


TRANSLATION IN EFL CLASSROOM



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Abstract

Throughout much of the history of research into second language acquisition (SLA), the role of learners' first language (L1) has been a hotly debated issue. Prodromou (2000) refers to the mother tongue as a 'skeleton in the closet', while Gabrielatos (2001) calls it a 'bone of contention'. Such views are but a mere reflection of the different methodological shifts in English Language Teaching, which have brought about new and different outlooks on the role of the mother tongue. The conflict itself is taking place in academic circles rather than in classrooms, where the use of L1 is still considered unacceptable owing to the predominance of the communicative method in language teaching.

Research on the role that mother tongue has for the non-native learners of English has been conducted around the world, however none in North Macedonia. This research aims to explore some of the controversy regarding the use of the student's first language (L1), as well as to suggest translation activities as a beneficial tool for the students of South East European University in Tetovo, North Macedonia. It also provides insights into native language interference in the process of translating from students' mother tongue into English, and vs.

1. Introduction

Brown (2000, p195), states that "the debate over whether English language classrooms should include or exclude students' native language has been a contentious issue for a long time but as of yet the research findings have not been entirely persuasive either way." Those advocating an English-only policy have tended to base their claims on theoretical arguments such as the idea of learning being heavily determined by the quantity of exposure to the language. "Opponents of an English-only policy have often focused only on the fact that students usually support the idea of using L1 in the classroom" (Critchley, 1999, p11), whereas the other group of researchers believes that mother tongue has a facilitating role in learning the second language.

Intuitively, a good number of teachers feel, partly based on their experiences as learners of a second language, that the mother tongue has an active and beneficial role to play in instructed second language acquisition/learning. In the literature, an increasing number of teacher-researchers stress the growing methodological need in TEFL/TESOL for a principled, systematic and judicious way of using the mother tongue in the classroom. And yet, for some of us, there seems to be a

generalized feeling of guilt that we are acting counter to the principles of good teaching when we use the learners' mother tongue as a tool to facilitate learning.

Professionals in second language acquisition have become increasingly aware of the role the mother tongue plays in the EFL classroom. Nunan and Lamb (1996), for example, contend that EFL teachers working with monolingual students at lower levels of English proficiency find prohibition of the mother tongue to be practically impossible. Cook (2001) in support of the role of L1 states that "bringing the L1 back from exile may lead not only to the improvement of existing teaching methods but also to innovations in methodology" (p. 189). Furthermore, Brooks and Donato (1994, cited in Cook, 2001) argue that the use of mother tongue is a normal psycholinguistic process that facilitates L2 production and allows the learners both to initiate and sustain verbal interaction with one other.

In spite of the negative view toward using the first language of learners in the classroom, most nonnative speaker teachers of English have quietly been using the L1, to a lesser or greater extent; "the skeleton has been there all the time, we just haven't

wanted to talk about it". According to Vaezi & Mirzaei (2007, p.7) "the reason for such treatment of the first language lies in the fact that the psycholinguistic or pedagogic framework which justifies the place of mother tongue in L2 instruction does not exist yet." Smith (1994) in support for bilingual education states that providing children quality education in their first language gives them two things: knowledge and literacy. The knowledge that children get through their first language helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible.

Many studies have been conducted on the relation between L1 and foreign language learning and translation; however, no study involved the Albanian language interference in learning a second language grammar. If a contrastive analysis is conducted between the students' native language - Albanian, and the students' target language - English, then many differences will appear between the Albanian and English language that indicate to very common issues that students face in translation from their mother tongue into English, and vs. Moreover, the major aims of this research are to show the students' attitudes towards native language usage and interference, to find out the extent of native language usage and to explore impact that mother tongue on English language proficiency.

2. Research Methodology

The major objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the different approaches that students have toward the use of mother tongue in English as a foreign language classes.
- To find out if students believe that mother tongue can facilitate translation from English into their mother tongue and vs.
- To find out if mother tongue proficiency reflects on students' capability to translate correctly.

2.1. The Sample

There were included one hundred students from SEEU. These were students who voluntarily participated in my research survey. It has been random selection of the sample. The results were analyzed and interpreted with a quantitative research.

- From 100 students, 88 participants were females and 12 males.
- From 100 students, 68 participants were Albanians and 32 were Macedonians.

2.2. Survey Procedure

All the students taking part in the experiment were given teacher-designed questionnaire. This questionnaire was a 8-item multiple-choice test devised to measure degrees of translation and the use of students' mother tongue in the English as a foreign language

learning and teaching. Some of the questions were provided with two questions and there were questions from four up to eight possible answers. From these alternatives the participants had to select the most appropriate way to respond to that particular situation. The scoring for this test was based on native-speaker responses to the items.

The questionnaire:

Table 1. Students' believes on their accuracy in their mother tongue

1. Should non-native students of English be accurate in their native language?	
<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
59%	41%

The biggest problems in translation classes are the rules and orthography of the mother tongue. Majority of them face huge problems with the proper use of mother tongue, whereas pay countless attention to the use of the foreign language. As seen from the answers given to the first question, 59% of students believe that mother tongue proficiency reflects on the second language proficiency.

Table 2. Students' believes on the use of mother tongue in the English classes

2. Do you believe that teachers should use translation in English classes?			
<i>a. not at all</i>	<i>b. a little</i>	<i>c. sometimes</i>	<i>d. a lot</i>
18%	23%	58%	1%

Although with the communicative approach mother tongue is totally neglected in the foreign language learning and teaching, its role cannot be neglected. The results show that 58% of students believe that mother tongue should sometimes be used in the classroom, whereas 23% feel that mother tongue cannot be absolutely neglected from EFL classroom.

Table 3. Students' believes on the use of translation in the class

3. When do you think it is necessary to translate into native language in the English classroom?	
<i>a. to help define some new vocabulary items</i>	31%
<i>b. to practice the use of some phrases and expressions</i>	17%
<i>c. to explain complex grammar points</i>	14%
<i>d. to explain difficult concepts or ideas</i>	26%
<i>e. to give instructions</i>	8%
<i>f. to give suggestions on how to learn more effectively</i>	4%

<i>g. if other, please specify</i>	0%
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As seen from the above table, there are many cases when students need to be provided with translation in their English classes. Moreover, 31% of students need assistance in the learning a new vocabulary, and 26% of them believe that mother tongue can help them in explaining difficult concepts and ideas. However, the percentage of students who need mother tongue for practicing the use of phrases and expressions, such as collocations and idioms (17%), as well as the ones who find mother tongue supportive in grammar classes (14%), is a percentage that cannot be neglected.

Table 4. Students' believes on the assistance that they get from the use of mother tongue in the class

Table 5. Students' believes on percentage of the use of mother tongue in EFL classroom

5. What percentage of the time do you think that your native language should be used in the class? Choose one.										
Percentage of class time	5%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%
Percentage of students	29%	28%	17%	17%	8%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The table clearly shows the decline of percentage of time that students believe that mother tongue should take in the EFL classroom. 91% of students believe that percentage of time where mother tongue needs to be used is 5% (29 students), 10% (28 students), 20% (17 students), and 30% (17 students). The research did not expect to get higher percentages than 30% of time, especially when considering the answers given to two previous questions.

Table 7. Students' believes on the influence that mother tongue has on the fluency in translation

7. Have you received any influence from L1 proficiency in translation from English into your mother tongue	
Yes	No
75%	25%

In the English classes students come with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in, however, for majority of them Albanian and Macedonian are their native languages. These two languages, as same as the English language, belong to the Indo-European branch of languages, however, they belong to different families of languages, and that is the reason that the students' native languages do not have any similarities with the English, neither with the vocabulary, nor in grammar. Results from this question were expected.

4. Do you think that translation into native language in the classroom helps you learn this language?			
no	a little	fairly much	a lot
22%	53%	12%	13%

The results from this question 4, show the opposite what has been said in the previous questions. 53 % of them answered that mother tongue helps a little in learning English. The interpretation of such results is that the students who study English, influenced by new trends in teaching and learning English, generally believe that mother tongue should not be used in the classroom. However, the answers given in the previous questions show that there are many cases and moments when mother tongue is a precious source in gaining new vocabulary, grammar and instructions.

Table 7. Students' believes on the influence that mother tongue has on the fluency in translation

7. Have you received any influence from L1 proficiency in translation from English into your mother tongue	
Yes	No
75%	25%

Students, in large number, 75% of them, believe that mother tongue proficiency reflects on their ability to translate correctly. Again, it can be seen that mother tongue has a crucial role on the other languages, in our case, in English language. From the experiences in English teaching, it can be confirmed that their believes are correct and it can be proved by their results in both languages. Students who perform very well in their mother tongue courses are the same ones who have very good performance in the foreign language courses.

Table 8. Students' believes on mutual impact of language

8. Does English proficiency help you perform better in translation to your mother tongue?	
Yes	No
78%	22%

As it can be seen from the survey question, the students of English believe that the fluency in one language facilitates the other language, and vice versa. As a teacher in that department, I have realized that there are many students who come from countries where English is an official language, such as the USA or Great Britain. These students lack the knowledge of their mother tongue

because their first language is English. However, the English that they use helps them in paying attention to their mother tongue vocabulary and grammatical structures.

4. Conclusion

From the research data, it can be concluded that translation helps students in EFL learning. Second, it encourages students to see the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Deller and Rinvulcri (2002) observe that the mother tongue is one of the many skills and knowledge that students possess, but it is not always used and even sometimes is completely ignored in the EFL classroom. Third, through a comparison of the target language and the students' native language, most language learning difficulties are revealed.

As stated above, the importance of mother tongue in EFL classroom has been investigated in other context, but unfortunately there has not been conducted any research in the context of North Macedonia, respectively in the context of South East European University in Tetovo. All the previous studies which evaluate the role of native language in foreign language learning indicate that the mother tongue was used by the majority of teachers, and both, students and teachers responded positively toward its use. The study conducted with the students at South East European University show minor differences on students' approach toward the use of translation in the EFL context.

Based on students' responses, it can be indicated that the translation of some words, complex ideas, or even whole passages is a good way to learn a foreign language.

- Good language learners tend to use limited translation to gain a focus on form, which is then made fluent through more immersion-based communication (extensive reading, casual conversation, etc.).

- Student wants and needs:

Wants: In this study Albanian or Macedonian learners have been asked in a variety of contexts and at a variety of proficiency levels about their preferences regarding bilingual support. Upwards of 35 % of students prefer having some language support in class.

Needs: There is plenty of evidence showing how learners can switch off when overwhelmed with an L2. The L1 is the support that many of these students rely on to participate and avoid pragmatic failure.

A bilingual classroom as we have here in SEEU where the students and teachers share the same mother tongue present a different situation. There is no reason why a teacher shouldn't take advantage of the students' shared knowledge in bridging the gap

to what they don't yet know. This study tried to show that the question is not if, but rather to what degree, students find the use of mother tongue as a facilitator in foreign language learning.

One important domain in language teaching where the use of mother tongue is inevitable is translation. Teachers can use translation activities in the EFL classroom to raise language awareness, promote language learning, and develop student's autonomy.

The permanent questions that remains without being given definite answers are: what L1 support do students want or need in class? How do teachers use the L1 in class? Should teachers use the L1 in class?

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