



A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGY IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE GRAMMAR AMONG THE TWO GROUPS OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA

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Abstract:

The primary objective of this investigation was to recognize how far teaching strategy of translation promoted effective learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) grammar among the first year undergraduates of Faculty of Management and Commerce (MC) and the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts (RAFA) at the University of Jaffna and suggest feasible recommendations for the stakeholders based on classroom exploration. In order to accomplish this objective, mixed method research methodology was employed. Among the population, 50% of MC and RAFA were selected as two clusters. Then the selection test was conducted in order to identify a particular class group which contained maximum frequency where stratified sampling was used to select sample groups for MC (n = 46) and RAFA (n=39). Further, the sampled groups were divided randomly into two equal groups; control and experimental groups. The same experimental groups were selected for the participant observation. Based on their respective subject matter, tense, prepositions, question formation, voice and mixture of all these items in the form of error correction were tested after employing translation method of teaching. The results of t-test analysis in control group of students showed no statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test. However, experimental groups in both cluster students showed statistically significant ($p < 0.5$) results. In quite contrast to the quantitative results, qualitative results from participant observation revealed that in teaching speaking skill, translation should be avoided. It also brought out multiple realities as to when to use translation, and when not, and how to use and also the quantity of translation. Therefore, this research finding establishes that the principled or the reasonable use of translation is essential in teaching English as second language grammar.

Keywords: Teaching strategy, Translation, Stratified sampling, Participant observation, Grammar of English as a second language.

Introduction

A study on the effectiveness of Translation Strategy in Teaching English as a Second Language grammar at the University of Jaffna” is an exploration of the effect of two languages in teaching specific aspects of English as a Second Language grammar. In this study, both Translation Strategy and Bilingual teaching are interchangeably used. The two distinct disciplines involved in this study are: Faculty of Management and Commerce and Ramanthan Academy of Fine Arts. The medium of instruction in the Faculty of Management and Commerce is English and the subject matter (content) is taught where as the medium of instruction in Ramanthan Academy of Fine Arts is Tamil and their course component is performance oriented. As such, former have some sort of exposure in the second language at least in the academic sense and are relatively better than the students of latter. However, the fact is that they are still in the process of acquiring the second language, and there is the possibility of picking up the second language with the passage of time (four years). University of Jaffna is chosen as a venue of this research due to many valid academic reasons. The first and the foremost reason is unsatisfactory proficiency level of graduates in English. They are unable to compete in the job market as they do not perform well and impress in the job interviews. It is quite regrettable to note that there are humiliating comments over this issue in Jaffna. Justification also derives from the present researcher himself on the part of students when correcting their answer scripts. Other researchers also reported the above phenomenon in their studies. Canagaraja (1993) pointed out that the desire of students of University of Jaffna at that time was learning only the grammar of L2 in a product oriented manner in order to pass the ESL course and fulfill a socio- economic necessity. But Sivaji (2011) stated that the grammatical accuracy in L2 writing seemed to be at satisfactory level in 1993, but at present, teachers of the University of Jaffna observed a high percentage of grammatical inaccuracies in the L2 writing of their students. Teachers are trained in monolingual method of teaching English, that is teaching English only through English. As such, they blindly and unquestionably follow English only policy. In order to find a solution to this problem, the researcher explored the possibility of using the strategy of translation as a teaching method. However, this strategy has been criticized and debated. Further, this study was undertaken at a time when the strategy of translation was re-emerging as a new field in the universities. Therefore, its findings will suggest feasible and effective recommendations for the stakeholder based on classroom exploration.

Literature review

In this sense, definitions of translation, and different teaching methods with the use of translation strategy, arguments for and against in using it in classrooms and related studies provide a necessary background for the research problem.

As the terms Translation Strategy and Bilingual teaching overlap in this study, both are interchangeably used. Haugen’s definition on Bilingualism in this sense serves as the starting point, in which he proposes (1953:7) “the points where a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language”. Similarly,

Macnamara (1996) proposes that a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence only in the one of the four language skills. However, Bloomfield (1935: 56) defines bilingualism as native-like control of two languages. Another term related to bilingualism is Biliteracy. It was Hornberger who introduced the concept of biliteracy by bringing together the theoretical field of bilingualism and literacy in order to explain the complexity of bilingualism. According to her, the definition of biliteracy is that “any and all instances in which communication occur in two (or more) languages in or around writing” (2003:35).

Historical view on the issue of teaching ESL grammar and translation

Several hundred years ago, bilingual teaching was the ‘norm’ with students learning through translation. In the 19th century, this trend slowly reversed itself towards monolingual approach. The reason was the students of translation method were unable to use the language even after studying it for a longtime. But for the last three decades, there has been growing interest in studying the consequences of the use of translation in English classroom. Several studies have been undertaken on this issue of translation by Atkinson(1987), Auerbach (1993) and Miles (2004). According to Harmer (2001), the use of translation in the EFL and ESL classroom was thought as uncommunicative, boring, pointless and irrelevant. Brown (2000:16) commented this method as, “virtually nothing to enhance students’ ability in the language. Due to the above reasons, dissatisfaction for grammar translation method grew and direct method was emerged. The Direct Method got its name from the fact “that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids, with no recourse to the students’ native language.” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:23). The goal of the Direct Method was communication in the target language. Another method that grew partly out of reaction against the limitation of grammar translation method, and partly out of the war time demands was audio lingual method. Like the direct method, the audio lingual method advocated that students should be taught a language directly, without using the students’ native language to explain new words or grammar (Richards and Rodgers 1986).

Arguments for and against the use of translation

Language teaching methods had undergone radical changes in terms of arguments for and against the use of translation. The biggest problem without using translation method was that it was very impractical (Phillipson, 1992:191). One reason was that most English language teachers worldwide were non-native (Harbord 1992: 350, Hawks, 2001 :50). Another reason was that to enforce the sole use of the Target Language could often lead to a reduced performance on the part of the teachers, and the alienation of students from the learning process (Pachler & Field, 2001, p85). Not only that, but excluding L1 could lead to a higher dropout rate in ESL schools, whereas when L1 was permitted, researchers and teachers alike report much more positive results (Auerbach, 1993:18).

Basically, mother tongue was a resource in the second language classroom as it had cognitive, psychological and linguistic functions. According to Anton & DiCamila (1998), it played a scaffolding role in collaborative tasks, and it was a source of cognitive support for students' language analysis and performing higher level tasks (Storch and Wigglesworth 2003). Another benefit of using LI was that it reduced affective barriers to English acquisition and allowed for more rapid progress in ESL. It also acted as a source of students' schemata which could help in acquiring the target language, although some of its practices might deny its appropriateness. Here, the students' schemata meant that students' thinking, feeling and artistic life was very much rooted in their mother tongue.

Arguments against the use of translation

Arguments against the use of translation were discussed under the following three subtitles introduced by Cook (2001). Among these three arguments, maximum provision of L2 argument was the crucial one because it has some sense in it.

1. The L1 acquisition argument
2. The language compartmentalization argument
3. The maximum provision of the L2 Argument

Firstly, the general assumptions of the L1 acquisition argument is that L2 was acquired like L1 through English. Similarly, Krashen (1983), proponent of Natural Approach argued that the students learn their second language very much in the same way that they learn their first language and that L2 was best learned through massive amounts of exposure with limited time spent using L2 (Tang, 2002). The language compartmentalization argument was not supported either by research or practice. There were more than 150 studies against this argument (Cummins 2002: 61). The language compartmentalization argument does not correctly represent the working of the mind. Finally, in comparison with the above two arguments, this maximum provision argument carried much weight because maximum exposure in target language is an important fact.

From Phillipson's (1992:193) point of view, this rapid spread and dominance of English, both home and abroad has been labeled as linguistic imperialism. Political and practical reasons (of teacher's, not the student's) were another cause of rise of English-only policy in the classroom and the exclusion of mother tongue. Those who used mother tongue were punished (Phillipson 1992:187). The Makere report in 1961 (cited in Phillipson, 1992:185) further reinforced the idea of using nothing but English in the classroom. There were five basic tenets originating from this report, which have been called into question, but which were taken as the 'truth', at the time. They were:

1. That English should be taught in a monolingual classroom.
2. The ideal teacher should be a native English speaker.

3. The earlier English is taught the better.
4. The more English used in the classroom during lessons, the better.
5. If other languages are used, English standards will drop.

The researcher himself intends to find out objectively as to what extent the strategy of translation works successfully through this study though there were arguments for and against. Prior to this, the effectiveness of translation as a teaching method in teaching English as a second language was reviewed against the historical background of teaching methods.

Research on translation strategy in teaching English as Second Language Teaching or Bilingualism

Historically, there were three broad overlapping periods of research on Bilingualism or Translation Strategy of Teaching English as Second Language Teaching and IQ has developed (Baker 2001).

1. The period of detrimental effects
2. The period of neutral effects
3. The period of additive effects

The early research on bilingualism, demonstrated that bilingualism was a negative phenomenon. The conclusions of these studies were too in favor of monolingual teaching, that is English ought to be taught through English, not by the use of L1, which has to be prohibited in the classroom.

However, the study undertaken by Pearl and Lambert (1962) was actually a turning point and watershed in redirecting the focus of bilingual research from the deficit perspective to one that was prepared to acknowledge the positive, or additive, dimension of bilingualism. After this breakthrough, an extensive body of literature has been generated over the last three decades. Some of these literature reflected views by proponents of the practice (Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Butzkamm, 2003; Cummings, 2009; Macaro, 2005 and 2009; and Swain & Lapkin, 2000); while others contained opinions by its opponents (Canal and Swain, 1980; Duff and Polio, 1990; Ellis, 1994; Krashen, 1982; and Swain, 1985).

In the above research studies, most researchers while arguing for the option of using L1 in the classroom, also cautioned against the overuse of it. The reasons for using mother tongue were also discussed. They were: to explain grammar rules, to clarify the meaning of difficult words and concepts and to establish close relationship between students and teachers.

So far, the discussion on research on bilingualism has not covered the Sri Lankan context. In the next subsection, research on bilingualism will be based on Sri Lankan context.

Use of Tamil as mother Tongue (L1) in teaching English as a Second Language

Shriganeshan (2011) conducted study on the use of mother tongue and local culture in developing English proficiency. He adopted an ethnography study with the group of third year students twenty in number for three weeks at the Vavuniya campus. The objective of this study was to see whether the general language proficiency could be promoted using mother tongue and local culture.. Research findings showed that at the end of the three- week programme, a lot of language learning seems to have taken place.

Another study to be reviewed here is an experimental method conducted by Suntharesan (2012) at the University of Jaffna. The study makes an important contribution to second language teaching, particularly in the area of grammar. The objective of his study is to discuss how mother tongue can be effectively used in certain linguistic areas in order to motivate students and promote their language proficiency faster.

The study undertaken by the present researcher is different from the two studies because it involves mixed method. Quantitative results were explained by qualitative research in more detail in depth way. Ethnography study of classroom observation is conducted to explore and discover how bilingual instruction works in natural setting as presented in the research question. In the next chapter, research methodology this mixed method will be discussed.

Teaching English grammar through the use of translation of Tamil is a field that has not been explored very extensively. Further, using too much mother tongue also leads to deprivation of valuable input of L2. Whatever it may be this study was undertaken at a time when translation studies re-emerges as a new field in the Universities. Therefore, a study on this issue provides valuable insights.

Research methodology

It is found from the review of literature that strategy of translation in teaching grammar of English as a Second Language is really a problem, and set the scene for this particular study. Therefore, in order to find a solution to this problem, the mixed method research methodology was designed (Creswell 2009). In this mixed method research, experimental method in the form of classroom study was employed as a quantitative study in which the test was the main instrument. Participant observation was employed as a qualitative study.

Quantitative study (experimental method) was explained by qualitative instrument (participant observation). The same experimental groups from Management and Commerce and Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts were selected for the participant observation. .

In order to achieve this objective, the present research was guided by these two research questions:

- 1) Does teaching strategy of translation promote effective learning of specific aspects English grammar at the University of Jaffna?
- 2) How far teaching strategy of translation promotes effective learning of specific aspects English grammar at the University of Jaffna?

The objective of this investigation was to find out how far employing teaching strategy of translation effectively promotes learning process of grammar of English as a Second Language (ESL) and checking the effectiveness of this strategy. The classroom investigation was performed with an intervention programme for one semester consisting of approximately four months or a period of 40 contact hours with unlimited casual contact hours to investigate whether teaching of grammar through bilingual instruction.

Sample

First of all, the technique of cluster sampling was adopted in the quantitative study as it involves natural but relatively homogeneous groupings as in the case of Management and Commerce and Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts. Then, within these two cluster samples, simple random sampling method was used to select half of the population from each group and then selection test was conducted in order to identify particular class interval groups of maximum frequency (stratified sampling method as mentioned below in detail). This maximum frequency groups were equally divided as experimental groups and control groups.

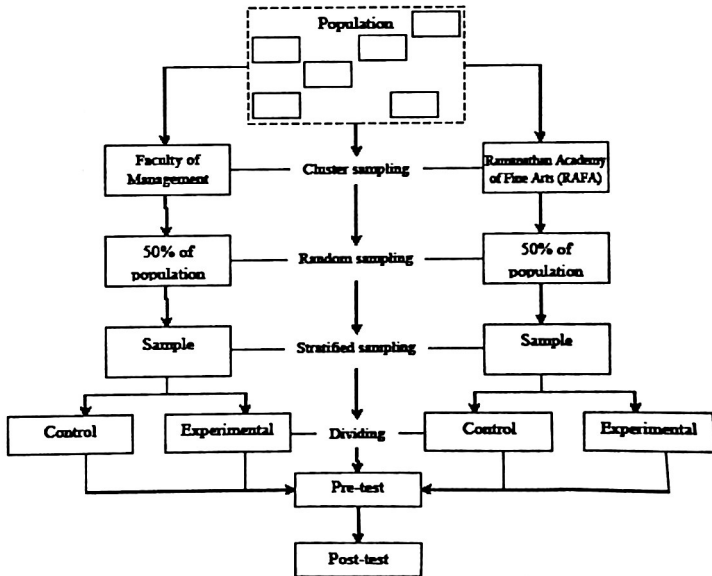


Figure 1: Statistical methodology applied in the research to find the effectiveness of using mother tongue in English language teaching

Among the population of 190 students of first year Commerce and Management undergraduates of university of Jaffna, 50% that is 95 were randomly picked up as samples. Then the selection test was conducted in order to identify a particular class group which contains maximum frequency (the range of marks among the students is approximately same). On the basis of stratified sampling 46 subjects were picked up. After that, the 46 subjects were equally divided into two halves. One group is control group while the other one is experimental group.

Similarly, out of the population of 156 first year students of Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts, 78 undergraduates (50%) were randomly selected as samples for the selection test. From this selection test, a class interval group of 39 students of maximum frequency were taken as subjects for experimentation on the basis of stratified sampling. Among these students, 21 were assigned to control group while 18 were assigned to experimental group.

3.2. Hypothesis

Based on these observations, the research questions were framed. In order to find the answers to these research questions, the following hypothesis were formed.

Control / experimental Management & Commerce

H1: Teaching strategy of translation promotes effective learning of specific aspects of English as a second language grammar in the Control / experimental groups of Management & Commerce at the University of Jaffna.

H0: Teaching strategy of translation does not promote effective learning of specific aspects of English as a second language grammar in the Control / experimental groups of Management & Commerce at the University of Jaffna.

Control / experimental Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts

H1: Teaching strategy of translation promotes effective learning of specific aspects of English as a second language grammar in the Control / experimental groups of Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Jaffna.

H0: Teaching strategy of translation does not promote effective learning of specific aspects of English as a second language grammar in the Control / experimental groups of Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Jaffna.

Experimental method

In a quantitative sense, experimental method was adopted where the hypothesis is "Teaching strategy of translation promotes effective learning of specific aspects of English as a second language grammar". In this experimental method, teaching

strategy of translation was an independent variable and gaining grammatical competence was dependent variable. As for the intervention, the experimental group of management which comprised twenty three students was taught using translation as a strategy. The control group of other twenty three students was taught only through English. Similar treatment was given to the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Jaffna in which 21 were assigned to control group while 18 were assigned to experimental group.

In operationalizing quantitative method, hypothesis was formed from the research questions. Then experimental method is used in which test is the main instrument.

Test as a main instrument

In the quantitative study of experimental method, tests were used as the main instrument for measuring the results of experiment. There were five main questions based on tense, prepositions, question formation, active/passive and miscellaneous questions of error corrections. Unlike the other questions, the test on tense and preposition are based on their respective subject matters that is content based (management studies and commerce and fine arts). Post test is also administered in the same manner. Therefore, this research study was undertaken to establish whether the use of mother tongue facilitates or hinders the learning of 'tense' 'prepositions' and 'question formation'.

Participant observation

Participant observation was employed in this study in order to observe directly as to how translation plays its role in learning second language grammar. In this sense, the experimental groups of Management and Commerce and Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts were used for the participant observation. Further, this qualitative instrument further explained the findings of Quantitative study (experimental method) in an in-depth manner. In participant observation, verb, preposition, question formation and voice were taken into account as to when to use L1, and when not, and how to use L1 and also amount (quantity) of L1. In the next section, presentation as well as analysis of data would be discussed.

Results & discussion

The results and discussion consisted of presentation of collected data in an organized manner and analysis of the data in relation to the hypothesis set out in the previous chapter. As it was the mixed method, both quantitative data as well as qualitative data were presented for analysis after triangulation. The data triangulated were discussed in the next Section.

Table 1: Summary statistics for students' performances in study groups

Parameter	Management & Commerce				RAFA			
	Control		Experimental		Control		Experimental	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Observations	23		23		21		18	
Mean	24.87	22.83	24.52	34.00	34.29	39.14	36.56	61.78
Variance	29.15	43.21	19.62	97.45				
Degrees of freedom (df)	22		22		20		17	
t-value	1.67		4.39		1.36		5.68	
t-critical	1.72		1.72		1.73		1.74	
p-value	0.05447		0.000		0.094		0.000	
Tested difference	Post□Pre		Post□Pre		Post□Pre		Post□Pre	
Test tail	Right-tail		Right-tail		Right-tail		Right-tail	

The results of t-test analysis in Control group of students in both Management & Commerce and RAFA showed, statistically no difference ($p > 0.05$) among pre-test and post-test. Meanwhile, Experimental groups in both faculty students showed statistically significant results. Statistical analysis strongly proved that teaching English language using through translation method is effective when comparing with the next approach which utilized the same teaching English using English-medium.

Analysis of participant observation

Table 1

Participant Observation	Purpose of using translation	Time (Minutes)	Percentage
Teaching 'be' verb	Explaining grammar point	15	12.5 %
Simple present (Description of persons)	Explaining the task, error correction and explanation, Teaching grammar point.	10	8%
1. Listening (as an integrated skill of speaking and writing)	Once, listening as an integrated skill of speaking and writing started, no L1 was used.		
2. Reading	Explaining the task, Explaining grammar point including preposition	05	8%

3 Language games (Description of objects)	Giving instruction, for correction of errors, teaching grammar points, the structures, vocabulary. Both L1 & L2 were used in parallel.	10	16%
Teaching present continuous	Providing different context	05	8%
Teaching speaking skill	No mother tongue	—	—

Communicative method Question Formation (Identifying picture)	Explaining the task and teaching grammar rules. No L1 was used when the classroom interaction was started	5	8%
'Did' form	Explaining the task of language game, explaining the syntax in question formation and simple past negative	10	8%
Do/Does form	Explanation of task, Providing linguistic explanation, teaching word order.	15	12.5%
Past continuous tense	Providing contextual situations to establish grammatical meanings including preposition.	15	25%
Eclectic method Teaching Active /Passive Language game	Group work	5	8%
Translation as Teaching method	Sentence was narrated in mother tongue and the students translated it in English.	15	25%
Deductive and Inductive methods Simple past tense	Teaching grammar rules, and providing context.	10	16%
Prepositions	Teaching grammar rules, and providing context	5	8%

As summarized in the table, the amount of time spent for employing translation and its percentage for teaching different grammar was shown. Analysis of participant observation showed that in teaching grammar points and explanation, giving instruction, correction of errors, translation is necessary. As a result, students were motivated to use English in the classroom. In teaching present continuous, mother tongue is utilized for providing different context. Providing different context in mother tongue enables the students to construct more sentences creatively and appropriately. What the researcher observed is different teaching methods take different amount of mother tongue. In this communicative method, classroom technique of language game was used with the five minutes explanation of instruction in mother tongue. Using translation for teaching voice does not work. Even teaching preposition, translation was not very much effective. Finally, no mother tongue was used in teaching speaking skill.

On the basis of analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, the conclusion the researcher arrived at would be discussed next.

Findings and conclusion

Findings of quantitative study

In this mixed method, quantitative study of experimental method of both faculties Management & Commerce and RAFA established strongly that bilingual instruction promotes effective learning of specific aspects English grammar at the University of Jaffna.

Findings of qualitative study

The most important findings of participant observation are that learners' ability to generate basic sentence in English in 'be' verbs. This ability is developed largely due to the explanation of grammar point in the mother tongue. Further, the explanation of non existence of Tamil equivalent and comparative study of this difference between Tamil and English bilingually enhanced their knowledge. Another most important point is that 'be' verb and in its connection with 'have' verb and 'adjective'. In this respect, the purpose of mother tongue is twofold: first, to explain this process of transformation from 'have' verb to 'be' verb; and second, its use in writing for stylistic purposes. In addition, mother tongue explanation enabled the students to sort out form function relationship between present continuous and simple present tense because present continuous is often overused for simple present. Further, in present continuous, the students were able to construct sentences when the contextual situation is provided in mother tongue. The next important finding is that listening skill is the most powerful skill as it generates speaking as well as writing skills with the least amount of mother tongue usage (only for the instruction). Mother tongue is used extensively on subject verb agreement in third person simple present in the extension activity. The other evidence of using mother tongue is found in constructing

short piece of writing in describing objects through language game. In this activity, mother tongue is also used for correcting errors when the students constructed sentences creatively. Finally, the evidence of participant observation established that the use of Mother tongue does not work successfully in fluency based and two way interaction of pair work

Conclusion

It was evidenced from the mixed method research that teaching strategy of translation promoted learning process of grammar of English as a Second Language among the first-year undergraduates of Faculty of Management and Commerce (MC) and the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts (RAFA) at the University of Jaffna. Statistical analysis of quantitative study strongly supported the Translation method in teaching English as a second language grammar. Quantitative study (experimental method) was explained by qualitative study such as participation observation as to when to use translation, and when not, and how to use and also the quantity of translation. However, an important finding is that when engaged in speaking skill, translation method should be avoided as it is a fluency based, and performance oriented activity. In this sense, using mother tongue definitely interrupts communication as it is a two way interaction. Therefore, this research finding establishes that the principled or the reasonable use of mother tongue is essential in teaching English as second language grammar

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