THE EFFECT OF FORM AND MEANING FOCUSED TRANSLATION INSTRUCTION TO THE LANGUAGE SKILL LEVELS OF ELT STUDENTS

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Abstract

In this paper, the affect of form and meaning focused translation instruction to language skills are investigated. The research took place in the academic year of 2009-2010. The study was an experimental study with an experimental and control group: 40 subjects in the experimental group and 35 subjects in the control group. After 10 weeks of treatment the results showed that the subjects in the experimental group which was treated with meaning focused translation instruction improved their language skills more than the subjects in the control group which was treated with form focused translation instruction.

Key Words: translation, language skills, form, meaning

YAPI VE ANLAM ODAKLI ÇEVİRİ ÖĞRETİMİNİN İNGİLİZ DİLİ EĞİTİMİ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DİL BECERİLERİNE ETKİSİ

Özet

Bu makalede, yapı ve anlam odaklı çeviri öğretiminin dil becerilerine etkisi incelenmiştir. Araştırma 2009-2010 akademik yılında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma deney ve kontrol gruplu deneysel bir çalışmadır: denek grubunda 40 denek ve kontrol grubunda 35 denek mevuttur. 10 haftalık uygulama sonunda sonuçlar anlam odaklı çeviri öğretimi gören denek grubundaki deneklerin dil becerilerini yapı odaklı çeviri öğretimi gören kontrol grubundaki deneklerden daha fazla geliştirdiklerini ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: çeviri, dil becerileri, yapı, anlam

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of language teaching methodologies, researchers have continuously been in search of innovative ideas in order to make language teaching and learning process most effective and efficient for learners. Some of these ideas have been derived from second language acquisition (SLA) research and referred to language classroom applications and concerns. In the field of second language acquisition

(SLA), grammar teaching has been a debate in language teaching instruction. Translation education having been effected by SLA has treated grammar in accordance with language teaching. The pedagogical approaches to grammar have been less effective for describing complex and multiple language phenomena and exceptions occurring when language was authentically used (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Therefore, the instructional methods of grammar have been theoretically and pedagogically changed in the language teaching settings. With the development of these instructional approaches to L2 grammar in the ELT context, grammar teaching has been continuously considered one of the crucial instructional components for SLA in the ELT context. One of the most frequently debated concerns so far has been whether to instruct the linguistic features of the language or to set the learners free to pick up these features of the language on their own (Pica, 2000). In translation courses teachers have been using different types of instruction according to their own interest and aim.

As translation needs the usage of most of the language skills, the students can also improve their language skills with the study of translation. Using different instructional types and materials will improve the language skills of the students. Duff (1994) states that "...professional translation is a specialized skill that requires specialized training. The goal of translation is more likely to provide learning opportunities in the process of creating translations as final products in order to develop language awareness. Translation activities should be used in the English classroom, and they should be supported by communicative, natural learning methods" (p. 50). This study will examine if form and meaning focused translation instruction improves the language skills of the students.

2. Literature Review

Form Focused Translation

Form-focused instruction has first been introduced as one of the approaches to teaching grammar in the field of second language education and has become an important topic of recent discussions and research. White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta, (as cited in Ellis, 2006) indicate that form-focused grammar instruction resulted in attaining higher proficiency in SLA within a shorter time, compared to conditions in which meaning-focused grammar instruction took place. In the light of this, some conclusions for the inclusion of explicit grammar instruction can be drawn. For instance, Long (as cited in Ellis, 2006) argues that emphasising form-focused instruction is useful as long as it is in keeping with the natural processes of acquisition. As a way of further response to this ongoing dispute concerning the efficiency of grammar instruction, Genesee (as cited in Ellis, 2006) and Harley (1998) stress that the evidence obtained from the immersion programs and naturalistic acquisition research demonstrates that emphasising only meaning in classroom teaching results in an inadequate development of certain linguistic features. There have been different labels used to add-

ress focusing on form, as opposed to teaching which is entirely focused on meaning.

As above mentioned, studies on classroom instruction have shown that explicit grammar instruction has a positive effect on second language learning and performance. Colina (2002) emphasises that second language acquisition research is highly relevant to translation studies. Relatively unaddressed in the literature to date is the question of whether such instruction can have a direct effect on the quality of translations into English, especially for those structures that cause particular difficulty. Although translation students may be aware of L2 grammatical rules at the sentence level, much of natural usage is actually pragmatically and contextually driven. Transfer from L2 grammar language instruction may be quite limited in translation tasks, where L1 language structures sometimes compete as tempting but inappropriate alternatives to English structures. Students must become aware of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information content of proper choices in various textual contexts.

Translation is of great value in sensitising students to contrasts and comparisons between the grammars of their own language and the source language (Gill, 1998). Translation is an activity that raises the students' awareness in terms of similarities and differences between learners' L1 and L2 grammatical structures. For Catford (1969), the translation process is a search for the formal or functional equivalents for source language linguistic elements like morphemes, words, clauses, and sentences. In fact, the largest translation element for Catford is the sentence rather than the text. Besides studies on translation, some translation teachers use form focused translation instruction in their translation courses. Lörscher (1992), in teaching translation, states that "In my corpus of translations produced by foreign language learners, a large number of indicators of sign-oriented translation can be detected. In sign- or form-oriented translating, subjects transfer source-language text segments by focusing on their form and by replacing them with target language forms. This transfer of forms/signs is brought about without recourse to the sense of the two segments involved" (p. 111).

The aim in adapting a form-focused translation instruction (explicit grammar instruction) is that grammatical forms may also express different meanings such as the English possessive phrase "my house" which might mean, "the house I own", or "the house I rent" depending on the context. Grammatical markers have primary and secondary functions, for example rhetorical questions and prepositions. Further, a single meaning might be expressed in different forms such as "the cat is black", "the black cat", and "the cat, which is black" (Larson, 1984, p. 8). Also Larson adds that grammatical structures vary among languages. The order may be changed completely. Turkish, for instance, has a different word order from English, which means that the place and significance of emphasis on words are different. Passive constructions may be translated with an active construction or vice versa (Larson, 1984). Grammatical choices should, therefore, be based on the function of the TL grammatical constructions not on the literal rendition of a SL form (Larson, 1984, p. 20).

Meaning Focused Translation

According to Stern (1992), implicit teaching techniques "encourage the learner to approach the new language globally and intuitively rather than through a process of conscious reflection and problem solving" (p. 339), the rationale being that language is too complex to be fully described and that conscious knowledge cannot provide a sufficient basis for efficient learning. Stern also specifies focus on meaning as which "invites the learner to use the language for a purpose and to focus on the message rather than any specific aspect of the code" (p. 301).

Kiraly (1995) states that communicative approach to second language teaching has important implications for translation training (p. 34). Kiraly (1990) also includes that:

the other type of translation is 'communicative' translation, which attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. He assumes the right to make improvements on the original text and he adapts his text as much as possible to TL norms. Certain types of texts, that is those that are bound up in the source language culture, would require semantic translation while others would require a communicative translation (p. 87).

Then, he adds that "new ideas in translation classrooms include using methods such as role-play and simulation that create a greater sense of realism - and thereby generate enthusiasm and overcome passivity, teach translation as a realistic communicative activity" (p. 33).

Each language has its own grammatical structure, that is, the division of the lexicon into word classes; whereas, the semantic structure is common to all languages, in those types of units, the features, and the relationships are essentially the same. In other words, grammatical form is different from language to language yet meaning is universal. Therefore translation is possible, as anything that can be said in one language can be said in another. Translation must aim primarily, as Nida and Taber (1969) put it: at reproducing the message (the total meaning or content of a discourse) of the source language to the receptor audience by way of using the closest equivalent of the source message, in terms of meaning and style. Also, grammatical structures vary among languages. The order may be changed completely. Turkish, for instance, has a different word order from English, which means that the place and significance of emphasis on words are different. Passive constructions may be translated with an active construction or vice versa (Larson, 1984). Grammatical choices should, therefore, be based on the function of the TL grammatical constructions not on the literal rendition of a SL form (Larson, 1984, p. 20).

Atkinson (as cited in Erer, 2006, pp. 12-13) claims that translation makes learners concentrate on meaning, as opposed to mechanical grammar exercises, which only focus-on-formS. Translation activities can be used to encourage students to take risks

rather than avoid them. Translation rules out avoidance strategies as students have to take even the most difficult parts of a text into consideration while translating. And, finally, through translation students become aware of the fact that an exact equivalence should not always be expected. Jakobson (1959) agrees that translation must deal "not with separate code-units, but with entire messages" (p. 233). Also, Nord (1994) states that in translation classes, instruction should allow for the incomplete nature of the translation student's foreign language competence. For the need for active student participation in the translation class Newmark (1988a) emphasises that "clearly the future of profitable teaching lies in some kind of role-playing, simulation exercises, real or imaginary situations" (p. 130).

Language Skills and Translation

Translation is a unique mode of language use (Neubert, 1997, p. 23). Even superficial observations of the translation process show translators mobilizing very diverse, interdisciplinary skills and knowledge to accomplish their tasks: knowledge of languages, subject and real-world knowledge, research skills and qualities such as creativity and problem-solving strategies (Presas, 2000, p. 28). Titford and Hieke (1985) put forth that translation is an activity "usefully engaged in after the basic L2 communicative skills have been taught", and "consolidatory and facilitative" (p. 74). In the same vein, Bernardini (2004) adds that "The implication is that once language skills have been mastered (this is to be achieved at BA level), the translation-specific value added can be acquired in one or two years at most. As we have seen, this is unlikely to be the case. Furthermore, I would object to the view that language skills and translation skills can be treated as two independent variables: first learn the language, then learn to translate" (p. 26). So, in order for a student to do good translation s/he has to gain full improvement of language skills.

Newson (1998) claims that translation can be a useful pedagogical tool provided there is a sound understanding of the many factors affecting the translation process. He goes as far as to say that translation should be included in a teaching program as a '*fifth skill*' together with the four other skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Wilss (2004) also puts forth that "one of the characteristic features of translation teaching is the combination of knowledge and skills. The proposition that translation is based on a genuine body of knowledge and skills and that the appropriate discipline for its study is translation teaching seems to be coupled and to move together" (p. 13).

Writing plays a very important role in any translation. Since a translation happens in a context and implies the transposition of a source text into a target text, this must fulfil the same constraints of an original text written in the target language. (Aksoy, 2001). Méndez and Vallejo (2009) state that "In fact, writing is important for translating, just as important as reading is. Since the former one helps the translator to express the ideas of the source language and the latter one to comprehend the whole message" (p. 113).

Bell (1993) asks the question of what does the translator's knowledge-base contain? And the answer has been suggested in the following terms:

> ... the professional, (technical) translator has access to five distinct kinds of knowledge; target language (TL) knowledge; text-type knowledge; source language (SL) knowledge; subject area,('real-world') knowledge; and contrastive knowledge. Add to this the decoding skills of reading and encoding skills of writing and we have a plausible initial listing of (at least some of) the areas which need to be included in any specification of the translator's competence (p. 36).

Zohrevandi (1992) argued that translation does not need to be the ultimate goal of language teaching, but it can be a resourceful tool for students to explore grammar, build and activate vocabulary, comprehend reading, and perform listening and speaking activities. Also, Brehm (1997) focuses on reading for translators and incorporates useful insights from studies in reading acquisition in first and second languages. Séguinot (1994) points out the usefulness of teaching technical writing to trainee translators and Koltay (1998) defends including technical and academic writing in translation curricula.

Perkins (1985) also indicated that through translation instruction, "The advanced learner will always gain some insight into points of L1-L2 difference and conflict on a syntactic, semantic and stylistic level and this may ultimately improve his L2 competence" (p.53). Cognitive models recently used to define (PACTE, 2000; Neubert, 1997, 2000) and evaluate (Orozco, 2000; Adab, 2000) translation competence postulate that it is made up of a number of continuously evolving sub-competences feeding into and off one another, each with a cluster of sub-components. PACTE for instance, identifies six such sub-competences. The first four are largely self-explanatory: communicative competence, comprising the knowledge system and skills needed for linguistic communication; extra-linguistic competence, covering general world knowledge, specific subject knowledge and cultural knowledge in the source and target cultures; psychophysiological competence, "the ability to use all kinds of psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources" (PACTE, 2000, p. 102); and instrumental-professional competence, composed of knowledge and skills related to using the tools of the translator's trade and to the translation profession as a whole. The remaining two occupy central positions in the actual accomplishment of translational objectives. Transfer competence, recognized by both PACTE (2000, p. 102) and Neubert (2000, p. 6) as the one which integrates all the others and as the key distinguishing provenance of the translator, embodies the ability to bring about an adequate transfer from the source to the target text, establishing bridges or linking mechanisms between the translator's working languages (Presas, 2000, p. 27). Finally, strategic competence encompasses all procedures used to solve problems during the translation process, and can thus be seen as the ability to control the interaction between all the other sub-competences to effect transfer. Dynamic and open-ended, these models present translation competence as a process of building and rebuilding knowledge and skills.

While university level translator training programs comprise various types of courses, including seminars in linguistics, literature, and area studies, as well as remedial classes in foreign language skills, the instructional sessions of primary interest in this study are those in which learners are supposed to acquire translation skills (Enns-Conolly, 1986; Rohl, 1983; Wilss, 1977). El-Sheikh (1987) suggested a communicative approach to the teaching of translation that might help the students to develop their language skills systematically.

Studies have been conducted in relation to language skills. Beeby (2004) stated that ''Berenguer's (1996) pioneer proposal is based on the skills she considered to be important for a translator in the context of German as a C language. She proposed exercises to develop five main skills: (1) Reading comprehension exercises based on 'deverbalisation' (Delisle 1980) and translation-oriented discourse analysis (Nord 1991; Elena, 1990). (2) Exercises to separate the two languages in contact that focus on differences in: writing conventions, vocabulary, grammar and text types. (3) Exercises to develop documentation techniques. (4) Exercises to develop cultural expertise in the foreign culture. (5) Exercises to develop translation awareness'' (p. 40).

Schäffner (2004) states that ''for all the exercises we always use authentic texts and make sure that a translation assignment is provided. Since the students are at the same time improving their language skills, we often use source texts and authentic translations on the basis of which we comment on the translation strategies applied and their effectiveness in view of the (assumed) purpose'' (p. 121). Teachers who can form their own prescriptions according to the needs of their students might be successful using any given method. The key to addressing learners' needs is being eclectic rather than being monolithic, translation can play a role in an integrated way, where all the five skills, namely, reading, writing, listening, speaking, and translation, are dealt with. Translation can be especially beneficial in establishing a balance between accuracy and fluency in classroom activities (Erer, 2006, p. 11).

The use of translation could be a valuable resource or tool that can contribute to the development of various language skills. For example, in a group discussion task, students' language shifts between their mother tongue and the target language might function as an effective strategy to enhance communication among group members. Also, the strategic use of L1 or translation would be helpful in developing learners' reading efficiency and maintaining the flow of their conversation and writing tasks.

3. Methodology

Research Questions

The research was conducted in order to answer the following questions:

1.   Will there be a difference in the language skill scores of the students in the experimental and control group?

2.   Does translation improve the language skill of the students?

Subjects

The subject pool for the study consisted of 75 undergraduate students who have taken the Translation (from English to Turkish) at the Department of English Language Teaching, Gazi University: 40 for the experimental group, and 35 for the control group. The subjects took the translation course two hours per week. Four of the classes in the ELT program at this university were chosen for this current study. Two of them were assigned to the experimental group for the study, and the other two served as the control group.

Materials and Procedures

All subjects in the experimental and control groups received the same amount of treatment with two different types of instructional methods from two different teachers in their regular classes: the meaning focused instruction for the experimental group and the form focused instruction for the control group. The treatment was limited to instructional materials as Alan Duff's book titled "Translation" for the experimental group and Denis Chamberlin and Gillian White's book titled "Advanced English for Translation" for the control group. The books were designed for form and meaning focused instruction, therefore no additional material was used. The study extended over a period of 10 weeks. The subjects took the Translation course for 10 weeks in the first term of the 2009-2010 academic year. The subjects took a pre-post test of a language skill self assessment inventory (see Appendix). The findings were evaluated according to the results of this inventory.

Data Analysis

The data gained from the data collection tools were analysed by using the SPSS 15.0 software programme.

4. Results and Discussion

Evaluation of the Groups' Language Skills

In this section, the findings and interpretation of the evaluation of the language skills in the experimental and control groups students' pre-post test scores are stated.

Table 1 The Independent T-Test Results for the Difference in the Scores of the Experimental and Control Group Students' Language Skill Pre-Test

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	S	sd	t	p
Experimental	40	2,979	,747	73	,261	,795
Control	35	2,938	,594			

Table 1 displays that there is not a significant difference between the experimental and control group students' pre-tests scores of the language skills self-assessment inventory aiming to identify the level of their language skills ($t_{(73)}$=.261, p>.05). According to the data, the mean scores of the language skills self-assessment inventory of the pre-test of the experimental group which was treated with meaning focused translation instruction was ($\overline{x}$ =2.979), the mean scores of the language skills self-assessment inventory of the pre-test of the control group which was treated with form focused translation instruction was ($\overline{x}$ =2.979). Therefore, the groups can be said to be equal in terms of language skills before the treatment.

Table 2. The Independent T-Test Results for the Difference in the Scores of the Experimental and Control Group Students' Language Skill Post-Test

Group	N	$\overline{x}$	S	sd	t	p
Experimental	40	3,341	,525	73	2,882	,005
Control	35	3,023	,415			

As summarized in Table 2, the Independent Sample t Test conducted to check if there is a statistically significant difference in the language skills self-assessment inventory of the experimental and control group students' post-tests show that there is a significant difference between the groups ($t_{(73)}$=2.882, p<.05). According to the data, the mean scores of the post-test of the experimental group which was treated with meaning focused translation instruction was ($\overline{x}$ =3.341), and the mean scores of the post-test of the control group which was treated with form focused translation instruction was ($\overline{x}$ =3.023). These results show that there is a significant meaningful difference in the post-test scores and the difference is in the favour of the experimental group.

The Effect of Form and Meaning Focused Translation Instruction Treatment to the Language Skill Levels

Table 3. The Result of the Two-Way Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Test according to the Experimental and Control Groups Students' Language Skill Level Pre-Post Test Scores

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	P
Between Groups	9.025	74			
Group (Experimental/Control)	.060	1	.060	.126	.724
Error	8.965	73	.157		
Within Groups	8.433	75			
Measurement (Pre-Post Test)	1,195	1	1.386	12.987	.001
Group*Measurement	**.896**	**1**	**.896**	**6.789**	**.023**
Error	6.342	73	.107		
Total	17.458	149			

As Table 3 shows, there is a statistically significant difference in the scores of the language skills pre-post tests of the experimental and control groups who have been treated with two different instructional types. Significant difference has been seen in the combined scores of the groups treated with different instructional types and the repeated measure factors between the language skills pre-tests and post-tests scores $[F_{(1-73)} = 6.789, p<.05)]$. This finding shows that in the treatment of form and meaning focused translation instruction the students have shown difference in the increase in their language skills scores. The experimental group students which were treated with meaning focused translation instruction showed that they have achieved more success in the score of the language skills scale.

5. Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate whether form or meaning focused translation instruction is effective in the translation courses at ELT departments in general and at the ELT Department of Gazi University in specific. The study also aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the reading comprehension levels of the students to their translation skills. In language teaching and learning, research has been intensely interested in matching the language learners' needs to the best teaching methods. This evolution in the field has led to better understanding and implementation of methodology in the language classroom, and researchers are currently giving focus to the benefit of instruction on language learning.

The results of the evaluation of the groups' language skills show that there is not a significant difference in the experimental and control group students' pre-tests scores of the language skills self-assessment scale aiming to identify the levels of their lan-

guage skills. The students were accepted as equal before the treatment in accordance to the pre-test results of the self-assessment language skill scale. In the evaluation of the pre-post tests according to the treatment type, difference in the scores of the language skills pre-post tests of the experimental and control groups who have been treated with two different instructional types is statistically significant. The significant difference is in the favour of the experimental group which was treated with meaning focused translation instruction. It can be said the experimental group students which took meaning focused translation instruction gained better improvement in increasing the language skill levels in the self-assessment language skill scale more than the control group which took form focused translation instruction treatment. As the findings in this study indicated, the use of translation could be a valuable resource or tool that can contribute to the development of various language skills. For example, the strategic use of L1 or translation would be helpful in developing learners' reading efficiency and maintaining the flow of their conversation and writing tasks.

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7. Appendix

LANGUAGE SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT SCALE

How do you rate yourself in the language skills listed below as compared with those of other students in your class?

(a) Reading:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor
(b) Writing:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor
(c) Listening:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor
(d) Speaking:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor
(e) Grammar:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor
(f) Vocabulary and idioms:
_____ Excellent _____ Very good _____Fair _____Not good _____ Poor

(Liao, 2002, p. 153)