

## Using Translation in the Framework of Learning a Foreign Language from Learners' Perspectives

Sereen Mousa Jubran, Reem Mansour Arabiat

### Article Info

#### Article History

Received:  
May 02, 2021

Accepted:  
August 06, 2021

#### Keywords :

Foreign Language  
Learners, Translation In  
Efl Classes, Jordanian  
Students, Al-Balqaa  
Applied University

#### DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.5167622

### Abstract

*The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of using translation in learning a foreign language from learners' perspectives. The sample of the study is 95 senior Jordanian students studying English language and literature in Al-Balqaa Applied University, Jordan. The instrument of the study is a 5-Likert scale questionnaire which consists of 21 questions divided into five sections; writing, reading, listening, speaking, and using on-line translation. The researchers set three questions to be answered in the discussion part. The results of the study reveal that learners use translation during reading and writing more than listening and speaking. Generally, all participants had a positive attitude towards using translation while learning English. More specifically, learners believe that translation improve their English language skills positively. The study concludes that although some educators are against using translation during the process of learning a foreign language, learners believe that using translation will promote learning English as a foreign language.*

### Introduction

Without a doubt, English language is considered an international language and the official language used in many countries in the world, even in countries where their first language is not English. In Arab countries, for example, Arabic is the mother language. Yet, the number of Arab people who learn English is increasing yearly (Crystal, 2012). Their attempt to acquire English language as the language of technology is to be able to communicate globally. This expansion of using English language puts an extra effort and responsibilities on English teachers' shoulders to select the suitable method or technique in their attempt to help foreign learners to acquire English language. During the process of teaching Arab students English, many teachers face challenges that force them to translate into mother language. They claim that learners find translation very helpful in clarifying difficult issues of English language. This goes in line with Cook(2010) who argues that translation plays an important role in acquiring the foreign language successfully.

The role of translation in learning a foreign language (FL) has wide argument among theoreticians and educators. The hot debated argument is centered on whether translation-based activity is an effective tool in learning a foreign language or not.

Advocates of translation believe that it is a useful tool in foreign language learning, for it provides learners with a full understanding of unknown vocabulary, expressions, and expresses their ideas while writing in the target language. Whereas opponents hold the view that using translation is a serious obstacle and inappropriate within the framework of learning a foreign language. They criticize using translation because it is associated with the grammar-translation method, time-consuming, and irrelevant (Brown, 2002 and Shiyab, 2006).

### Literature review

Lately, there has been an interest in translation as a source for foreign language learning, and usually foreign language learners are inclined to translate into their mother language whether unconsciously or consciously to facilitate the process of acquiring the target language. Reviewing the literature on using translation as a tool to learn a foreign language has been a significant subject for discussion. A number of researchers (Stern 1992; Widdowson, 2003; House 2009; Cook 2010; Pym et al. 2013) have focused on using translation while learning a foreign language.

Advocates consider translation as an effective tool to learn foreign language skills to understand words meaning, oral expressions, and to express their ideas while writing. In Western countries, Cook (2003) and Lewis (2009) state that learning a new language is achieved through students' first language because learners connect foreign language learning to their first language through contrast and compare, which is unavoidable. Likewise, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) states that translation is a valuable skill for communication while learning a foreign language. Equally, Pym, Malmkjar, and Virgili (2013)

assert that translation improves learning a foreign language and can be used with higher-level students as initial scaffolding communicative activities. Similarly, Popovic (2001) claims that learners need to translate while learning a foreign language because translation promotes students' learning. By the same token, Ross (2000) and Witte et al., (2009) emphasize on considering translation as a skill that goes side by side with listening, writing, reading, and speaking. They claim that the learner who is able to master a foreign language who has the ability to understand any message written in foreign language is able to translate it into his/her mother language. Consequently, every learner has the ability to translate. In addition, Ross (2000) claims that non-native English language teachers are the advocates for using translation pedagogy in teaching a foreign language, and they have to differentiate between translation as a career and an assistant tool to learn a foreign language.

Whereas opponents of using translation while learning a foreign language strongly rejected this method, and it was criticized by many educators and researcher. The First European Survey on Languages Competences (ESLC 2011) reports that using the first language must be excluded, and the use of target language during learning a target language is very positive. Similarly, Deller and Rinvoluceri (2002) claim that the random use of translation has a negative effect on foreign language learners. Along the same line, Shiyab (2006) claims that translation should be excluded while learning a foreign language because translation hinders thinking in the target language as well as language interference. Likewise, Auerbach (1993) and Bouangeune (2009) assert that using only the target language in classrooms will increase learning the target language. Also, Carreres (2006) outlines the arguments against using translation in the framework of learning a foreign language. Some of his arguments are using translation activities focus on writing and reading, force students to think about the target language through their first language, and translation is good for learning grammar.

### **Related studies**

Many empirical studies have been conducted on the use of translation as a pedagogy tool in teaching a foreign language from students' perspectives.

Some studies were conducted on using translation in learning English as a foreign language for specific purposes (Kavaliauskienė and Kaminskienė, 2007; Micic, 2008). Others focused on the effect of translation on acquiring vocabulary and writing skills (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Lally 2000; Celik, 2003; Bruton, 2007; Laufer and Girsai, 2008; Hummel, 2010; Kim, 2011). Likewise, other researchers studied using translation as a motivating activity to enhance learning a foreign language and learning strategies (Carreres 2006; Liao, 2006; Mogahed, 2011). Similarly, Guerra (2009) and Lewis (2009) investigated the effect of students' attitudes on using translation pedagogy on learning foreign language. The results indicated that learners showed positive attitudes and great benefits to learn the foreign language.

In Jordan, English as a foreign language is taught in early stages since 1990s, and English becomes compulsory in all schools, whether public or private schools. Jordanians believe that learning English as a foreign language opens great opportunities for them to have a better job since English language is used in almost many fields in the country such as business, technology, and, over and above, it is used in the social media (Al Musa and Smadi 2013). Jordanian English language teachers encounter problems in teaching English as a foreign language without using Arabic language in explaining some English aspects. Jordanian students also are unable to grasp English without the help of Arabic language (Rababah, 2000). Consequently, both teachers and students encounter problems in teaching or learning English as a foreign language.

### **Methodology**

The population of the study is (100) senior students majoring English language. The sample of the study consists of (95) senior students. Five of the whole population did not answer the questionnaire. The reason behind selecting senior students is because they are exposed to English and completed most of English major requirements. All the students are females only from Princess Alia University College for girls / Al-Balqaa Applied University.

### **Questions of the study**

The study tends to answer the following questions

- 1- To what extent does translation help Jordanian students in learning English as a foreign language from students' perspectives?
- 2- To what extent does translation help Jordanian students learning English language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as a foreign language?
- 3- To what extent do foreign language learners turn to online translation when they are unable to translate?

### **Instrument of the study**

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers constructed a "5-point Likert scale" questionnaire for measuring to what extent senior students use translation during learning English, in what English language skills they use translation more, and finally, whether students turn to online translation when they fail to translate by

themselves. The questionnaire consisted of 21 questions divided into five sections; writing, reading, listening, speaking, and using online translation.

### Research findings

#### Data analyses

##### To answer the first question

To what extent does translation help Jordanian students learn English language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as a foreign language?

**Table (1):** the means and standard deviation of using translation for Jordanian students in writing, speaking, reading, and listening.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
writing	95	6.00	26.00	16.4421	5.04177
speaking	95	5.00	13.00	8.9579	1.92363
reading	95	7.00	21.00	14.1684	3.43528
listening	95	3.00	13.00	7.6737	2.66355
Total	95	24.00	71.00	47.2421	11.36691

Table (1) shows that using translation while writing comes in the first place with a mean of (16.4421) and (5.04177) standard deviation, whereas using translation while listening comes in the last place with a mean of (7.6737) and (2.66355) standard deviation, and the mean total of all skills is (47.2421).

To find if there is a correlation between the skills, Pearson correlation coefficients are calculated, as shown in table (2).

**Table (2): Pearson's correlation coefficients for language skills**

		Total W	Total S	Total R	Total L	Total
Writing Skill	Pearson Correlation	1	.532**	.778**	.756**	.946**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
Speaking Skill	Pearson Correlation	.532**	1	.495**	.489**	.669**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
(Reading Skill	Pearson Correlation	.778**	.495**	1	.661**	.886**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
Listening Skill	Pearson Correlation	.756**	.489**	.661**	1	.852**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
Total Skills	Pearson Correlation	.946**	.669**	.886**	.852**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

It is very obvious from the results in table (2) that there is a statistically significant correlation among the skills. This indicates that there is a strong relationship among English language learning skills.

##### To answer the second question

To what extent do foreign language learners turn to online translation when they are unable to translate?

The means of the items of students' response are calculated, as shown from the data in table (3).

**Table (3):** The means of foreign language learners' turn to online translation.

Items of Translation	N	Mean	S. D.
Although my English improves, I still translate into Arabic in my English classes.	95	3.0000	1.18501
I use on-line translation to help me in understanding an English text	95	3.4842	1.08042
I try to understand the text without using any type of on-line translation	95	3.5474	1.09902
When I have difficulties in understanding English, I use on line-translation to understand this difficulty	95	3.8421	1.00335
I used dictionary when learning English	95	3.2947	1.39050
Total	95	3.43368	3.36646

Table (3) shows that the overall mean of foreign language learners' turn to online translation is (3.43368)

To find the relation between using online translation and English language skills, Pearson Correlations are calculated.

	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total

	Skills I	Writing	Speaking	Reading	Listening	Translation
Total Skills	1	.946**	.669**	.886**	.852**	.470**
Total Writing	.946**	1	.532**	.778**	.756**	.424**
Total Speaking	.669**	.532**	1	.495**	.489**	.271**
Total Reading	.886**	.778**	.495**	1	.661**	.506**
Total Listening	.852**	.756**	.489**	.661**	1	.355**
Total Translation	.470**	.424**	.271**	.506**	.355**	1

The results of table (3) show that there is a statistically significant Correlation and a strong relationship between English language learning skills and translation.

### To answer the third question

To what extent does using translation in learning English as a foreign language affect Jordanian students' attitudes?

The means of the items of students' attitudes are calculated, as shown in table (4).

**Table (4):**The mean of students' answers of the attitudes items on using translation in the questionnaire

N	Mean	Std. Deviation
95	3.0947	1.32948

Table (4) shows that the overall mean of students' attitude is (3.0947).

**Table (5):** the relation between Jordanian students' attitudes and using translation in learning English as a foreign language

	Total Skills	Total writing	Total speaking	Total reading	Total listening	Attitude
Total Skills	1	.946**	.669**	.886**	.852**	.865**
Total writing	.946**	1	.532**	.778**	.756**	.841**
Total speaking	.669**	.532**	1	.495**	.489**	.534**
Total reading	.886**	.778**	.495**	1	.661**	.798**
Total listening	.852**	.756**	.489**	.661**	1	.685**
Attitude	.865**	.841**	.534**	.798**	.685**	1

The results in table (5) show that there is a statistically significant correlation, which indicates that there is a strong relationship between English language learning skills and attitude.

### Discussion of the findings

The findings of the first question showed that foreign language learners tend to use translation while writing more than the other skills (reading, listening, speaking), whereas translation is not used frequently while listening. This result was consistent with the findings of Dagiliene (2012), Al-Musawi (2014), Nor (2014), Mahemia (2014), Samardali and Ismael (2017), Michael and Paz (2018). Using translation while writing more than the other skills is due to several reasons and some of them are as follow. First, according to Anh (2019), writing is the last skill to be learned compared to reading, listening, and speaking, not only in English but also in the mother tongue as well. Yet, the difficulties that students face in writing in English are much bigger. This is due to the fact that writing learners have to consider many aspects such as spelling, punctuation, appropriate vocabulary, sentence types and structure. In addition, learners have to be able to integrate the structure and meaning at the same time in order to form a clearly structured, cohesive, and logical paragraph or a text as well. Second, most learners of English as a foreign language devote little time in practicing writing (Nah,2019). Along with this idea, Hedge (2000) concludes that learners devote most of their time to listening (45%) followed by speaking (30%), reading (16%), and writing comes as the last skill in practice with (9%).He added that due to the less time devoted to writing, learners are stuck and stressed in conveying meaning or message when writing a paragraph or a text. Finally, according to Hamer (2006), learners are demotivated to writing because of the feel of failure, making mistakes, uncertain to achieve the goal of writing correctly. Similarly, foreign language learners encounter many problems while reading. Since reading and writing are interrelated and what a writer writes readers will decode and comprehend, the same problems of writing will re-occur while reading English texts. Chen and Chen (2015) assert that Foreign language learners often suffer from several difficulties in reading such as lack of sufficient number of vocabulary, inability to understand homophones and homonyms, and insufficient syntactic and lexical knowledge. In other words, the problems that foreign language readers encountered are related to non-linguistic and linguistic reading hitches (Alyousef, 2006; Fitriani, (2013); Karimian and Talebinejad 2014; Fitriani ,2017). Therefore, since writing and reading are interrelated skills, both skills share the same difficulties, and students find translation the best tool to solve these difficulties whether by self-translating or by using online translation. Listening and speaking, on the other hand, are used frequently

every day in the lecture hall. Since the participants in this study are seniors majoring English language and literature, this indicates that they speak and listen during discussions in the lecture hall. Also, due to social media and other internet devices, they practice speaking with foreigners using English. Moreover, some professors of literature refer learners to watch films, series, and documentaries. In reading and writing students do not practice the skills frequently, and learners have enough time to think, pause, or correct freely rather than listening and speaking. As a result, learners do not use translation as much as they use it in writing and reading. Consequently, learners, in their attempt to overcome the problems of English skills, they tend to turn to online translation because translating, for them, is a means of learning English and conveying meaning. The ability to translate gives foreign language learners a sense of accomplishment, so first, learners translate mentally to help them clarify ambiguous or any unknown vocabulary meaning. If they fail to do so, they turn to online translating. Moreover, since technology devices are in hand of learners and easy to be accessed, the participants add that it is very normal and common that they use online translation when they write, read, listen, or speak in L2 (Artar, 2017).

The positive attitudes of the participants of the study towards using translation reveal that translation helped Jordanian learners in learning English and improving their English skills through using translation (Kim, 2011). Furthermore, they assert that translation promotes the productive and receptive skills, although they use translation in some skills more than others. (Calisa and Dkiilitas, 2012). Other participants assert translation is a valuable skill to be used in the framework of learning a foreign language.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study attempted to investigate the role of translation in the field of learning a foreign language. The instrument of the study was a 5 Likert scale questionnaire with 21 items divided among writing, reading, speaking, listening, and using online translation. The results of the study showed that learners use translation most in writing with a mean score of (16.4421) and (5.04177) standard deviation. However, using translation while listening was the least skill with a mean of (7.6737) and (2.66355) standard deviation, and the mean total of all skills is (47.2421).

Also, learners tend to turn to online translation once they failed to translate by themselves. Remarkably, all learners had positive attitudes towards using translation because they believe that translation promoted learning English as a foreign language. Using translation in learning a foreign language is one of the debatable topics among methodologists and theoreticians, yet foreign language learners considered translation an effective tool and can be used in the university halls to improve English language.

### References

- Al-Musawi, M.N. (2014). Strategic use of translation in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) among Bahrain University students. *Comprehensive Psychology* 3 (4).
- Alyousef, H. (2006). Teaching Reading Comprehension to ESL/EFL Learners. **The Reading Matrix** vol. 5 No. 2.
- Anh, N. (2019). Student's Writing Skills: Challenges and Remedies. **IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)** V (9)6. PP 74-48.
- Artar, P. (2017). **The Role Translation in Foreign-Language Teaching**. Doctoral Thesis. Retrieved from <https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/461885/TESI.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Auerbach, E.R. (1993) Reexamining English only in the ESL classroom. **TESOL Quarterly**, 27/1, 9-32
- Bouangeune, S. (2009). Using L1 in Teaching Vocabulary to Low English Proficiency Level Students: A Case Study at the University of Laos. **English Language Teaching Journal** 2(3) DOI: [10.5539/elt.v2n3p18](https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n3p18)
- Brown, H. D., 2002. **Principles of Language Learning and Teaching**. 4th ed. New York: Longman
- Bruton, A. (2007). Vocabulary learning from dictionary referencing and language feedback in EFL translational writing. **Language Teaching Research**, 11(4), 413-431.
- Calisa, E. and Dikilitas, K. (2012). The Use of Translation in EFL Classes as L2 Learning Practice. **Social and Behavioral Sciences** 46 (5079-5084)
- Carreres, A. (2006). "Strange bedfellows: Translation and language teaching." In **The teaching of translation into L2 in modern Languages degrees, uses and limitations**. Sixth Symposium on Translation, Terminology and Interpretation in Cuba and Canada: December 2006. Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council. <http://www.cttic.org/ACTI/2006/papers/Carreres.pdf>. Accessed in December 2014.
- Celik, M. (2003). Teaching vocabulary through code-mixing. **ELT Journal** 57(4): 361-369.
- Chen, H. and Chen, H. (2015). The Influence of the World English's on Chinese English and English Teaching in College. **Journal of Organometallic Chemistry**. 192, (1).
- Cook, G. (2010). **Translation in Language Teaching: An Argument for Reassessment**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Cook, V. (2003). The changing L1 in the L2 user's mind. In Cook, V (Eds). **Effects of the second language on the first** (pp. 1-18). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Crystal, D. (2003). **English as a Global Language**. Cambridge University Press
- Dagilienė, I., 2012. Translation as a learning method in English language teaching. ISSN 1648-2824 KalbūStudijos. 2012. 21 Nr. **Studies About Languages**. 2012(21): 124-129. Available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.21.1469>
- Deller, S. and Rinvolucris M. (2002). **Using the Mother Tongue**. London: First Person Publishing/Delta.
- Fernandez-Guerra, A. (2014). The usefulness of translation in foreign language learning: Students attitudes. **International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies**. Vol-1, Issue- 1. Retrieved from <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/261641087>
- Fitriani, F. (2017). Implementing Authentic Assessment of Curriculum 2013: Teacher's Problems and Solution. **Getsempena English Education Journal (GEEJ)**. Vol (4) no.2
- Harmer, J. (2006). **How to teach English**(15th ed.). Longman.
- Hedge, T. (2000). **Teaching and learning in the language classroom**. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- House, J. (2009). **Translation**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hummel, M. (2010). Translation and short-term L2 vocabulary retention: Hindrance or help? **Language Teaching Research** 14(1): 61-74.
- Karimian, Z. and Talebinejad, M. (2013). Use of Translation as a Learning Strategy in EFL Classroom. **Journal of Language Teaching and Research**, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 605-610
- Kavaliauskienė, G. and Kaminskiene, L. (2007). **Translation in a Learning tool in English for Specific Purposes**. Kalbotyra. 57(3), 132-139. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228548076> **TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING TOOL IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES**
- Kim, Y. (2011). "Using translation exercises in the communicative EFL writing classes". **ELT Journal** 65 (2): 154-160.
- Kobayashi, H., and Rinnert, C. (1992). "Effects of first language on second language writing: Translation versus direct composition". **Language Learning**42 (2): 183-215.
- Lally, C. (2000). First Language Influences in Second Language Composition: The Effect of pre-writing. **Foreign Language Annual** 33(4) PP 428-432
- Laufer, B. and Girsai, N. (2008). Form-focused instruction in second language vocabulary learning: A theory and practice. **Journal of French Language Studies**, 14(3), 321-341.
- Lewis, M. P. (Ed.) (2009). **Ethnologue: Languages of the World** (16th ed.). Dallas, Texas: SIL International. <http://www.ethnologue.com/16>
- Liao, P. S. (2006) EFL learners' Beliefs about and Strategy Use of Translation as a Strategy. **SAGE Publications London**, Thousand Oaks CA and New Delhi, 37.2, 191-215.
- Mahernia, S. (2014). **Use of Translation in the Writings of International Students Learning English in Malaysia**. Unpublished Dissertation. University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.
- Micic, S. (2008). The role of translation in undergraduate medical English instruction. **Ibérica**16:169-182.
- Mogahed M. (2011). To Use or not to Use Translation in Language Teaching. **Translation Journal**15(4).
- Nor,H (2014). The technique in teaching listening skill. **journal on English as a foreign language** Vol 4, No 1.
- PYM, A., Malmkjær, K. & Gutiérrez-Colon, M. (2013). Translation and language learning: The role of translation in the teaching of languages in the European Union. (1), **Publications Office of the European Union**.
- Paz, M.R. (2018).Students' Perceptions on Pedagogic Translation in Tertiary Writing Tasks. **Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research** Vol. 6 No. 3, 105-113
- Popovic, R. (2001). The Place of Translation in Language Teaching. Paper in **English Teaching Forum**,37:2,[www.sueleatherassociates.com/pdfs/Article\\_translationinlanguageteaching.pdf](http://www.sueleatherassociates.com/pdfs/Article_translationinlanguageteaching.pdf)
- Rababah, G. (2003). Communication and linguistic problems facing Arab learners of English. **Indian journal of applied linguistics**, 29(1), 127-142
- Ross, NJ (2000) Interference and intervention: using translation in the EFL classroom. In **Modern English Teacher**. (Vol. 9/3, July 2000) Pearson Education Ltd., UK.
- Samardali, M.F., & Ismael, A.M. (2017). Translation as a Tool for Teaching English as a Second Language. **Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics**, 40, 64-69.
- Shiyab, S. (2006). **A Textbook of Translation: Theoretical and Practical Implications**. Grant Publishers.
- Stern, H. H. (1992). **Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, H. (2003). **Defining Issues in English Language Teaching**. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Witte, A. Harde, T. and Hardenm A. (Eds.) (2009). **Translation in Second Language Learning and Teaching**. New York: Peter Lang.

---

**Author Information**

---

**Dr. Sereen Mousa Jubran**

Associate Professor, Princess Alia University  
College, Al-Balqaa Applied University, Shmesani,  
Jordan

**Reem Mansour Arabiat**

Lecturer, Princess Alia University College, Al-Balqaa  
Applied University, Shmesani, Jordan

---