

The Effect of Translation (TILT) on the Communication Skills of the Undergraduates; The Translanguaging Approach

(TILT)による学生のコミュニケーション能力の向上効果；
トランスゲージの取り組み

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Abstract

This article will discuss one of the English language teaching methodology, Translation, the arguments on its effects on foreign language learning; the pro and cons of using translation especially on the Japanese students. The new term of “Translanguaging” will be introduced with its definition and practice. The background of the English language education and the current situation in Japan will also be briefly discussed, followed by the research questions, methodology, and tasks conducted in this study. The discussion will be concluded with the discussions and further study plan.

Keywords: Translation in language teaching and learning, English education, methodology

Background

Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) is definitely not a new term we have heard in the language acquisition nowadays. Indeed, the Grammar Translation Method is considered one of the oldest and traditional languages learning method. TILT has not always been the favorite topic to study, it is labeled as outdated and not helpful to the development of communication skill among the language learner. In Japan, many of the language instructors, teachers (especially foreigners), do not prefer using translation method in the English language classes, it is a practice we always try to avoid in the communication-based classes. 1 of the main aims of foreign language teaching is to develop students' ability to communicate in English. MEXT (1989) requires teachers to focus on students' communication competence. Grammar Translation Method is said to be the teaching method that neglecting the development of communicative Skill and intercultural awareness and global perspectives.

The EFL education in Japan has always been the core of the controversies and being criticized

throughout the past 50 years. The English language abilities of Japanese students are relatively low. The acquisition of the global communication language skills has become necessary along with the globalization in Japan. The job market requires a good command of English among the job seekers, as the excellent communication skills play a significant role in ensuring the success of an organization. Globalizing forces and the unprecedented mobility of capital, goods, and people across borders requires the ability to interact in a variety of inter-cultural and cross-cultural scenarios (Parsons & Caldwell, 2015). However, English language barrier at the workplace discourage highly-qualified professionals entering Japan workforce; as language incompetence creates a communication barrier from both way; the locals and the foreigners (Morita, 2017). For the fresh graduates in the monolingual society like Japan, the ability to communicate in English fluently is definitely an advantage for better career development. Recognizing the importance of English is one of the key features of the holistic development of the undergraduates, most universities provide various programs, courses, training, workshops, lectures and various activities that are aimed at inculcating good communication skills within the institutions.

For the Japanese people, the English language has emerged as a foreign language which is taught and studied in the country. However, the acquisition of this foreign language to a high level of fluency remained elusive (Parsons & Caldwell, 2015). Undergraduates are the products of the higher education institution. The primary responsibility of universities and colleges is to produce marketable graduates holistically and compatible in the world of globalization. Graduates from universities and colleges, nowadays, are required to be skillful in their expertise and also to be able to work well with the system. As early as in the 90s, EFL (English Foreign language) teachers in Japan are required to focus more on the students' communication competency. In the year 2008, "Foreign Language Activities" was changed to the compulsory subjects by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The changes could be summarized as below;

1. English Communication classes are upgraded to compulsory subjects in the schools;
2. learning hours of English has been increased weekly;
3. new vocabularies (for memorizing purpose) has been increased, and
4. the requirement to teach English through English has become a core condition in the foreign language education system.

Not only the new education policies and new approaches being introduced, the language learning materials such as reading materials, skills up materials for language learning are also being mass produced in order to fulfill the demand. Communication classes (1 to 1) are easily found almost everywhere in the

country. Many new approaches and learning techniques are introduced yearly, the focus is on the ability to conduct English classes only in English. “English classes should be conducted principally in English” (MEXT, 2014). As for the tertiary level policies (MEXT’s Top Global University Project), the English medium courses are strongly promoted for the universities internalization. Many of the educators from different levels approved and agreed with the idea of using only the target language in the L2 classes; however, not many of the teachers are practicing this method in their class. The suggestions for taking out the first language (Japanese language) in the EFL classes faced resistance even though using English in English classes has become the main guidelines. Using English to teach English is not the favorite alternative as the teachers themselves are not being taught in that way. English classes in Japan focus more on understanding the grammar rules, memorizing vocabularies and doing text translation. Most of the teachers develop their own teaching style according to the experience and the students’ ability. The drastic change (from traditional method) has actually worried the teachers as most of them never taught in a communicative way when they themselves in high schools (Nishino, 2011). The forbiddance of using the first language (Japanese) in the English classroom is also seen as the politically driven act that has the minimal grounding in pedagogical research; as such it is useful to target language teaching and learning as is commonly portrayed (Turnbull, 2018).

For many years, English as the foreign language education in Japan sticks strongly with the traditional language teaching methodology of the Grammar Translation Method. The Japanese language has continuously used as the traditional language of instruction in the classroom. Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) has not always been the favorite topic as it is considered as old, not supporting the learner’s communication skill as the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) does. Some even consider TILT as not helpful to improve the EFL learners’ communication skill. There are many factors distribute to the usage of TILT in Japan English education; a very obvious one would be the Yearly University Entrance Exam in Japan. The format of the exam has a strong effect on the teaching practice among the high schools’ English teachers. Most of the Japanese teachers believe that by memorizing the grammar rules, vocabularies, and able to conduct the text or paragraph translation (*yakudoku*) would help the students to score in the entrance exam. Besides, forcing the students to memorize rules and vocabularies, sentence pattern, doing translations, will make the students study hard even outside of the English classroom. Even though this traditional way of language teaching has always been the core of the controversies; the recent study shows that translation activities could make the learners communicate in both ways. Strategic application of the first language is accepted as the social and cognitive tool during the target language learning process (Turnbull, 2018).

As this activity integrated into the language learning practice along with other language skills. What the teacher needs to focus on is to provide text, translation task with communicative value. Translation is said to be the fifth skill in language skills. As a form of communication, translation involves interaction and cooperation between people (Dagiliene, 2012). Most of the learners reflect that doing the translation (old style) is boring, demotivating, not helping them in communication skill. However, if the activities (TILT) could create the desire for learners to speak, to communicate, to contribute ideas, sharing opinions in English, then the learners understand the purpose of learning the language.

Nolasco & Arthur's (1995) suggestions on using TILT are;

1. Language is used for a purpose
2. Translation activities should create a desire for communication
3. Encourage students to be creative and contribute ideas

Looking at the recent TOEFL score ranking among the Asian countries in 2017, Japan is placed at the 26 out of 30 Asian countries. According to Morita (2017), the fact that low ranking despite all the years spent on English suggests that EFL education may not be as effective as it could be. As Japan is emerging into the multi-racial society with the increase of foreigners in this monolingual country, the ability to speak more than one language has always been the issue that concern most of the Japanese. Studies also stated that as the largest group of foreigners in Japan speak Chinese, Korean and Portuguese, therefore learning these languages are more practical than mastering English (Kubota, 2015). The effort needed by the Japanese to produce more bilingual speakers or multilingual speakers in the country is definitely not an easy task, especially to the language teachers.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in Japan stated the need for improvement in the level of English proficiency of the undergraduates in universities and colleges. Indeed, not only Japan, many East Asian countries have been working for more communicative approaches towards English Language Communication Skills. One of the approaches taken by MEXT in the year 2003 was to introduce the Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities. The plan was being rejected widely among the educators. Thus, in the year 2011, the plan was revised and has become the central part of the national course since then. Critics such as the traditional methods of English Language Learning, which focuses on translating and memorizing has led to the lack of oral proficiency of the graduates; in universities in Japan. The teaching approaches are focusing more on improving the undergraduate's communicative competence and speaking skills (Thompson & Millington, 2012). MEXT is working on the perceived problems in English language education as the traditional teaching method

lacks the communicative input and output. The Ministries and Agencies Advocate in Japan identified the Generic Skills in various ways. The skills development that defined by each ministry and agency is also part of the mission of the University. However, it is hard to put the theories into practice. The application of the method that shows kinds of activities and lessons in the university that involved with the skills development is subjective. Besides, the level of the student's achievement in English communication skills is also hard to be evaluated.

Theoretical Background of Translation in Language Teaching (TILT)

Four Language Skills	
Productive	Receptive
<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Listening</i>
<i>Writing</i>	<i>Reading</i>

The well-known four language skills of language learning are the speaking skill, listening skill, the writing skill, and the reading skill. The translation in language learning and teaching is said to be the fifth skill. While the properly designed translation activities are said to enhance the other 4 skills; some argue that translation is the most important social skill as it promotes communication. Whereas the form of communication, translation involves interaction and cooperation between people (Dagiliene, 2012). Translation activities make students communicate in both ways (in their mother tongue and also the target language) as it integrated into the language learning practice along with other language skills. Even the practice of translation in language learning and teaching has been the core of the controversies in the ESL and EFL pedagogy, the focus should always be on the communicative value of the given text.

Nolasco & Arthur (1995) suggestions on using TILT:

1. Language is used for a purpose
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Translanguaging and Japan English Education

Translanguaging is not a new term in EFL. It is the development of the concepts of using two 'languages' deliberately and systematically in the EFL classroom. Language learners are encouraged to use both of their first language (Japanese) and the target language (English) in the classroom for the purpose of developing the weaker target language. Translanguaging teaching and learning activities involve providing short passage or vocabularies for the learners to translate into the target language. It allows the learners to freely intergrade the usage of all languages in their linguistic system. Teachers do

not necessarily need to be fluent in the learners' first language, indeed the teacher provides controls to the learners and only evaluate the output in English.

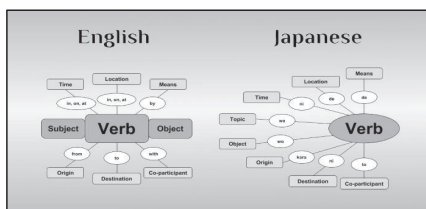
“Translanguaging views all the languages in the speaker’s linguistic repertoire as belonging to a single integrated system, whereby the speakers select and use the most suitable elements of each language for communicative use in a given context. Second language learners are not considered to be acquiring new language but adding to the integrated linguistic system of which their first language is already a part.” (Turnbull, 2018).

Problem Statement

There are many groups of learners with different levels and background. With all the contemporary language teaching methodologies brought into Japan, TILT is labeled as an outdated and not an effective tool to help learners in foreign language acquisition. However, is it relevant to induce contemporary language learning techniques to the learners whose only experienced learning English by doing translation in their schools? The high school teachers would prepare the students for the university entrance exam where the question format is based on doing the translation. Students are taught to memorize vocabularies and grammar rules; they are trained to work with text translation as this met the university requirements in Japan where students are requested to be able to read academic theses in English (Yamaoka, 2010). In the tertiary level, students are prepared with skills and knowledge to enter the workforce, normally after 3 to 4 years of education in the university. Forbidding the usage of the first language in the class in tertiary level could create uneasiness and reluctance among the learners. Most of the time, many of the learners give up English learning.

Many of the educators find it challenging to develop the English language fluency among most of the undergraduates who carry an average to poor scores in the English language since the school years. This result from various factors, such as lack of confidence to speak using foreign language; fear of making mistakes, or limitation of English language background itself. When English is taught for testing purposes, it is unavoidable that the learners are provided with enormous grammar and vocabulary lessons that will prepare them for the test. After years of delivering the English language with different kinds of technique, such as the popular task-based learning, using only English in the English communication classes; the outcome is yet to achieve the goal of the target language acquisition. Even though an enormous amount of time and resources are devoted in improving the English language communication skills; most of the Japanese graduates are still underprepared to work in the globalized world when it comes to the communication ability in English. Studies have shown that low-level proficiency students

face difficulties in expressing themselves using correct and simple sentences, they are reluctant to communicate mainly in English as they have poor speaking skills and they do not need English in their daily living environment. The illustration below indicates the basic difference between the Japanese language and English language.



Research Questions

1. Is this method suitable to apply on the undergraduates with the beginner level of English accuracy?
2. Can this approach somehow help to improve the communication skills of the undergraduates?

Objective

TILT and Translanguaging are mostly applied to the language learning classes, and there are many pros and cons responses towards this method on the Japanese EFL context. This study is an attempt to determine if there is a way to improve low-level students' communication skills in English by continuously applying the TILT (as what the students are familiar with) and promoting the Translanguaging approach.

Methodology

A pilot test has been conducted with small-number undergraduates. It takes place from the beginning of the new semester in April 2018 and is still in the completion process. The English level of the students is low and there are only 12 of them.

The method of the study includes:

- an overview of the theoretical background
- analysis of translation activities
- analysis of the result of the survey
- The total of the tasks: 5 tasks given (including listening activity)
- Type of the tasks:
 - 1. Direct translation in providing responses to different situations
 - 2. Listen to the text and explain the content into L2 or vice versa.

- Each task was recorded
- A set of questionnaires will be given at the end of the session (self-check questionnaire on the effects of using translation activities to learn English in communicating) (Dagilene, 2012).

Conditions

- The text given for translation should be relevant and practical
- Translation text should lead to discussion (communication)
- Pair work would help to compare and share ideas (equally involved in a task)
- Pre-Translation → based on the post-reading / grammar rules
- Post-Translation → activities such as rewriting, revision, and evaluating the result / Task-based activities

Procedures

The total of the 5 tasks is given (including listening activity) throughout the semester. Type of the tasks:

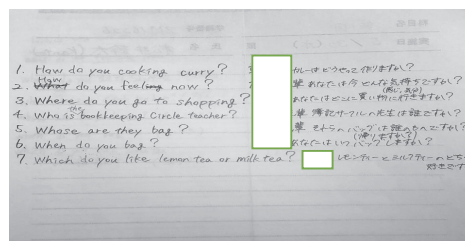
- 1. Direct translation in providing responses to different situations
- 2. Listen to the text and explain the content into L2 or vice versa.

The tasks are chosen according to the level of the respondents' English language accuracy. Each task was recorded, and a set of questionnaires was given at the end of the session (self-check questionnaire on the effects of using translation activities to learn English in communicating) (Dagilene, 2012). The focus is to level up the language accuracy of the group

Procedures - Task 1

Topic: 5W 1 H (Questioning)

- After the respondents understood the grammar rules, they were asked to construct questions, first in the target language, English (L2) and then translate it into Japanese (L1)



Reflections (Task 1):

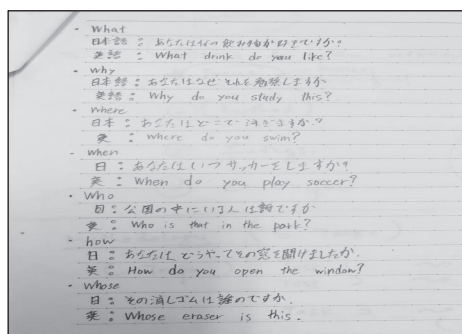
1. Result: The sentences after translations are incomprehensible

2. Discuss rules (as the reinforcement)
3. Rules: First think and construct the responses or questions, (even it has to be in the first language), and then write down and speak the sentences

Procedures - Task 2

Topic 5W 1 H (Questioning)

- Task 2 was conducted the following week.
- The same grammar rules were taught, and the learning point was about building proper question sentences in English (L2).



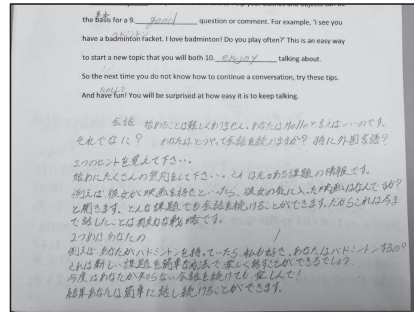
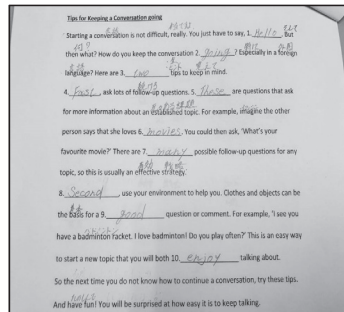
Reflection on Task 2:

1. The exercises chosen were simple but the objective from the exercises was to develop English communication confidence among the respondents.
2. Improvement observed.

Procedures - Task 3

Listening & Translation

- Respondents were given a text with empty spaces to be filled
- **Topic: Tips for keeping Conversation going??**
- First, they listened and fill in the blanks
- Next, they translate the text into the Japanese language
- Finally, they discussed the translations to get the more accurate meaning of the text provided



Procedures - Task 4

Listening Activity

- Respondents listened to text (a short story) in the target language (L2)
- They were asked to retell the story in their mother tongue (Japanese Language)
- compared and discussed
- The same story was being played once again in L1 (Japanese Language) to let the respondents check their understanding
- To practice listening skill and to be able to provide responses
- Involve in the cognitive process (doing the translation)
- It is different from the Audio-Lingua Method (ALM) where the L1 mother tongue is forbidden at all during the activity

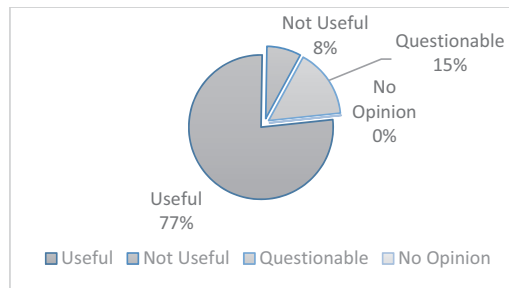
Procedures - Task 5

- Respondents were to construct questions (in English) and to provide possible responses (in English)
- Aim: Cognitive training to first construct proper (Q&A) in a native language, then only respond it in the target language
- The motivation (able to speak in English) will be improved

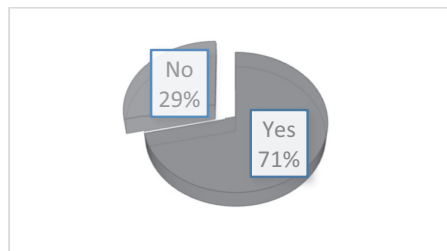
Questionnaire Analysis

In order to access the relevance of translation activities, a survey (questionnaire) was carried out.

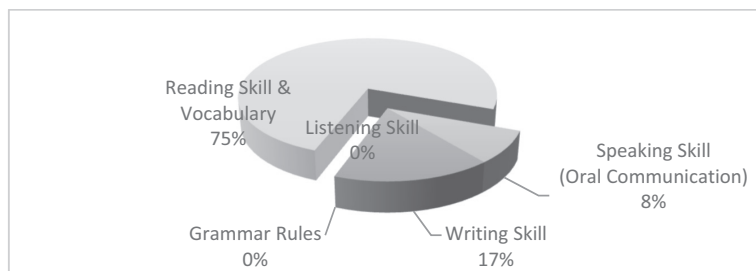
- a. How useful is a translation as a method of learning English (L2)?



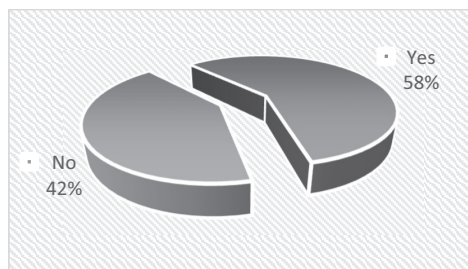
b. Do you think you could make faster progress in foreign language learning through other methods?



c. What language skills do you feel can be strengthened the most from using translation?



d. Do you feel translation activities have prepared you for the better communication skills in English?



Discussion

After the sessions completed which took around 2 months, the following conclusion has been made;

- Giving text to students and make them translate it is not the only way to conduct translation activities in the class.
- Indeed, instruct them about the purpose of the translation. Students are motivated to complete the task when they understand the learning objective and the benefits of the activities. Here, as the class is not related to the credits or examination, the learning activities were fully for the better development of English communication skills.
- Reading or listening to text in L1 and then provide a summary in L2 is one of the many ways to conduct the communicative activity.
- The slight improvement is observed; this supports the idea of the usage of the “old”, “traditional type” of methodology doesn’t seem to be the big No in the language learning process.
- Modification of this method into the applicable tasks for the student’s daily needs would increase the students’ eagerness.

Is using TILT helpful to the language learners compare with other communicative techniques? Applying any “advance” “modern”, methods into the class will not promise the same desired result as written in the paper, especially handling the group of “young adult” with elementary-level of English in the university. After years of the same practice in learning English, forcing students to adapt to the new method takes time and great effort from both the educator and the student. However, is sticking to the old traditional method helpful? The problem was not with the translation (TILT). Perhaps is the teaching patterns that separate its communicative function. Translation takes place in the real world and linked to the communicative purpose. What could be suggested here is nonetheless, the material chose for translation activities. It has to be interesting, (or at least arise the interest of the students to involve); related to the students’ knowledge or needs and motivate communication (group or class discussion).

Conclusion

Translation Method might be old-fashioned, but TILT does not have to be used lengthy text translation only. The success of TILT lies in its correct use as a working and learning tool, appropriate activities that help students to contrast their native and foreign languages and to see the USEFULNESS of the task (Guerra, 2014) & (Dagilene, 2012). The purpose of translation is NOT to train professional translators, but to help learners acquire and strengthen their accuracy in the English language.

Duff (1989); "Translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?"

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