The Effect of Using Supplementary On-line Corpora on Advanced Iranian EFL Learners' Persian into English Translation Ability

Batoul Sabzalipour

Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University: Tonekabon Branch, IRAN. M.A. Candidate of TEFL

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of specialized bilingual supplementary corpora in translating various texts by advanced-level students in Iranian English Language institutes. The research question of this study was whether providing students with on-line supplementary corpora might have any effect on Iranian EFL learners' translation ability. To answer the question, 60 advanced-level language learners from several language institutes in Tonekabon and nearby cities participated in the study. The subjects were randomly assigned to two groups (experimental and control, 30 in each group). The purpose was to observe any probable progress with regard to the translation ability (TA) of the students from the beginning toward the end of the program. The subjects took a standard OPT test to demonstrate their English proficiency. A translation pre-test from Persian to English was administered while all the subjects were asked to use handy dictionaries to indicate their translation ability in each group. After 10 sessions of treatment a post-test of translation was administered. The experimental group translated a text by using any bilingual handy dictionaries as well as on-line corpora as the supplement while the control group translated the same text just by using handy dictionaries. The data were analyzed using Independent sample T-test. The results showed that the quality of translation was improved as a result of using corpus-based translation tools.

KEYWORDS: Corpora, Supplementary Corpora, Corpus-based Translation, Translation Ability (TA).

INTRODUCTION

Despite years of translation instruction at advanced levels, non-native speakers (NNSs) of English still produce translations riddled with relatively basic grammatical and lexical errors (Heglheimer, 2006). In part, this problem may be caused by a combination first language (L1) interference, lack of grammatical awareness and unfamiliarity with the context in which the word is used in. For learners to benefit from the stages of current approach to translation, using corpus linguistic, a minimum lexical and grammatical competence is required. From Chomsky's view point (1965), our knowledge of rules enables us to create original sentences (MCEnery & Wilson, 2001). He believes that corpora are incomplete and skewed. Some sentences are found in corpora because they are commonly used constructions, while others may be found in corpora by chance. So an empirical approach can be carried out by observing natural language data through a corpus. For example, why a certain structure is used instead of the other in a sentence? A corpus linguist would say to look in the corpus and find out.

The general aim of this study is to understand the possible effect of using corpora as a reference tool for translation and how technology can help foreign language teachers and translators. The specific purpose of this study is to look closely at how Iranian EFL learners use corpus as a reference tool in conjunction with dictionary when translating English texts. Bilingual dictionaries have for a long time been used as a source for translation and also a matter of discussion. Since translation is on important way of transferring information from one language to the other language, hence, it deserves particular attention and investigating the most applicable way to improve its quality is necessary.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The growing availability of innovative technology has allowed corpora to be used more frequently as a reference tool for language teachers and learners. Traditionally, dictionaries have been used as the primary reference tool in second language classrooms. Online dictionaries provide definitions of words and phrases that include some context and grammar. However, learners sometimes become confused about which definitions are the ones they are searching for in the context in which they are used. Moreover, learners do not always receive sufficient information about how to use the word or phrase in an original sentence. On-line corpora, on the other hand, are structured to solve these problems by providing authentic examples in realistic contexts. Through the provided context, the learner can also learn about grammatical structures by examining a variety of examples. In

---

*Corresponding Author: Batoul Sabzalipour, Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, IRAN. M.A. Candidate of TEFL, Phone No.09112934633, Email: b.sabzalipor@yahoo.com.

addition, it provides an active environment in which learners become researchers and test their hypotheses. They encounter problems along the way and revise their hypotheses by having direct access to the data.

It also has a potential application in the language classroom by employing general principles and methods of corpus-based language analysis (Murphy, 1996). For this reason, corpora and concordancing programs have been used by second language learners and teachers in classroom exercises. These exercises include building vocabulary and exploring grammatical and discourse features of texts (Kennedy & Miceli, 2001). For example, Aston (1997a) suggests an exercise using a corpus that consists of several texts on the same topic. By using this specialized corpus, the learners can retrieve multiple texts that contain recurrent patterns for analysis. The texts retrieved from such a corpus can serve as a source for discourse analysis. If learners understand the context, they can also be asked to produce texts that are similar to those retrieved from the corpus. In this case, a corpus can provide examples with particular collocations in particular situations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Advanced Iranian students and translators face with a lot of problems in translation i.e. finding the exact equivalent for words and phrases as they are used in first language. There are approaches of assessing learners translation ability (using, integrative testing and communicative testing) (Buck, 2001) both for the linguistic forms and comprehension . Many learners can easily find the meaning of the words and phrases from the dictionaries and recognize the linguistic form, but they cannot have a correct comprehension of the text. In order to promote comprehension on one hand, and autonomy and self-assessment in the classroom on the other, students are usually asked to compile and use different types of corpora. Students compile a corpus, i.e. a collection of Internet documents created ad hoc as a response to a specific text to be translated (Zanettin, 2002, p. 242).

Further, the problem which is the main focus of this study is the problem of translation that has led to the reluctance of the translation trainees, after graduation, to be attracted toward practical translation. Rahimy (2009), quoting from many scholars, discusses Iranian undergraduate and graduate translation trainees' problems in translation, and believes that the main reason of such a problem is the deficiencies in the curriculum for translation program at undergraduate and graduate levels in Iran.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 60 students of Shokouh English-Language Institute branches from Tonekabon and nearby cities. Their age was between 19 and 25. Their English proficiency levels were high enough to be enrolled in this study and all of them were in advanced level classes, thus, the primary-level learners were excluded because students with basic-level proficiency might have difficulty expressing strategy use and might, in fact, have problems in processing the translation task presented during the study. The students taking part in the study had registered into the English language classes and had promoted from lower levels (or who may have been repeating a level they failed in a previous term).They passed two terms learning key translation principles before and are familiar with translation task. The class size depended upon the term registration, and was not a factor to be considered in this study; therefore, it ranged from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 15. The subjects were familiar with using computer and internet. They also knew how to use dictionaries in translation.

Procedures

The participants of this study were given an OPT test to determine their proficiency level and 60 out of 100 students above the overall average score of participants, that was 25, were selected for the study. Then a pre-test was administered to assess their translation ability. The test was a text taken from Longman TOEFL (Philips, 1996) for translation from English to Persian. Here both groups i.e. experimental and control were allowed to use any monolingual or bilingual dictionaries for the translation practice in the experiment of this study.

 After ten sessions of the treatment that involved teaching how to use on-line corpora to the experimental group and familiarity with different types of English- Persian corpora, both groups were given a translation post-test. In the control group, the participants used common handy bilingual and monolingual dictionaries for translation while the participants of the experimental group worked on translating the same text by using the same dictionaries as well as an on-line corpus as a supplement of their dictionaries. The two tasks used in both groups of the study were 1) finding the exact equivalence of the words and phrases by the students from two different resources and 2) asking students to translate the text into their native language. Here, the supplementary corpus was the dependent variable and the translation task was the independent variable. The participants of the

two groups classes were taught 23 sessions of translation principles during a term, thus, they were familiar with the translation tasks on the whole.

The translation tests (from English to Persian) in the pre- and post-tests were assessed based on the model presented by Farahzad (1992, p. 277) called **objectified scoring**. It presupposed a careful examination of the target text. The model took the sentence as the unit of translation and the verb as the marker of a sentence, which was assigned a score. In her model, complex sentences were broken down into main and sub-clauses, each receiving a separate score (ibid: Farahzad, 1992, p. 277). The model also accounted for the cohesion and style which could not be checked and scored at the sentence and clause level but leaves determination of the weight of their scores to the examiner. Since the purpose of this study was meaning-based translation of texts, meaning was more important and papers were scored on the basis of this criterion. To ensure the inter-rater reliability of the test results, two other raters who were also translation instructors were asked to rate the translations based on the above-mentioned model. The scores given by the three examiners were compared; the scores yielding no significant difference were to be indicative of precision and reliability in scoring. An Independent sample t-test was used for the analysis of results.

RESULTS

Findings

The data of the current study were analyzed using descriptive as well as inferential analyses. The descriptive analysis of the pretest scores of the experimental and the control group of the study has been presented in tables 1 and 2 as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the pre-test scores of the experimental and the control group of the study

Group	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
Ex	30	13.7		1.87
Con	30	12.96		2.12

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the pre-test scores of the experimental and the control group of the study. Both groups seem to have mean scores approximately close to each other. This means that the two groups of the study are nearly at the same level of translation ability before the administration of the treatment of the study.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the post-test scores of the experimental and the control group of the study

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
EG	30	16.50	1.50
CG	30	13.93	1.61

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of the post-test scores of the experimental and the control group of the study. Both groups seem to have mean scores with a difference to each other. This means that the two groups of the study are at a different level of translation ability after the administration of the treatment of the study.

Table 3. T-test analysis of the post-test scores of the experimental and the control group of the study

	Levene s test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std.error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal Variances assumed	.000	.993	6.75	58	.000	2.7	..399	1.9	3.49

Table 3 summarizes the results of calculating the t-value in an independent sample T-test to compare the post-test scores of experimental and control group. The observed-t is 6.75.

Hypothesis Analysis

Based on the literature review on vocabulary learning and corpus-based language learning as well as the proposed methodology outlined previously, also, based on the obtained t-observed of the study, the null

hypothesis of the study: 'There is no difference between learners who use the supplementary on-line corpora for translation and those who do not' can be indicated to be rejected. Tables 1, 2 and 3 can be used to justify such a rejection.

A comparison between the means in tables 1 and 2 shows that there has been a rise from the mean of the pretest to the posttest in the experimental group while the degree of rise is not significant in the control group. This represents the effectiveness of using corpora in developing the participants' translation ability in the experimental group.

Table 3 represents the obtained t-value of the study. Accordingly, the observed t is 6.75 (t_{obs}). In addition, the critical t for the degree of freedom of 60 is 2.000 ($t_{crit}=2.000$). It is obvious that the observed value of t exceeds the critical value and thus, by 95% confidence it can be indicated that the posttest means of the two participant groups of the study are significantly different.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study presented findings concerning the impact of on-line corpora as a supplement on translation ability of Iranian advanced EFL learners. The findings indicated that there was a difference between the translation ability of the participants in the experimental and those in the control group of the study. As a conclusion, it can be inferred that working on corpora is one of the acceptable ways a teacher may follow while practicing translation. Perhaps, one justification is that language learners may understand and translate the texts better when they have the context in which the word is used while in traditional methods, they did not have the same chance. This is in line with Aston (1997a) view who suggests that by using a specialized corpus, learners can retrieve multiple texts that contain recurrent patterns for analysis.

Practically, the findings of the study are applicable to English language teachers and testers as well as material developers. Teachers can use the corpora as an instruction tool and a teaching technique in teaching various abilities in language specially translation. Further, experts in testing language skills are able to present innovative translation tests using their targeted corpora. Finally, material developers in the field of translation studies will be able to develop translation materials via taking the concept of corpora and corpus linguistics into account. It is worth noting that making a decision on whether or not different sorts of corpus may affect various components of language in a single research study is not too easy. Thus, it is advised that language researchers study the effect of corpus in their further experiments.

REFERENCES

1. Aston, G. (1997a). Enriching the learning environment: Corpora in ELT. In A. Wichmann, S. Fligelstone,

2.McEnery, & G. Knowles (Eds.),*Teaching and language corpora* (pp. 51-64). London: Longman.

3. Buck, G. (2001). Assessing Listening. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

4. Chomsky, Noam. (1965). Theory of Syntax. Camb Aspects of the

5. Farahzad, F. (1992).Testing achievement in translation ridge, MA: MIT Press. classes. In C. Dollerup & A. Loddegaard (eds.), Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Training Talent, and Experience, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing. Company, pp. 271-278.

6. Hegelheimer, Volker. (2006). CALICO Journal, 24(1), PP 5-32.

7. Kennedy, C., & Miceli, T. (2001). An evaluation of intermediate students' approaches to corpus investigation. Language Learning & Technology, 5(3), 77-90.

8. McEnery, T. & Wilson, A. (2001). Corpus linguistics: An introduction (2nd ed.). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

9. Murphy, B. (1996). Computer, corpora and vocabulary study. Language Learning Journal, 14, 53-57.

10. Phillips, D. (1996).Longman Practice Tests for the TOEF. Test volume-skills and strategies, second edition Addison-Wesley com

11. Zanettin, F. (2002). Parallel words: Designing a bilingual database for translation activities. In A. Wilson & T. McEnery (Eds.), Corpora I language education and research: A selection of papers from talc94.Concept 'Concept'", New Trends in Conceptual Representation: Challenges to Piaget's Theory?, Hillsdale(N.J.), Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.