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## ELT STUDENTS' BELIEFS ABOUT AND STRATEGY USE OF TRANSLATION

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### Abstract

Although the significance of translation for foreign language teaching had gone unnoticed for decades, the general attitude towards translation has begun to alter, and translation has started playing a vital role in language learning process and aids learners to comprehend and produce the English language. Nevertheless, solely a small number of studies have been devoted to the contribution of translation to language learning, specifically for the students in English Language Teaching (ELT) departments. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of translation in ELT students' English learning, notably regarding their learning beliefs and learning strategies about using translation in learning the language.

*Keywords:* translation, English language teaching, strategy use, beliefs

### 1. Introduction

The phenomena of how to teach or learn a new language has generated an immense literature in English, based upon various assertions, theories, observations and experiments, and have been produced upon variety of perspectives such as psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, pedagogic, educational and political. Since the late nineteenth century, the common presumption in this literature has been that a new language is best taught and learned monolingually. Thus, students' own language is not even used for explanation, translation, testing, classroom management or general communication between teacher and student. However, this monolingual assumption has been increasingly questioned, and a re-evaluation of teaching that relates the language being taught to the students' own language has begun (Hall & Cook, 2012).

Although the significance of translation for foreign language teaching had gone unnoticed for decades, the general attitude towards translation has begun to alter, and translation has started playing a vital role in the language learning process and aids learners to comprehend and produce the English language. According to Liao (2006), on contrary to their teachers' disparage towards translation, learners use translation as a learning strategy to comprehend, remember and produce English. Hence, it can be said that students' learning behaviour in using translation is inconsistent with their teachers' beliefs. He further adds:

*“Many English teachers believe that it is necessary for students to use translation only at the initial stages of learning. At the college level, it is believed possible and even necessary to use English without translation because students at that level are believed to know English well enough to improve their linguistic skills without their mother tongue being involved. Such a viewpoint, however, is often in*

*conflict with students' perspective, based on the findings of this study that learners draw on knowledge of their native language and rely on translation as they try to discover the complexities in English.” (Liao, 2006:210)*

This study aims to explore the role of translation for students in the departments of English Language Teaching (ELT), notably regarding their learning beliefs and learning strategies about using translation in learning the English language. The data were collected through survey questionnaires and qualitative interviews to seek answers to the following research questions:

- 1- What are ELT students' beliefs about using translation in learning English?
- 2- What learning strategies concerning translation do ELT students utilize?
- 3- What are the relations between learners' beliefs about and the actual use of translation?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Language Learning Strategies and Beliefs**

Learning strategies are the thoughts and actions which are chosen by individuals use to accomplish a learning goal (Chamot, 2004); they are procedures that facilitate a learning task (Chamot, 2005). Particularly in the early stages of learning and while dealing with an unfamiliar language task, strategies are frequently conscious and goal-driven.

Language learners mostly pursue their own strategies to learn and to regulate their learning. Not only the term “strategy” but the terms; styles, techniques, tactics, consciously employed operations have been described and clarified by the researchers (Wenden, 1987; Cook, 1991; Ellis, 1994; Brown, 2000; Richards & Rogers, 2001) in order to explain the thoughts, students develop stages to comprehend, learn or retain new information. Researchers have focused on the research targeting the language learning strategies for nearly three decades (Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Studies especially on vocabulary learning strategies (Aktekin & Güven, 2013; Balcı & Çakır, 2012; Zhang & Li, 2011; Erten & Williams, 2008; Wong, 2005) and reading strategies (Sarıçoban, 2012; Çubukcu, 2008; Lawrence, 2007; Pan, 2006; Pressley & Gaskins, 2006) are particularly notable.

According to Chamot (2005), learning strategies are crucial in second language learning and teaching for two major reasons. Initially, as the strategies used by second language learners in their language learning process paves the way for gaining insights into the metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective processes included in language. Second, less successful learners can be taught or have the opportunity to develop new strategies. Thus, they can become better language learners (p. 112).

According to a recent review by Rubin et al. (2007), with regard to the intervention studies relating to language learning strategies; teaching students learning strategies, if effectively done, increases not only their knowledge of strategies but also their motivation and performance. In a vast range of studies, it can be inferred that leading students to employ learning strategies demonstrates positive outcomes and training is also beneficial (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1999; Oxford, 1990; Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009).

Cook (2001) describes the L1 as providing the “scaffolding” support that the learners need to build up the L2. She suggests that the teachers should support implementing a methodology where use of L1 is ‘not incompatible with use of the foreign language’. She utilizes Vygotskyan-style research and the theory of cultural learning to support her view.

## 2.2. Students' Use of Translation as a Learning Strategy

Although a large number of foreign language teachers might have disparaged the role of translation in language teaching, conversely, learners benefit from translation in their language learning process (Marti Viano and Orquin 1982; Politzer 1983; O'Malley *et al.* 1985; Chamot *et al.* 1987).

Translation is regarded as a phenomenon of transferring one's own languages to another and frequently classified as one of the cognitive learning strategies (Chamot 1987; Chamot and Kupper 1989; Oxford 1990). In Communicative Language Teaching approach, however, translation has not been regarded as a favored strategy by the foreign language educators.

Even though language teachers presume translation as an insufficient learning strategy, such presumption appears to lack much empirical evidence (Liao, 2006). In addition, there are studies which defend the positive and facilitative role of translation or L1 transfer in students' language learning (Baynham 1983; Titford 1985; Perkins 1985; Ellis 1985; Atkinson 1987; Kobayashi and Rinnert 1992; Kern 1994; Husain 1995; Cohen and Brooks-Carson 2001, Liao, 2006).

A great number of researchers have claimed that learners' preconceived beliefs about language learning are prone to affect the way they pursue their learning strategies and learn a second language (Abraham and Vann, 1987; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden, 1986, 1987). Researchers (Abraham and Vann, 1987; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden, 1986, 1987) have demonstrated connections between learners' metacognitive knowledge or beliefs about language learning and their preference of language learning strategies. In her interviews, Wenden (1987a) found that, in many examples, students follow consistent learning strategies with their beliefs about language learning. Wenden (1986a) further adds that these learners' explicit beliefs about how a language is best learnt provides rationale of their choice of learning strategies.

## 3. Methodology

This study primarily involved a survey, comprised of two sets of questionnaires measuring beliefs-*Survey for Beliefs about Translation (SBT)* and strategy use- *Survey for Translation as a Learning Strategy (STLS)*. Both surveys were designed as Likert Scale of 1 to 5. Moreover, in order to probe more deeply the relationships and among learners' beliefs about translation, strategy use, and individual demographic variables, also interviews were conducted with 12 students chosen at random. SPSS v.17 was used for data analysis. A total of 82 students who were studying in ELT departments of two different universities were selected for the quantitative survey. They were 18 male and 64 female students who were first and second graders. Majority of them studied one year prep-class.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of the SBT

Participants responded to the SBT item on a Likert scale 1 to 5, indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning their beliefs about translation. The means and standard deviations were computed of the participants' replies to the items and presented in *Figure 1*. A large number of the participants denoted that translation plays a positive role in their current English learning process. 17 items were rated  $M > 3$ .

The findings regarding the beliefs of the students about translation (*Figure 1*) are parallel with the studies of Prince and Hsieh. Prince (1996) found out that translation plays a positive role in learners' vocabulary learning and assists them in memorizing; Hsieh (2000, as cited in

Liao, 2006, p.195) claimed that translation enhances learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary learning.

Table 1. *The findings of positive and negative aspects of Learners' Beliefs about Translation*

BELIEFS ABOUT TRANSLATION					
Highest-rated Items			Lowest-rated Items		
Item	Mean	St. Deviation	Item	Mean	St.Deviation
7	4.29	,809	8	2,00	,816
5	4.22	,786	17	2,52	1,057
1	4.16	,761	18	2,98	1,089



**POSITIVE ASPECTS**

Translation assists students to understand English

Translation helps students to comprehend and check their comprehension of English.

Translation aids memorizing words, idioms and grammatical rules.

**NEGATIVE ASPECT**

Translation does not help students make progress in learning English.

At this stage, students can learn English without Turkish translation.

The participants do not think that everyone has to use translation to learn English at this stage.

**Descriptive Analysis of the STLS**

Participants responded to the STLS item on a Likert scale 1 to 5, indicating the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements concerning their beliefs about translation. The means and standard deviations were computed of the participants' replies to the items and presented in *Figure 2*. A large number of the participants denoted that translation plays a positive role in their current English learning process. Out of 28 items, 16 items were rated  $M > 3$ .

Table 2. *The findings of positive and negative aspects of Translation as a Learning Strategy*

TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING STRATEGY					
Highest-rated Items			Lowest-rated Items		
Item	Mean	St. Deviation	Item	Mean	St. Deviation
4	3,89	1,042	8	2,48	1,091
13	3,71	,949	24	2,71	1,202
17	3,70	,925	6	2,89	1,110



### USEFUL ASPECTS

Students more often use translation to learn English vocabulary words, idioms, phrases, to write and read.



Students check their comprehension

The findings also demonstrate that the learners employ translation for vocabulary learning and reading skills improvement (*Figure 2*). This is consistent with the study of Liao (2006) who came up with the same results and, in addition, with the study of Duruhan & Şad (2010) who discovered that students benefit from translation regarding vocabulary and comprehension. However, the findings are not in the same line with Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992). The results of their study show that Japanese students prefer directly English use in composition.

In accordance with Oxford's (1990) classification of learning strategies, the items rated by the students match with cognitive learning strategies such as rehearsal, organization, transfer and elaboration.

### **Correlation**

The data correlation (*Table 3*) reveals a strong bond between beliefs and the strategy use of learners. It can be concluded, basing on the results, that unlike their educators, learners believe that translation is an assisting tool for them as they learn a language. However, they also denote that it is not one of key components of their learning process. Further, the findings indicate that learners' beliefs are consistent with their strategy use.

Table 3. *Table of correlation between beliefs and the strategy use of learners*

CORRELATION BETWEEN BELIEFS AND STRATEGY			
		SBT	
		SLTS	
SBT	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 82	,705** ,000 ,82
SLTS	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	,705** ,000 ,82	1 82
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

### ***Interviews***

Qualitative interview data was also collected from twelve students chosen at random which enabled researchers to gain deeper insight to students' beliefs and strategies about translation. Generally, students stated that they benefit from translation when they learn new vocabulary. Further, they add that when they write something in English, they initially think in Turkish. They also comprehend word-to-word translation when they are asked to talk about the use of translation in speaking. Referring to translation while they speak is the least common strategy.

#### **Excerpt 1:**

*I mean, yes I use translation when I learn vocabulary for example. I write the Turkish equivalent and try to memorize. Also, in my writing class, when the instructor gives a task about writing, I first think in Turkish. Then, I write in English and of course, there is always something to be corrected. However, when I think in Turkish while I am trying to speak English, it makes me stagger. I am waiting to have English dreams...They say that when you have English dreams, you master the language.*

#### **Excerpt 2:**

*When I study new vocabulary, I generally write Turkish meanings; however I note down a sentence in which the word is used in English. I prefer to learn English synonyms or antonyms if possible.*

#### **Excerpt 3:**

*I cannot speak fluently if I think of what I will say in Turkish. Turkish is not very similar to English. Therefore, I concentrate to speak without translating in my mind even though I may make mistakes.*

#### **Excerpt 4:**

*While learning new words and writing, I use Turkish. It is easier for me. It helps. When my English improves, I may stop using Turkish. We are in Turkey learning English with Turkish teachers and Turkish friends. So Turkish is necessary.*

#### **Excerpt 5:**



*I always try to use English, speak English, write English. However, when I have difficulty, I sometimes need Turkish. I will be an English teacher, so I have to concentrate on English.*

## 5. Conclusion

In light of our findings, it can be said that 1) Plenty number of participants denoted that they believe translation play a positive role in their English learning process. However, the results also demonstrate that they do not possess the belief that they are dependent on translation or translation is inevitable for their learning process. It can be inferred that they regard translation as an assisting tool. 2) Learners utilize translation frequently as a learning strategy. 3) It can be inferred from the statistics results that the participants' beliefs influence their learning strategies.

Overall, it can be inferred that translation plays an important facilitative role in ELT students' English learning experiences. With respect to students' shared beliefs about using translation in learning English, generally they expressed that the translation is an assisting tool for present phase of learning (Intermediate level), and considered translation as a positive learning resource for them to comprehend, memorize, and produce better English, to acquire English skills, and to complete various English tasks. On the other hand, they were concerned that translation might inhibit their thinking in English, and make learners assume that there is a one-to-one correspondence of meaning between Turkish and English, and thus become a 'bottleneck' in their advancement in English learning. For these reasons, they thought that they should gradually refrain from this tendency of translating as they make progress in learning English.

When it comes to the use of translation as a strategy to learn English, on average, students were found to have a medium to high level of translation strategy use. They employed a wide variety of learning strategies involving translation to help them strengthen their English skills and solve language problems. Specifically, the use of translation as memory, planning, cognitive, affective, and social strategies were identified as frequently used strategies among these students.

In terms of the relationship between learners' beliefs and their strategy use, although individual variations did occur, overall, students' professed beliefs on the SBT were highly consistent with their described learning strategies on the STLS. The qualitative interview data also generally supported the quantitative results.

There are some limitations of survey research. First, although the results of descriptive analysis have shown the overall patterns of learners' beliefs and strategy use related to translation, there was little we could know about the sources of these respondents' beliefs and what caused them to use such strategies. Second, the number of the participants was limited to eight two. On condition that the number reaches up to four hundred, factor analysis can be conducted and hence, these surveys may turn into inventories concerning Turkish and English.

Consequently, the results of this study were based on a sample population of ELT students in solely two universities. As we mentioned before, English language educators seems to hold prejudgment about the use of translation in language learning environment. Hence, we aimed to probe what ELT students' beliefs about translation are since they are going to become English teachers themselves.



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## Appendix

### SURVEYS

#### Survey for Beliefs about Translation

Dear Students,

We would like you to fill in the questionnaire sincerely in order to help us to conduct our research on the use of translation strategies. The information will be kept confidential. Your contribution will be of great help. Thank you in advance.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nafiye Ç. AKTEKİN

Res. Assist. Ayşegül UYSAL

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Please circle:**

**Gender: Female Male**

**Have you studied at prep-class? Yes No**

**Are you bilingual? Yes No**

	5= Strongly agree	4= Agree	3= Not sure	2= Disagree	1= Strongly disagree
1. Translating helps me understand textbook readings.					
2. Translating helps me write English composition.					
3. Translating helps me understand spoken English.					
4. Translating helps me speak English					
5. Translating helps me memorize English vocabulary					
6. Translating helps me understand English grammar rules.					
7. Translating helps me learn English idioms and phrases.					
8. Translating does not help me make progress in learning English.					
9. Translation helps me understand my teacher's English instructions.					
10. Translation helps me interact with my classmates in English class to complete assignments					
11. The more difficult the English assignments are, the more I depend on Turkish translation.					
12. Using Turkish translation helps me finish my English assignments more quickly and save time.					
13. Using Turkish translation while studying helps me better recall the content of a lesson					

later.					
14. I like to use Turkish translation to learn English.					
15. The use of Turkish translation may interfere with my ability to learn English well.					
16. Turkish translation diminishes the amount of English input I receive.					
17. At this stage of learning, I cannot learn English without Turkish translation.					
18. I think everyone has to use Turkish translation at this stage of learning.					
19. I will produce Turkish-style English if I translate from Turkish to English.					
20. I prefer my English teachers always use English to teach me.					
21. I feel pressure when I am asked to think directly in English.					
22. I tend to get frustrated when I try to think in English.					
23. When using English, it is best to keep my Turkish out of my mind.					
24. I believe one needs to be immersed in an English-speaking culture for some time before he/she is able to think in English.					

### Survey for Translation as a Learning Strategy

Dear Students,

We would like you to fill in the questionnaire sincerely in order to help us to conduct our research on the use of translation strategies. The information will be kept confidential. Your contribution will be of great help. Thank you in advance.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nafiye Ç. AKTEKİN  
Res. Assist. Ayşegül UYSAL

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Please circle:**

**Gender: Female Male**

**Have you studied at prep-class? Yes No**

**Are you bilingual? Yes No**

	5= Strongly agree	4= Agree	3= Not sure	2= Disagree	1= Strongly disagree
1. When reading an English text, I first translate it into Turkish in my mind to help me understand its meaning.					
2. I read Turkish translations in the course reference book to help me better understand English articles in the textbook.					
3. After I read English articles, I use an available Turkish translation to check if my comprehension is correct.					
4. To write in English, I first brainstorm about the					

topic in Turkish.					
5. When I write in English, I first think in Turkish and then translate my ideas into English.					
6. I write Turkish outlines for my English compositions.					
7. When I listen to English, I first translate the English utterances into Turkish to help me understand the meanings.					
8. I read the Turkish translation scripts before I listen to instructional English tapes or CDs.					
9. When I watch English TV or movies, I use Turkish subtitles to check my comprehension					
10. I listen to or read Turkish news first in order to understand English radio/TV news better.					
11. When speaking English, I first think of what I want to say in Turkish and then translate it into English.					
12. If I forget certain English words or expressions in the middle of conversation, I translate from Turkish into English to help me keep the conversation going.					
13. I memorize the meaning of new English vocabulary words by remembering their Turkish translation.					
14. I learn English grammar through Turkish explanations of the English grammatical rules.					
15. I use Turkish translation of grammatical terms such as parts of speech, tenses, and agreements to help me clarify the roles of the grammatical parts of English sentences.					
16. I learn English idioms and phrases by reading their Turkish translation.					
17. I use English-Turkish dictionaries to help myself learn English.					
18. I use Turkish-English dictionaries to help myself learn English.					
19. I use an electronic translation machine to help myself learn English.					
20. If I do not understand something in English, I will ask other people to translate it into Turkish for me.					
21. I ask questions about how a Turkish expression can be translated into English.					
22. When the teacher assigns English articles for reading, I work with others to translate them.					
23. I practice mentally translating my thoughts from Turkish to English in various situations.					
24. I take notes in Turkish in my English class.					
25. I write Turkish translations in my English textbooks.					
26. I try to clarify the differences and similarities between Turkish and English through translation.					
27. When reading English, I try to grasp the meaning of what I read without thinking of Turkish equivalents.					
28. When speaking English, I think of what I want to say in English without thinking first in Turkish.					