tests after gathering that data, we began to compare the types of course materials with the formats of tests in search of any kind of reasonable relationship between the tests and the kind of introduced materials, knowing that the teachers' interests (i.e. testing strategies) and knowledge may be of influence.

Again, it is needless to say that this paper excluded the testing strategies. By testing strategies we mean "test giving strategies" which means the general approach a teacher take in order to test the students' abilities. These include the time, place, frequencies, intervals of the test or tests, giving it one by one or for all at the same time, etc. Rather this paper focused on the content of the tests given and their forms to see if their forms have any relationship or correspondence to the forms of materials taught.

The number of courses which were checked in University of Kashan was 42 whereas the number of courses checked in Mofid University was 47. The courses include: Reading and Comprehension I, II & III, English Grammar I & I, Listening and Speaking I & II, Language Study skills, Advanced Writing, Phonology and Phonetics, Oral Reproduction I & II Principles and Methodology of Translation, Reading Press Texts, Linguistics I & II, Simple Texts Translation, Simple Poetry, Letter Writing, English Expressions and Idioms, Essay Writing, Theoretical Principles of Translation, English Literature I & II, Translated Islamic Works I & II, Persian Language Structure, Advanced Translation I & II, Interpretation I, II & III, Simple Prose, Contrastive Analysis, Morphology, Principles of Research I & II,

Teaching Methodology, Economic Texts Translation, Press Translation, Translation of Deeds and Correspondence I & II, Language Testing, Translation of Literary Texts, Translation of Religious Texts, Translation of Political Texts, and Translation of Movies. All the courses other than those specific to the major of English translation were excluded.

4. Results

According to students of Mofid University, all of the abovementioned courses ended with a final exam except one, Oral Reproduction I. The tests for 42 courses were of written type and for 5 courses, of oral type.

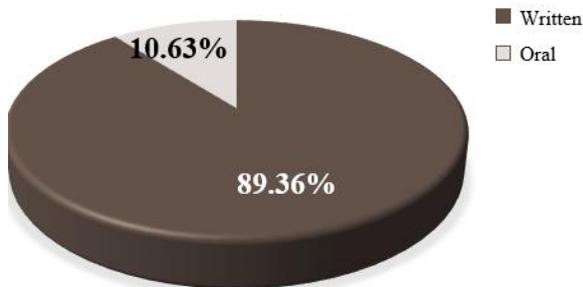


Figure: 1 Basic forms of all the Tests for 47 Courses in Mofid University

As for the University of Kashan, 35 courses were ended with written tests while the final tests for 7 courses were of oral type.

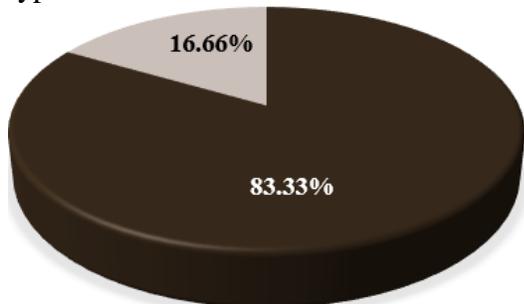


Figure: 2 Basic forms of all the Tests for 42 Courses in University of Kashan

It shows that all the tests were of verbal form. The majority of them were also in written form. As it is displayed in table 1, the courses, the types of materials and the tests are mentioned one by one. Here, of course, we leave some courses due to the fact that they are test courses. It means during the term, the students are being tested not being taught or studying something, for example the course ‘Individual Translation’. Let’s see:

Table 2: Courses, materials, and tests types in Mofid University

Number	Course Title	Type of Material Taught	Test format	Teacher
1	Reading and Comprehension I	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. A
2	English Grammar I	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mrs. B
3	Listening and Speaking I	Audio Files	Written, Fill in the Blank	Mr. C
4	Reading and Comprehension II	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. A
5	English Grammar II	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mrs. B
6	Listening and Speaking II	Audio Files	Written and Oral	Mr. C
7	Language Study skills	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. D
8	Reading and Comprehension III	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice and Fill in the Blank	Mr. C
9	Advanced Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mrs. E
10	Phonology and Phonetics	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. D
11	Oral Reproduction I	Textbook	Oral, During the Term	Mr. A
12	Principles and Methodology of Translation	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Ms. F
13	Reading Press Texts	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice	Mr. A
14	Linguistics I	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. G
15	Translation of Simple Texts	Some Texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. C
16	Simple Poetry	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. H
17	Oral Reproduction II	Textbook	Oral	Mr. D
18	Letter Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. I
19	English Expressions and Idioms	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Ms. J
20	Essay Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. H
21	Theoretical Principles of Translation	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Ms. F
22	English Literature I	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. K
23	Linguistics II	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. G
24	Translated Islamic Works I	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mrs. B
25	Persian Language Structure	Pamphlet	Written, Essay type	Mr. G
26	Advanced Translation I	Some Texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. A
27	Interpretation I	A PDF File and students' Texts	Oral	Mr. C
28	English Literature II	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. K
29	Translated Islamic Works II	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. D
30	Simple Prose	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. H
31	Contrastive Analysis	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. G
32	Morphology	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. G
33	Advanced Translation II	Some Texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. A
34	Interpretation II	A PDF File and Some Audio Files	Oral	Mr. C
35	Principles of Research I	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. L



36	Language Teaching Methodology	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. C
37	Economic Texts Translation	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. D
38	Press Translation	Some texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. H
39	Translation of Deeds and Correspondence I	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice	Ms. M
40	Interpretation III	A PDF File and Some Video Files	Oral	Mr. C
41	Principles of Research II	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. L
42	Language Testing	Textbook	Written, Mixture	Mr. N
43	Translation of Literary Texts	Some texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. K
44	Translation of Religious Texts	Some texts	Written, Essay type	Mr. O
45	Translation of Deeds and Correspondence II	Textbook	Written, Essay type	Mr. O
46	Translation of Political Texts	A Book	Written, Essay type	Mr. C
47	Translation of Movies	Video files	Written, Essay type	Mr. H

Table 2: Courses, materials, and test types in University of Kashan

Number	Course Title	Type of Material Taught	Test format
1	Reading and Comprehension I	Textbook	Written, Essay type
2	English Grammar I	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
3	Listening and Speaking I	Audio Files	Oral
4	Reading and Comprehension II	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
5	English Grammar II	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
6	Listening and Speaking II	Audio Files	Oral
7	Language Study skills	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
8	Reading and Comprehension III	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
9	Advanced Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type
10	Oral Reproduction I	Textbook	Oral
11	Principles and Methodology of Translation	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
12	Reading Press Texts	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
13	Linguistics I	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
14	Translation of Simple Texts	Some Texts	Written, Essay type
15	Simple Poetry	Free Texts	Written, Essay type
16	Oral Reproduction II	Textbook	Oral
17	Letter Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type
18	English Expressions and Idioms	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
19	Essay Writing	Textbook	Written, Essay type
20	Theoretical Principles of Translation	Textbook	Written, Mixture
21	Linguistics II	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
22	Translated Islamic Works I	Textbook	Written, Essay type
23	Persian Language Structure	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice

24	Advanced Translation I	Some Texts	Written, Essay type
25	Interpretation I	Free Materials	Oral
26	Translated Islamic Works II	Textbook	Written, Essay type
27	Simple Prose	Free Texts	Written, Essay type
28	Contrastive Analysis	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
29	Morphology	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
30	Advanced Translation II	Some Texts	Written, Essay type
31	Interpretation II	Free Materials	Oral
32	Principles of Research I	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
33	Language Teaching Methodology	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
34	Economic Texts Translation	Textbook	Written, Essay type
35	Press Translation	Some texts	Written, Essay type
36	Translation of Deeds and Correspondence I	Pamphlet, Some texts	Written, Essay type
37	Interpretation III	Free Materials	Oral
38	Language Testing	Textbook	Written, Multiple choice
39	Translation of Literary Texts	Some texts	Written, Essay type
40	Translation of Deeds and Correspondence II	Pamphlet, Some texts	Written, Essay type
41	Translation of Political Texts	Pamphlet, Some texts	Written, Essay type
42	Translation of Movies	Free Materials	Written, Essay type

As it is displayed in the tables, some of the tests were given in a mixture of item forms. That is, some items are of essay type, some, of multiple choice and so on. All of the courses with a textbook, pamphlet or other kinds of texts as the classroom materials, ended with a written type of tests except oral reproduction I & II. As for the courses with audio form instructions, two courses of those 4 courses in Mofid University ended with an oral exam and the other two ended with a written test. In University of Kashan, all such courses had oral type of final tests.

There are eleven courses (27.5%) ending with a test in a mixture of item formats in Mofid University while it happens only once in University of Kashan. Some of the courses had two final exams in two different forms such as that of Listening and Speaking.

For the course, Reading and Comprehension, the students were taught based on some books. In the end, they took tests which were a mixture of essay type, multiple choice, fill-in-the blank and alike. This happened for the course English Grammar as well.

In Mofid University, the students were given a written test at the end of the terms for the course Listening and Speaking while the final test was oral in University of Kashan. This course was taught based on some audio files to which the student were supposed to listen, then they had to repeat it and say what they had exactly heard. In the final exam, the students of Mofid University were asked to listen to some audio files and write down in the blanks provided on their sheets what they had understood.

As for the course language Study Skills, a textbook were the base of teaching in the classroom. The content were some methods of studying and some other things all of which the students have to memorize. In the final test, as was possibly expected, a written test with some questions about those memorized thing was presented. This was also true about Phonology and Phonetics in Mofid University, Principles and Methodology of Translation, and Theoretical Principles of Translation.

In the courses Advanced Writing, Essay Writing, and Letter Writing, the students were taught based on a book, some points about writing. In the final tests, they were required to write a paragraph, an essay or a letter with observance of what they had been taught during those terms.

For Oral Reproduction, the students studied some short stories from a book introduced by the teacher and retell it in the class in their own words and account. As the final exam, thus, they were asked to recount a story.

In Simple Prose, English Literature, Simple poetry, and Press Reading classes, some rules were taught and practiced on a book. Those textbooks were the place which the students worked their knowledge on it. So, as the final tests, some literary texts and poems, some press texts were given to them to exercise what they had learned.

Regarding translating courses such as Economic Texts, Press, Advanced or Simple Texts Translation, some texts were given from a book or another place to be translated. The students translated them and in the classroom it was to be evaluated and assessed. As a final test a text, seen or unseen or both, was given to be translated.

The course Interpretation was going in this manner: some texts, audio files or video files were given to be worked on in advance. In the classroom, the students

were to listen to them and interpret it as an interpreter.

In other course classes, some points were to be understood and some to be memorized based on an introduced book. In the final exam, the students had to remember those memorized points and apply the understood ones.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that there is no meaningful relationship between course materials and test types for the student who major in English translation in Iran.

Almost all the tests were of written form. As it was noticed, by comparing the types of materials and the forms of tests we come to the point that every kind of materials can be tested in written form. This does not include the courses which are not in written form in nature such as the course "Interpretation". As a matter of fact, it can be tested in written form but it happens in very rare situations. So, teachers always try to test the interpretation skills of their students orally.

According to the comparisons, it is more the nature of the courses which leads to different types of tests along with the teachers' preferences. When a textbook or a pamphlet is introduced, it cannot be expected that the final exam would be in written form or in a certain format. Apart from teachers' preferences, it depends on what that textbook intends to teach. If it is oral skills, the test would most likely be oral. Furthermore, it seems to be dependent upon the objectives of the course or the teacher. Whether the students are required to memorize something or to apply it in their use, the type or format of the test can be different.

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