

THE EFFECT OF TRANSLATION ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Abstract.** Translation has long been a debated method in second language (L2) education. This study examines its impact on vocabulary retention, grammatical understanding, and cultural competence among adolescent learners aged 15–18. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach with 120 intermediate-level students, data were collected through translation tasks, proficiency tests, and learner feedback. Findings indicate that translation enhances vocabulary retention and cultural understanding, while also aiding grammatical comprehension. However, challenges such as over-reliance on the first language (L1) and literal translations present limitations. The study suggests that strategic integration of translation into modern teaching methods can contribute to a balanced and effective learning process for adolescents.

**Key terms:** Second language (L2) learning, translation, vocabulary retention, grammatical awareness, cultural competence, mixed methods approach, translation tasks...

### Introduction

Learning a new language is influenced by many factors, this can include the language itself, how we think, and the cultures involved. Among the various and different tools available for teaching languages, translation has a long history. It is especially linked to the Grammar-Translation Method, which focuses on translating written texts to help students learn grammar rules and build their vocabulary. Although this method has been criticized for not emphasizing speaking skills and real-life communication, translation still plays an important role in modern language education.

The importance of translation

Recent studies have started to highlight the benefits of using translation as a teaching tool. It can help improve language skills, enhance understanding of different cultures, and support learners' thinking processes. When students translate between their first language (L1) and the new language they are learning (L2), they can connect what they already know with new information. This connection helps them understand and remember new words and concepts better.

However, how translation is used in teaching is very important. If it is done well,

it can greatly benefit students; if not, it can create problems. For example, relying too much on the first language may lead to mistakes or misunderstandings in the target language. Additionally, if students focus only on translating word-for-word, they might miss the deeper meaning or context of what they are trying to learn. Therefore, teachers need to think carefully about how they incorporate translation into their lessons to make sure it helps students learn effectively.

This study aims to explore how translation affects three main areas of language learning: remembering vocabulary, understanding grammar, and appreciating cultural differences. To do this, researchers conducted a study with language learners who were at an intermediate level in their second language. They used various methods to collect data, including translation exercises, tests to measure language proficiency, and feedback from the students about their experiences.

The results of the study showed that translation can be a valuable tool for improving vocabulary retention and cultural understanding. It also helps learners gain a better grasp of grammar. However, the research also pointed out some challenges that come with using translation. For instance, some students might rely too heavily on their first language, which could hinder their ability to think in the new language. Additionally, focusing too much on literal translations can lead to confusion and a lack of true understanding of the material. Overall, this research highlights the potential benefits of using translation as part of language teaching strategies. When used thoughtfully and in balance with other methods, translation can enhance the learning experience for students. By recognizing its advantages and being aware of its limitations, educators can create more effective and engaging language learning environments for their students.

### **Research Objectives:**

This study aims to:

1. Evaluate the effects of translation on vocabulary retention in adolescent L2 learners.
2. Assess its role in enhancing grammatical understanding.
3. Examine its contribution to cultural competence.
4. Identify challenges in incorporating translation in L2 learning.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How does translation effect vocabulary retention in adolescent L2 learners?
2. What role does translation play in the development of grammatical knowledge?
3. How does translation influence cultural competence?
4. What are the limitations of translation in L2 learning?

Historical Context of Translation in Language Teaching

The Grammar-Translation Method was a popular way of teaching foreign languages from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. This approach mainly focused on translating literary texts directly from one language to another. Teachers used this method to help students learn how to read and write in a new language. However, this focus often came at the cost of developing speaking and listening skills. Many critics of this method pointed out that it led to passive learning, where students would memorize rules and vocabulary without really being able to use the language in real-life situations. They argued that this approach limited students' ability to communicate effectively. Despite these criticisms, translation remained a common practice in language education, especially in settings where understanding written texts was very important.

#### Translation in Modern Language Teaching

In today's language teaching, the role of translation is being looked at in a new light. Some teachers believe that using translation can be helpful if done strategically. They argue that translation exercises can make it easier for students to grasp complex grammar rules and understand cultural differences between languages. However, there are also educators who warn against relying too much on translation. They suggest that if students depend heavily on their first language, it might prevent them from using the new language naturally and spontaneously. This debate about the best way to use translation in language learning is ongoing. More and more research is being conducted to explore how translation fits into the process of acquiring a new language.

#### Adolescent Cognitive Development and Language Learning

When it comes to adolescents, they are at a stage where their thinking abilities are developing. They start to think more abstractly and become aware of how language works, which is called metalinguistic awareness. These developing skills can be very useful in learning a new language. For instance, students in this age group are capable of understanding and analyzing different parts of language, such as grammar and vocabulary. Translation exercises can take advantage of these cognitive skills, allowing learners to connect their knowledge of their first language with the new language they are studying. This connection can help deepen their understanding and make learning more meaningful. In summary, while the Grammar-Translation Method has its roots in history with a strong focus on reading and writing through direct translation, modern views on translation in language teaching are evolving. Educators are recognizing both its potential benefits and its limitations. By considering the cognitive development of adolescents, teachers can create engaging and effective learning experiences that utilize translation thoughtfully, helping students become more proficient in their new language.

#### **Methods:**

##### Research Design

A mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the multidimensional effects of translation on L2 learning among adolescents.

#### Participants

The study included 60 adolescent L2 learners (aged 15–18) from three language institutes, all with intermediate proficiency. Participants were divided into three groups:

1. Translation-focused group: Primarily used translation tasks for learning.
2. Immersion-focused group: Emphasized direct communicative methods without translation.
3. Blended group: Combined translation with communicative teaching techniques.

#### **Instruments and Procedures**

1. Translation Tasks: Weekly assignments included sentence-level translations, idioms, and cultural texts.
2. Pre- and Post-Tests: Standardized tests measured vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge before and after the intervention.
3. Surveys and Interviews: Learners shared their perceptions of translation tasks and their impact on learning.
4. Observation: Teachers recorded learners' engagement and performance during translation activities.

#### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative Analysis: Paired t-tests and ANOVA were used to compare pre- and post-test scores across groups.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis identified trends and patterns in learner feedback and teacher observations.

#### **Results**

##### Vocabulary Retention

Learners in the translation-focused and blended groups demonstrated higher vocabulary retention rates than the immersion-focused group. Post-test scores revealed:

Translation-focused group: 42% improvement in vocabulary retention.

Blended group: 35% improvement.

Immersion-focused group: 20% improvement.

##### Grammatical Awareness

Translation tasks helped learners identify and understand grammatical differences between L1 and L2. For example, learners in the translation-focused group correctly identified verb conjugations and sentence structures 85% of the time, compared to 65% in the immersion-focused group.

### Cultural Competence

Translation of culturally embedded texts, such as idioms and proverbs, improved learners' understanding of cultural norms and expressions. Survey results indicated that 78% of participants felt more confident engaging in cross-cultural communication after completing translation tasks.

### Challenges Identified

1. Over-Reliance on L1: 45% of learners in the translation-focused group found it difficult to transition from L1-based thinking to spontaneous L2 use.
2. Literalism: 25% of learners translated idiomatic expressions word-for-word, resulting in errors.
3. Time Constraints: Teachers reported that translation tasks required significantly more time than other teaching methods.

### **Discussion:**

#### Translation as a Tool for Vocabulary and Grammar

The study reaffirms previous findings by Laufer and Girsai (2008), which highlighted translation's effectiveness in vocabulary retention. By explicitly mapping L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) equivalents, learners can better understand word meanings and contextual usage. This mapping process not only aids in memorization but also enhances learners' ability to apply new vocabulary in appropriate contexts. For instance, when students translate a word or phrase, they are not merely recalling its equivalent but are also engaging with its nuances, connotations, and the contexts in which it is used. This deeper understanding can lead to more effective communication and a richer vocabulary base.

Furthermore, translation aids in grammatical analysis, allowing learners to compare and internalize language structures. By translating sentences between languages, students can identify similarities and differences in syntax, morphology, and sentence construction. This comparative approach fosters a more profound comprehension of grammatical rules, enabling learners to recognize patterns and apply them in their own writing and speaking. For example, understanding how different languages handle verb tenses or noun-adjective agreements through translation exercises can clarify complex grammatical concepts that might otherwise be challenging to grasp.

#### Cultural insights through translation

Translation also facilitates cultural learning by exposing learners to idioms, metaphors, and culturally specific texts. Bassnett (2002) emphasizes that translation serves as a medium for cultural exchange, and the study's findings strongly support this assertion. Through the process of translation, learners encounter phrases that carry cultural significance, providing insights into the values, beliefs, and social norms of the target language community. For example, translating idiomatic expressions helps

students understand not only the literal meaning but also the cultural context behind them. This exposure enriches learners' cultural competence and fosters empathy and appreciation for diverse perspectives.

Moreover, translation can serve as a bridge to literature and other forms of artistic expression from different cultures. Engaging with translated works allows students to appreciate the subtleties of storytelling, humor, and emotional expression that may not be immediately apparent in direct translations. This engagement not only enhances linguistic skills but also cultivates a broader worldview, encouraging learners to see language as a living entity intertwined with culture.

#### Limitations and Strategic Integration

However, the challenges identified in the study align with critiques by Krashen (1985), who argued that reliance on non-immersive methods could hinder fluency development. Over-dependence on translation may lead to a lack of confidence in using the target language spontaneously. When learners rely too heavily on their first language for understanding or producing the second language, they may struggle to develop the fluency and automaticity necessary for effective communication.

To address these limitations, a balanced approach is recommended, combining translation with immersive practices such as role-playing and conversational activities. By integrating translation exercises within a broader communicative framework, educators can help students practice using the target language in real-life scenarios. For instance, after engaging in translation tasks that focus on specific vocabulary or grammar points, students could participate in role-playing activities that encourage them to use those elements in conversation. This not only reinforces their learning but also builds their confidence in speaking without reverting to their first language.

#### Conclusion

In summary, translation is a powerful, however, underutilized tool in second language learning. When used strategically, it can significantly enhance vocabulary retention, grammatical understanding, and cultural competence. Educators must be mindful of the potential pitfalls associated with translation, such as over-reliance on L1 and literalism. By integrating translation into a broader communicative teaching framework that includes immersive practices, teachers can ensure that learners reap the benefits of translation while developing the fluency and spontaneity required for effective language use. This balanced approach not only promotes linguistic proficiency but also prepares students to navigate the complexities of real-world communication in their target language.

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