Language Translation as a Reading Comprehension Test: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Language translation has always been associated with reading comprehension. Thus, many studies have been investigating how these two are related. Therefore, the researcher conducted a meta-analysis study about the role of language translation in a reading comprehension test. Meta-analysis was used to effectuate this investigation. The researcher sought related studies and literature that proved the significant relationship of reading comprehension and language translation. The researcher found that language translation is beneficial to improving reading comprehension tests.

Keywords: Language translation, reading comprehension, L1, L2

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension has been an issue for many students if they succeed. To achieve reading comprehension, each learner has been formulating their ways to attain it. One of those formulated strategies is by language translation. The readers tend to translate the authentic text to their native language. Though language translation has been famous for reading comprehension, it is yet to be proven by this study.

Many studies have concluded that translation is one of the effective strategies in comprehending L2. Bell (1991) stated that doing the translation is substituting the original language text representation to another parallel text representation of another language (source language to target language). Likewise, Tawbi (1994) explains that translation conveys a message from one source language to another. Macizo and Bajo (2004) posit that the comprehension process that transpires in language translation has the same comprehension procedures as in reading. When rebuilding the equivalent message of a source language to a target language, it is heeded that reading comprehension is a must. Thus, that evident similarity can manifest the relationship between reading comprehension and the translation and reading process. In 2006, Carreres conducted a research questionnaire, and the result later concluded that the language learners discern that doing translation exercises is beneficial for learning a language. Kern (1994) has also orchestrated edifying research. The said research aimed to discover the functions of translation as a strategic cognitive method to the reading comprehension process of L2. The study found that language learners often rely on translation to grasp a text's meaning entirely. The research has also discovered that the L2 learners customarily perform the mental translation to deal with some challenges to language understanding, for instance, the unlocking of newly encountered vocabulary and structures. Leonardi, in 2011, has made a striking statement stating that the use of translation process as a pedagogical instrument can successfully be used to all language learners, beginners or advanced learners, of any educational level as a supplement for an innovative, meaningful, and better teaching experience. Using translation as a tool for language learning can be integrated into all the four language macro skills, namely speaking, and listening, and writing and reading. Another study by Cook (2007) promulgated that language learners who use their mother-tongue in the language classroom contend that L2 learners use the concepts they know from their L1 to process the L2. Cook also mentioned that language teachers have no control over the presence of the L2 learners' L1 in their minds. Cook postulated that the knowledge an L2 learner acquires or learns is being bridged due to their L1 knowledge. On the contrary, Beardsmore (1993) set forth the idea that the progress and sustainability of one's L1 do not affect their L2 proficiency, though this ideology may seem a piece of common knowledge. Beardsmore further propounded that people in the world become either bilingual or multilingual, but their experiences do not vary to any interference of another language to another language. A study by Whyatt, Weydt, and O'Muiteartaigh in 2009 displayed that the application of translation tasks on improving the language learners' language proficiency is found propitious since translation tasks successfully contribute to the learners' language competency and performance in reading skills. Upton (1997) asserts that it has been proven that reading using the L2 is not considered a monolingual event. Also, it has been found that second language learners access their L1 skills when reading, and several learners utilize this strategy to understand an L2 text further. However, Knutt, together with Jones (1991), stated that the whole reading process must always end to fully catch the meaning of the given text. Therefore, the reading learners should do their best to grasp the needed information. The DFL (Department of Foreign Languages) in Hung Vuong University conducted a study to correlational discover the relationship between the reading comprehension and the translation performance of the chosen sample. It was revealed that the participants' abilities to translate and their reading comprehension skills are closely linked; and that as the reading process occurs, the translation performance also gets influenced. Thus, the students can quickly pick out the main idea of a reading text, words are identified rapidly, and the writer's hidden meaning is being realized more comprehensively - not to mention the learners' ability to catch the writer's style and tone. Moreover, since the language learners engage themselves in a conversation-translation process, it can magnify their skills in reading and speaking. Tavakoli, Shafiei and Hatam (2012) studied and concluded that with the use of translation, language teachers could use it to evaluate the learners' reading comprehension. However, a study by Tzu-Yi Lee investigated the possible incorporation of translation in a language classroom and its impact on the learners. The said study showed that translation played a significant role in helping the students' reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this investigation led to proposing a pedagogical implication to the use of translation to aid EFL teachers' instructions and inclusion for the future designing of a new curriculum. Lastly, translation is a big concept, and sight translation is one of the sub-concepts we can encounter.

Moslem Fatollahi (2016) studied and proved that sight translation, as a practical language technique in a language classroom, can be helpful to improving the students' ability to read comprehensively.

In this study, the researcher aims to get the significant relationship of language translation to reading comprehension. The researcher also wanted to determine if competency in language translation affects the learners' performance in reading comprehension tests.

1.1 Statement of the Problems

The researchers would like to seek the answer to the following questions:

1. Does the use of language translation relate to the students' performances in reading comprehension?
2. Is there any significant relationship between language translation competency and reading comprehension performance?
3. Can language translation enhance the learner's performance in reading comprehension?

2. Methodology

This research follows a meta-analysis approach. In a meta-analysis study, the researchers shall define the research question and literature review, select appropriate studies, extract data, and analyze the data.

3. Meta-analyses

This study was reported by Cuc Thi Kim Pham (2017) on the title: Reading Comprehension and Translation Performance of English Linguistics Students of Hung Vuong University: A Correlational Study. The primary goal of this study's researcher was to discover the correlation between the learners' translation performance and the reading comprehension of the chosen respondents of the survey, English linguistic students at Hung Vuong University in Vietnam. Then, the researcher has employed an experiment to use pedagogical methods in translation courses by integrating the teaching of reading comprehension, which was assumed to improve the respondents' capabilities in translating texts. The respondents were asked to take a TOEFL reading test and the ATA guidelines (2011) translation test. This exploration led to the discovery that the student's performance in translating a text and their reading comprehension skills is closely related. Using the given standardized tool to assess the respondents' reading comprehension skills, the student's skills in the translation process has been affected; specifically, when discerning the main idea, vocabulary recognition, unlocking the writer's contention, attitudes, and style, and lastly in getting the gist of the whole text. Therefore, this research gives an implication to the teaching process that language teachers should always consider the reading capability of the learners in taking up translation courses. Basically, this paper found out that language learners who perform well at reading comprehension also perform well in translation task.

Secondly, Pakzadian, Barati and Moinzadeh (2012) produced the study under the title: The Effects of L1 Translation vs. Paraphrasing the Literary Texts on Female and Male Students Reading Comprehension. Accordingly, many studies have discovered the role of one's native language in relation to language teaching. The researchers of this paper have conducted this study to look translations and paraphrasing are related to the EFL learners' literary comprehension skills. In addition, this investigation also hoped to discover a significant effect on the undergraduate students' comprehension performance on paraphrasing and translating literary texts. Controversially, this exploration found no remarkable relationship between the comprehension skills of the respondents and the paraphrases. However, among the respondents, male learners were observed to be better than female learners in translating a text, whereas the female respondents exponentially outperformed the male learners in paraphrasing. This study brings an implication that the findings would be an outstanding contribution in providing more effective literature courses by constructing and implementing the L1 and paraphrasing.

Another study was conducted by Fatollahi (2016) under the title: Applying Sight Translation as a Means to Enhance Reading Ability of Iranian EFL Students. The researcher of this study believed that even though doing sight-translation is a wid.known task in translation courses, rarely has it been utilized as a pedagogy in reading despite the fact of its popularity. Hence, the researcher conducted this study to probe the striking relationship between the EFL students' ability on reading comprehension and the effect of executing sight translation. This paper follows the experimental research, in which the respondents were divided into two: the control group - conducting classes on reading without the sight translation tasks, and the experimental group - operating courses on reading with the use of sight translation exercises. This investigation found that the experimental group, who received the special treatment, outclassed the control group. Thus, it is safe to conclude that using sight translation tasks in reading training effectively enhances the learners' ability to comprehend reading processes. It has then implied that employing sight translation exercises can benefit the learners and language instructors for a better learning-teaching process.

Moreover, Sakurai (2015) reported the study under the title: The influence of Translation on Reading Amount, Proficiency, and Speed in Extensive Reading. The author of this paper assumed an impact among the three variables: the ratio of translation amount to the number of words being read, ER (extensive reading) program's rate, and reading comprehension. Thus, the researcher aimed to examine the influences among these three mentioned variables. To conduct this study, the researcher asked seventy (70) participants who have been exposed to the ER program for fifteen (15) weeks, then being studied and found out that a decrease in translation has been observed; thus, it affects the three variables. Furthermore, a reduction in translation activity and overt grammar analysis significantly differs from the ratio of the number of words being read and the scores tabulated from the post-test. This study implies that the implementation of ER programs without translating to their mother tongue among EFL learners is highly encouraged. The language teachers or facilitators play a vital role in the execution based on the findings of this research by reminding the students not to do translation and, at the same time, avoid being grammar conscious during the ER process. Only then the ER's efficacy in an English classroom is guaranteed but with the facilitation of the language teachers.

Next, Tavakoli, Shafiei and Hatam (2012) reported under the title: The Relationship between Translation Tests and Reading Comprehension: A Case of Iranian University Students. The researchers wanted to seek whether the use of translation exercises as an instrument tool for testing for reading comprehension skills of Iranian university students is possible in an English classroom setup. The researchers made use of four (4) instruments:

- a multiple-choice translation test
- an open-ended translation test
- a multiple-choice reading test
- an open-ended reading cloze test

The findings of this research led to the discovery that instruments with open-ended types for testing translation are more acceptable and credible. Thus, it can be inferred that translation tasks can be a reliable testing tool to measure the students' reading comprehension skills. Therefore, this study proves that language teachers and instructors may use translation exercises to improve the language learners' reading comprehension skills as a pedagogy in the classroom.

Afterward, Iranmanesh and Golshan (2018) conducted the study under the title: Mother Tongue as an Asset in Developing L2 Reading Comprehension Skill among Iranian EFL Learners. The researchers of this paper have observed that language teachers usually switch from L2 to L1 to improve the L2 learners' reading comprehension. Thus, the researchers have investigated whether this phenomenon was enterprising in an English pedagogical view. The researchers looked for two sets of respondents and conducted an experiment; the first set received the treatment in which the teacher while having a class, can switch from L2 to L1, while the second set strictly follows the use of L2 instruction only. The said experiment revealed that the students with poor performance in L2 reading who rely on the teachers' switching to L1 made them understand and grasp the instruction much better. In addition, the strict use of only L2 in a reading class resulted in a more time-consumed task and infuriating facilitation. For that reason, this study can conclude that making use of switching from L2 to L1, limited only to poor performed L2 reading learners, can be used as a pedagogical approach in a reading class.

In the end, Atari and Radwan (2014) attempted to conduct this study under the title: A Cross-sectional Study of Translator Trainees' L2 reading comprehension Skills and Strategies. Following the prescribed flow of the curriculum for translating training programs, the students under these programs must undergo language training for two years. The latter three years are meant for translation courses and linguistic courses. However, the researchers have observed a discernible decline in the students' reading comprehension performance among the 4th and 5th-year students. Since this issue is found concerning, the researcher conducted this cross-sectional investigation. A revealing result showed that the pedagogical approaches used to both higher and lower levels were not differentiated, particularly limited only to bottom-up strategy. Thus, this cross-sectional study implies that the differentiation of techniques to be used for students aiming to become translators should be applied to uplift their reading comprehension skills. It is also expected that using the top-down approach can be beneficial in making the students' reading comprehension skills higher.

4. Synthesis

This research needs to gather and synthesize different studies' data that show the significant connections allying the language translation and the test of reading comprehension. With the discussion, the overall impression of this meta-analysis research shows that the language translation and the reading comprehension test have significant relationships with each other.

In the studies gathered by the researcher, the ability of students in the language translation affects the performances in a reading comprehension test. Some experimental studies have proven that the competency in translating the authentic texts to the reader's native language improved the learners' performance in reading comprehension. Thus, language translation can be a means for the betterment of the language learners towards a reading comprehension examination. Diverse kinds of translation techniques, like sight translation, can also be applicable and are proven to be used as a means for the improvement of the reading comprehension test. However, paraphrasing is not an agent for improving any comprehension test in a study. Besides, a consequential relationship between the language translation competency and the reading comprehension performance because some studies also investigated and found out that learners' ability in language translation can affect reading comprehension. Thus, the researcher implied that future educators and teachers must focus on how the language translation can be improved so that the reading comprehension test can also be improved. The curriculum in the Philippines even included the language translation in the Filipino subject. In addition, language translation can enhance the learner's performance in a reading comprehension test. The studies also have proven a significant factor in reading comprehension tests in language translation. In general, language translation can be beneficial for improving reading comprehension tests, and it can also be a means to enhance and improve the learner's performance in reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion

The researcher found out that language translation relates to the students' performances in reading comprehension. Language translation becomes a means of unlocking difficulties and making reading comprehension easier by reading the authentic texts and replacing them with prior knowledge of their first language. Competency in language translation also shows a significant relationship in reading comprehension. Since language translation helps the readers in reading comprehension, the ability also defines the readers' comprehension of authentic texts. The researcher also found out that the learner's performance in reading comprehension is improving with language translation.

Bio-notes

Mr. Mark Anthony Reyes Aguion is an online ESL teacher of an online company called "Native Camp" where he teaches mostly Japanese students. His research interests are TESOL and applied linguistics.

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