Investigating Students' Attitudes Towards Integrating Machine Translation in the EFL Classroom: The case of Google Translate

Étude des attitudes des étudiants à l'égard de l'intégration de la traduction automatique dans la classe d'EFL : le cas de Google Traduction

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Abstract

This paper delves into the potential of machine translation tools, with a specific focus on Google Translate, to expand their role beyond traditional translation tasks to enhance language learning in EFL classrooms. While machine translation tools have become integral to translator training programs, their utilization in language education remains limited and understudied. The present study attempts to highlight the promising avenues for innovative pedagogy in language education by incorporating machine translation tools and EFL students' attitudes towards them. It explores the application of machine translation in the context of English language acquisition for non-native speakers. The results demonstrate that students consider machine translation as a useful strategy to learn English, and Google Translate (GT) offers advantages in vocabulary expansion and quick translations. However, its limitations, such as reduced accuracy for longer texts and the inability to process idiomatic expressions, necessitate careful consideration when integrating it into language learning curricula. GT can serve as a supplementary tool to support learners, but it should not replace conventional language learning methods. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for cautious guidance and monitoring when utilizing automated translation to ensure effective language learning outcomes, bridging the gap between translation and language education while acknowledging the tool's limitations.

Keywords: EFL classroom-Google Translate- learning strategies- Machine Translation- students' attitudes

Résumé

Cet article explore le potentiel des outils de traduction automatique, avec un accent particulier sur Google Translate, en élargissant leur rôle au-delà des tâches de traduction traditionnelles pour améliorer l'apprentissage des langues dans les classes EFL. Bien que les outils de traduction automatique soient devenus une partie intégrante des programmes de formation des traducteurs, leur utilisation dans l'enseignement des langues reste limitée et peu étudiée. La présente étude tente de mettre en évidence les pistes

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prometteuses pour une pédagogie innovante dans l'enseignement des langues en intégrant les outils de traduction automatique et les attitudes des étudiants EFL à leur égard. Cet article explore l'application

de la traduction automatique dans le contexte de l'acquisition de la langue anglaise pour les locuteurs non natifs. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants considèrent la traduction automatique comme une stratégie utile pour apprendre l'anglais, et Google Translate (GT) offre des avantages dans l'expansion du vocabulaire et les traductions rapides. Cependant, ses limites, telles que la précision réduite des textes plus longs et l'incapacité à traiter les expressions idiomatiques, nécessitent une attention particulière lors de leur intégration dans les programmes d'apprentissage des langues. GT peut servir d'outil supplémentaire pour soutenir les apprenants, mais ne devrait pas remplacer les méthodes conventionnelles d'apprentissage des langues. Enfin, cette recherche met l'accent sur la nécessité d'une orientation et d'un suivi prudent dans l'utilisation de la traduction automatisée pour assurer des résultats d'apprentissage linguistique efficaces, combler l'écart entre la traduction et l'éducation linguistique tout en reconnaissant les limites de l'outil.

Mots- clés : EFL- Google Traduction- stratégies d'apprentissage- traduction automatique- attitudes des élèves.

Introduction

For several decades, scholars have neglected the role of translation in the foreign language acquisition process. This is due to the fact that numerous scholars have considered it an inappropriate association in an EFL classroom context. However, with the advent of new emerging technologies and progress made in machine translation (MT), the bilingual approach to learning foreign languages seems to be regaining its substantial place in the world. Actually, the emergence of machine translation has not only transformed the translation industry, but it has also had a profound impact on education. Machine translation appears to provide new opportunities for learners to improve their language skills and develop foreign language proficiency. For instance, Google Translate (GT) is one of the most popular machine translation tools in the world. Currently, MT tools are a key component of translator training programs. However, little study has been done on their possible use in language learning contexts. Kenny (1999) pointed out that the integration of **computer-assisted translation (**CAT) tools, including machine translation, into university curricula could open up new areas of research and pedagogy.

Purpose of the study

This study attempts to:
- Investigate EFL students' attitudes towards using machine translation and how they integrate Google Translate to enhance their English language skills.
- Examine the pedagogical capabilities of Google Translate in EFL classroom.

Statement of the problem

The use of a bilingual approach in the language learning process has been neglected for decades. But recently, machine translation has been increasingly applied to foreign language acquisition. This study delves into the potential of MT tools to expand their role beyond translation tasks to enhance language learning in EFL classrooms. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to investigate the attitudes of English department students at Chlef University towards using MT tools and how they employ Google Translate to improve their language skills.

Significance of the study

Machine translation tools are now a key component of translator training programs. However, little study has been done on their possible use in formal language learning contexts. Looking at the changes in cultural patterns identified by Carole Barone in "The Changing Landscape and the New Academy," we endeavor to dig out how our pedagogies were keeping up with the shifts between traditional and modern patterns of thinking. Having decided to conduct a survey of MT use amongst our undergraduate students, it was an attempt to understand if and how students were employing MT with the intention of developing best practices, which are still ongoing. The bottom line of this study is to unveil students attitudes towards MT incorporation and its impact on enhancing critical thinking in the EFL classroom.

Questions of the study

- What are the attitudes of EFL learners towards integrating machine translation to enhance their language skills?
- How can machine translation bring an added pedagogical value to EFL classroom?

Hypothesis

Machine Translation plays a facilitative role in learning English as a foreign language.

Literature Review

In a digitalized world, machine translation tools have proven to have great potential to transform foreign language education. The proliferation of free online machine translation tools increasingly creates opportunities for the foreign language education community. Authors such as De Cesaris (1995) and Shei (2002) emphasized the importance of integrating computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools in educational settings, and they strongly advocated the use of translation memories in the language class as an autonomous resource to check for phraseological and grammatical correctness in the target language. Research worldwide has demonstrated that EFL learners frequently use online translators in language classes for the purpose of nurturing foreign language proficiency. For EFL learners, translation from and into their mother tongue has become a potent learning strategy that has been ingrained in their learning culture. However, their learning strategies vary from one another. In this regard, Corder (1983) argued that when foreign language proficiency is low, learner tend to rely more on their mother tongue. The current study aims to explore whether learners with low proficiency levels are the only ones who use translation tools. As such, the study examines the correlation between learners proficiency level and their beliefs towards the use of Google Translate.

Generally speaking, learners' incorporation of translation in a foreign language acquisition can be classified into six main categories, including cognitive, metacognitive, social, compensatory, affective, and memory strategies (Al-Musawi, 2014; Liao, 2002; Mollaei, Taghinezhad, & Sadighi, 2017). First and foremost, translation is perceived as a cognitive strategy when processing, receiving, and transferring foreign language material based on the learners' mother tongue. Through this strategy, learners can analyze language inputs to generate new

comprehension in a foreign language. For instance, learners can translate difficult words from the foreign language into their mother tongue to help them understand the text.

The second way in which students of foreign languages employ translation is through meta-cognitive strategy. Unlike the former, this strategy is used by learners with high proficiency. Learners employ translation in this case to evaluate their performance in the foreign language. For example, learners try to translate into their mother tongue their text previously created in the foreign language to make sure that they have structures in the correct arrangement.

Furthermore, when students collaborate to solve language tasks through translation, they can use translation as a social strategy. According to Mollaei et al. (2017), this strategy includes situations where students are actively asking questions to their friends about the meaning of English words or sentences. The question is usually triggered by low-proficiency students, and it seeks clarification, correction, or confirmation about their understanding of the high-proficiency students.

In affective, or what is named an emotional strategy, translation may reduce students' anxiety about learning a new language. While facing a foreign language, students with low proficiency levels may use translation to lower the risk of making a false understanding of written or oral languages. This possibility also helps learners encourage themselves to continue their learning despite having little understanding of the foreign language vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Additionally, learners typically use the memory strategy to establish connections between texts in their first language and those in their target language. For instance, students memorize the meaning of new English vocabulary by remembering the meaning in their mother tongue.

Finally, translation may serve as a compensatory strategy, as this happens when learners produce English texts (Liao, 2006). In this case, learners compose and organize ideas in their mother tongue to compensate for their lack of foreign language (English) proficiency and then translate the ideas to English. The compensatory strategy is also employed when students try to translate a text by guessing unknown words or sentences from linguistic clues available in the text. For example, doing translation through online resources such as Google Translate can assist students in reducing anxiety while independently learning a rather difficult text.

The use of translation as a strategy for language learners has gained more traction with the advent of machine translation. Kastberg (2012) distinguished three types of machine translation: fully automated machine translation, human-aided machine translation, and machine-aided human translation. On the one hand, the first type is software, where the process of translating languages is done solely by software, and the process works automatically after the source language is input to the software. The second type, on the other

hand, is the tool that takes humans as an editor. If the translation result is not accurate, humans can make changes and modifications. The third and last type is software, which is solely employed when the human translator needs some help from the program. This study's exploration of machine translation falls under the category of Fully Automated Machine Translation.

There are miscellaneous online automated translation resources that can be used by students. However, Google Translate (GT) became the most common online resource for translation (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017). It has evolved and become suitable for academic institutions' use (Alsalem, 2019). Today, GT has advanced and become one of the most widely used applications, and it is useful because it is free, instant, supports a wide range of languages for input and output, allows voice recognition, and can translate entire web pages and entire files by uploading them (Medvedev, 2016).

Methodology

For the sake of probing rigorous answers to the research questions, the current study employed a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) to measure, describe, and analyze data about the attitudes of English department students at Chlef University towards using machine translation to enhance their English language skills. Utilizing mixed methods allows for an in-depth understanding compared to conducting solely quantitative or qualitative research, as it combines the advantages of both approaches. Mixing two methods might be superior to a single method, as it is likely to provide rich insights into the research phenomena that cannot be fully understood by using only the qualitative or quantitative method. A mixed-methods design can integrate and synergize multiple data sources, which can assist in studying complex problems (Poth & Munce, 2020).

The researcher delivered an anonymous, open-ended questionnaire to 80 undergraduate EFL students at Chlef University, Algeria. The questionnaire inquired first about the present English proficiency levels of students, categorized as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2. Next, it sought information on the use of machine translation tools. The third inquiry pertains to the prospective machine translation tools employed by undergraduate students in the EFL classroom. Question four aims to assess the frequency of utilizing the Google Translate (EFL) setting, categorized as intensive, moderate, or infrequent. Additionally, it asked about the specific areas in which machine translation is utilized in the EFL classroom, such as grasping the meaning of English words and phrases, checking the pronunciation of English words, confirming the consistency and logical organization of the structure, enriching the English vocabulary, composing sentences or paragraphs in the English language, and other uses. Finally, the participants were queried regarding the efficacy of utilizing Google Translate in the EFL classroom. (strongly useful, relatively useful, not useful).

The study sample comprised 80 undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the English department at Chlef. University, Algeria. All participants are Arabic native speakers who were previously subjected to a placement test according to the Common European Framework of

Reference to determine their English proficiency level. The participants' responses were gathered and computed as shown in tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Question1: What is your current English proficiency level?

	frequency	Percentage
Beginner (A1)	0	0%
Elementary (A2)	15	18.75 %
Intermediate(B1)	37	46.25 %
Upper intermediate(B2)	25	31.25 %
Advanced (C1)	3	3.75 %
Proficient (C2)	0	0%

Table 1. Current English proficiency

Question 2: Do you employ machine translation in the process of learning English?

	frequency	Percentage
Yes	78	97.50%
No	02	2.50%

Table 2. The employment of Machine translation in EFL classroom

Question3: What are the frequent machine translation tools you use to learn English?

	frequency	Percentage
Google Translate	63	80.76%
other applications	15	19.23%

Table 3: the different translation tools employed by EFL learners

Question 4: How often do you use Google Translate in EFL classroom?

	frequency	Percentage
intensively	51	80%
moderately	10	15%

rarely	02	03.17%

Table 4. Frequency of using Google Translate in EFL classroom

Question 5: In which areas you employ Google translate

	frequency	Percentage
grasping the meaning of English words and phrases	63	100%
checking the pronunciation of English words	9	14.28%
confirming the consistency and logical organization of the structure.	18	28.57%
enriching the English vocabulary	63	100%
composing sentences or paragraphs in English language	27	42.85%
other uses	12	19.04%

Table 5. Areas where students may use Google translate in English learning

Question 6: How do you see Google translate in EFL classroom?

	frequency	Percentage
strongly useful	48	76.19%
relatively useful	15	23.80%
not useful	02	2.50%

Table 6: The effectiveness of using Google translate in EFL classroom

Findings and Discussion

The results of the study demonstrated that translation activity played a significant role in the participants' learning process. Table 1 indicated that **46.25 %** of our participants have an intermediate level (B1) in English. At this level, students are beyond the basics, but they are still not able to study exclusively in English. Approximately **31.25 %** of the respondents have an upper intermediate level (B2), which means their ability to function independently in a variety of academic and professional environments in English, although with a limited range of nuance and precision. On the other hand, **18.75 %** of the participants said they have elementary level (A2); students in this case have mastered the basics of English and can communicate only simple and basic needs. Only a small proportion of the participants (3.75%) possess an advanced level, enabling them to handle a wide range of subjects with excellent precision in practically any context without the need for prior preparation. It seems significant to note that no beginners (A1) are found among participants. This is due to the fact that the participants are undergraduate EFL students. They have prior knowledge of English, as they studied English in

middle school and high school. Table 1 also indicated that none of the participants were classified as proficient learners.

Concerning the integration of machine translation tools in the EFL classroom, Table 2 demonstrated that only 2.50 percent of the participants totally refused to use any machine translation tool. Some of the explanations for the reluctance to employ translation software are the fact that learning English is suggested to be only focused on the target language, avoiding the involvement of Arabic because translation stimulates thinking in one language and transferring to another and does not encourage proper learning of English. The data analysis revealed that participants who deliberately refrain from using their first language during the learning process are exclusively students with high proficiency. By doing so, they do not report any attempt to rely much on their mother tongue. In this regard, many studies indicate that promoting as much exposure to English while avoiding any use of the first language is the key to succeeding in English acquisition (Almoayidi, 2018).

Regarding question 3, which pertains to the different translation tools employed by EFL learners, it is important to note that two participants were eliminated from the study sample at this phase of the analysis based on the data presented in Table 2. Additionally, Table 3 indicated that out of the 78 participants who admitted to using machine translation, 63 respondents (80.76%) preferred using GT. This substantial rate corroborated what has been stated in the literature review concerning the widespread appeal of GT among EFL learners worldwide. Conversely, the remaining 19.23% chose other tools such as Reverso and Dualingo. An in-depth review of the specified rates indicates that all participants who chose tools other than GT have an advanced or upper intermediate level of proficiency in English.

As to the frequency of using Google Translate in the EFL classroom, it is reported in Table 4 that all the participants employed Google Translate as a learning strategy, but to varying extents. The majority (80.50%) used it extensively, while a smaller percentage (15%) showed less interest and used it moderately. Only 3.17% of the participants infrequently use Google Translate for their language learning endeavors. Interestingly, the majority of respondents who extensively utilized GT possess an elementary or intermediate proficiency in English. At this point, the findings of this study confirmed what Pan stated when he argued that beginner or lower-level students can learn the language in a more comfortable and safe way by using their first language (Pan & Pan, 2012).

Furthermore, Table 5 revealed that the automated translation tool "Google translate" is largely used by EFL learners at Chlef University. However, students employ it within various learning strategies. The researcher revealed that a single student may utilize Google Translate for various objectives in both directions: Arabic-English and English-Arabic. It was interesting to discover that 100% of the users employ Google Translate for grasping the meaning of English words and phrases as well as enriching their English vocabulary. According to Table 5, more than 42.85% of the participants who acknowledged using Google Translate to learn English use this free online tool to compose sentences and paragraphs in the English language. Conversely, 28.5% of them use it to verify the structure's consistency and logical order. Checking the

pronunciation of English words was selected by 14.28% of the respondents. Pronunciation plays a substantial role in students' foreign language learning as it constitutes the basic part of the speaking skill that supports the utterance to be more understandable and enables them to get grids into understanding the target language speech sounds instead of merely making it sound native-like (Mahdi & Al Khateeb, 2019). In this digital age, several digital applications are available to boost language learning, particularly in the area of English pronunciation practice. This assists language learners in their pronunciation practice skills independently, anytime, anywhere, even lessening students' reliance on teachers' assistance or feedback.

While 19.04% of our respondents indicated other areas, such as learning the meaning of technical terms, utilizing Google Translate as a spelling checker, and explaining idiomatic expressions, Aligning with the idea that the involvement of the student in boosting vocabulary acquisition is vital, Google Translate is the most frequently used program among students to expand their vocabulary. According to Miller in Mukoroli (2011), a vocabulary is a bundle of words that serve as the basic building blocks for constructing and understanding sentences. Students' lack of vocabulary, particularly technical terms, seems to be a serious conundrum for language development. Google Translate may be the best solution for students when encountering intricate vocabulary; it will be used as an aid to understand or determine the phrase and sentence's meaning. As reported by the study, students may use Google Translate to determine the meaning of unfamiliar or difficult terms in order to expand their English vocabulary. The synonym feature offers a rich word selection that can help students adjust the requisite context of the translation, accomplish assignments, upgrade their translation skills, and promote students' confidence in collecting assignments.

Drawing on what has been mentioned earlier in the literature review regarding translation learning strategies, it is inferred from Table 3 that EFL learners at Chlef University employed three main strategies of translation to enhance their language skills through the use of Google Translate. The majority employ Google Translate as a cognitive strategy. Students most frequently use Google Translate to learn English vocabulary words, phrases, and grammar. While a smaller number of participants use this automated translation tool as a compensatory strategy, Which means students compose and organize ideas in their mother tongue (Arabic) and then translate them into the target language (English). This happened because of a lack of foreign language proficiency. The least frequent strategy used by participants was the meta-cognitive strategy, which means learners employ Google Translate as a medium to check their performance in English. Metacognitive strategies refer to the way someone monitors his or her own thinking process, which includes planning for learning, regulating while the learning process takes place, and self-evaluation of learning after the completion of the learning process.

According to the data illustrated in Table 4, students do not share the same attitude towards the effectiveness of Google Translate in EFL class. The results revealed both positive and negative views. Participants are divided into supporters and opponents. Only 2.50 percent of the participants who previously confirmed their use of Google Translate in learning English expressed their doubts regarding the effectiveness of Google Translate as a learning tool. In

answering the additional open-ended question, they explained that Google Translate is only beneficial in some aspects, such as learning novel vocabulary and improving their understanding of English contents, but can't process idioms. They maintained that the translation unit length determines the quality of the translation, which means the shorter the text, the higher the quality. In support of this, students sustained that GT could not rigorously construct an entire paragraph or a whole text accurately. This view is endorsed by students' rendering of GT drawbacks and their negative impacts on their ability to write and read in the English language. Those students seemed aware of the weaknesses of Google Translate. On the other hand, approximately 97% of the users acknowledged the usefulness of Google Translate as a learning tool, but to different degrees. 78.75% of them had highly positive attitudes towards the incorporation of machine translation in the EFL classroom. They pointed out that Google Translate is a valuable tool for assisting them in learning English. They believe that it facilitates the learning process and helps them increase their vocabulary mastery and grammatical accuracy. Meanwhile, 18.75% saw Google Translate as relatively useful. They explained that there are usually many errors in Google Translate output, and its translations are often structure-preserving.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, GT is transforming the way students engage in learning English as a foreign language. The main advantages of using this free online translator among undergraduate EFL students involve assisting them in exploring information about the English language, upgrading their vocabulary and its use, becoming a spelling checker and a pronunciation examiner, and becoming a grammatical solution. The data revealed that students have a high tendency to employ GT at higher word levels, such as uncommon words and synonyms. This investigation has reported that students also use GT at discourse levels, where they construct sentences and paragraphs. The current study implies that GT is still valuable for students as a machine translation. Notwithstanding, the teacher should foster students use of GT in the process of learning, mainly in writing. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated a robust correlation between learners proficiency level and their beliefs towards the use of Google Translate. Most of the supporters are students whose proficiency level ranges from elementary to intermediate. They still consider translation a valuable and useful strategy to learn English and show a more favorable response to Google Translate as a learning tool. By contrast, students whose proficiency level ranged from upper intermediate to advanced tended to report negative beliefs about translation and showed moderate use of Google Translate. Additionally, learners proficiency level profoundly affects the way in which learners employ Google Translate; students with high proficiency used Google Translate to evaluate their performance and refine their English, whereas their peers with low proficiency mostly used Google Translate to compensate for their lack of knowledge. With regard to the findings of the study, Google Translate offers many benefits as a natural part of the foreign language learning process, according to the study's findings. Yet, the use of this online app in formal language learning contexts is still controversial. Thus, GT can serve as a supplementary tool to support learners but should not replace conventional language learning methods. This research emphasizes the need for cautious guidance and monitoring when utilizing the free online application Google

Translate to ensure effective language learning outcomes, bridging the gap between translation and language education while acknowledging the tool's limitations.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Dear students

We are investigating EFL students' attitudes towards using machine translation tools and how they integrate Google Translate to enhance their English language skills. You are kindly invited to honestly complete this questionnaire based on your learning experience. It is totally anonymous and the information provided will only be used in this investigation.

1.What is your current English proficiency level?
- o A1
- o A2
- o B1
- o B2
- o C1
- o C2

2.Do you employ machine translation in the process of learning English?

- o Yes
- o No

If you choose no, explain why

………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………

3.What are the frequent machine translation tools you use to learn English?

- o Google translate
- o Other tools

If you choose other tools name them

………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. How often do you use Google Translate in EFL classroom?

- o intensively
- o moderately
- o rarely

5. In which areas you employ Google translate?
- o grasping the meaning of English words and phrases
- o checking the pronunciation of English words
- o confirming the consistency and logical organization of the structure
- o enriching the English vocabulary
- o composing sentences or paragraphs in English language
- o other uses

If you choose other uses, list them below

………………………………………….
…………………………………………

6.How do you see Google translate in EFL classroom?
- o strongly useful
- o relatively useful
- o not useful

explain why

………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you for your collaboration

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