UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

THE USE OF TRANSLATION TO FACILITATE THE LEARNING OF LOW FREQUENCY AND ABSTRACT ENGLISH VOCABULARY

ERLINA MELATI MAHPAR

FPP 2007 19
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By

ERLINA MELATI MAHPAR

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

May 2007
DEDICATION

This thesis is a gift for Abah and Mak,
my first and best teachers.
Only Allah S.W.T
can
repay
all your
love and sacrifice.
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May 2007

Chairman: Arshad Abdul Samad, PhD
Faculty: Faculty of Educational Studies

The aim of this study is to analyse the facilitative effect of integrating selective translation in the teaching and learning of low frequency and abstract English vocabulary on below advanced proficiency students. Consequently, the objectives are to find out whether using translation and using only English are facilitative in learning English as a second language, and which of the two methods is more facilitative. Despite having been questioned and dismissed largely based on beliefs and opinions after the Grammar Translation Method era, the method has witnessed its revival in this era of Communicative Approach (Alias and Norasmadi, 2003).

In general, language teachers find translation to be an extremely valuable teaching device which is a great loss should it not be exploited, especially when tortuous explanations of lexical items in
the target language fail to secure students’ comprehension (Fatimah, 2001). Thus, resorting to translation is inevitably an option to ensure or enhance students’ learnability, which is the ultimate goal of this profession (Hammond, 1990). Incidentally, the long overestimated notion that the native or first language would hinder the learning of a second language should only be applied when translation is used en masse in class, not selectively and constructively. Giving honour to such extremity would only jeopardise our purpose as teachers and is, sadly, self-defeating (Wilss, 1981).

Although, the taboo of using translation in English classes has been widely put into practice in Malaysia, unfortunately, our students’ proficiency is still inadequate (Abdul Hamid and Mohmadisa, 2003). The Ministry of Education could not fail to notice this. Thus, measures are taken to rectify the situation such as implementing English in the teaching of Mathematics and Science in January 2003. Several topics in Form one syllabus, prepared under the Bestari Programme, were even abolished to accommodate this implementation (Hasuria, 2003). However, what can we do for the English classes themselves? This is where translation is significant. Translation is a one of the teaching methods that is often applied on second language learners to facilitate learning. However, some resist it largely based on beliefs and opinions that translation would impede
the learning of a second language. Hence, this study was initiated to provide an insight as to whether such beliefs and opinions are well-founded or are misleading. This was done through a quantitative study which is more genuine and valid than mere beliefs and opinions.

The focus of this study is translation of lexical items (content words) rather than structural and grammatical words (function words). This is because the basis of learning a language is learning vocabulary (Wallace, 1982). Furthermore, a message which omits function words usually can remain comprehensible (Stubbs, 2001) while it is impossible to comprehend those which omits content words. The study concentrates on low frequency vocabulary (Thorndike and Lorge, 1959) and abstract vocabulary (Carroll, 1994) as it poses difficulty in learning. Thus, translation is applied on learners to facilitate the learning of these difficult words.

Consequently, the researcher had conducted an experiment on below advanced proficiency students of Sekolah Menengah Bandar Baru Seri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur to gauge the facilitative effect of using translation in class. Two sets of post-tests were taken by the students are compared against one another and analysed by applying T-test, means and \( \eta^2 \) squared. Firstly, the facilitative effect of using
translation in second language classrooms is measured. Then, the researcher evaluated whether using English solely in classrooms facilitates second language learning. Finally, both methods are compared and analysed to ascertain which method is more facilitative.

The results of the study indicate that both methods (translation and English solely) facilitate second language learning. However, using translation is found to be more facilitative than using English only. Not only is it measured to be effective but largely effective in learning English as a second language. In brief, the results of this study reflect the facilitative effect of this once popular method. Thus, the resurgence of interest in the translation method nowadays may prove as a blessing.
INGGERIS YANG MEMPUNYAI KEKERAPAN RENDAH DAN ABSTRAK

Oleh

ERLINA MELATI HJ. MAHPAR

Mei 2007

Pengerusi: Arshad bin Abdul Samad, PhD
Fakulti: Fakulti Pengajian Pendidikan


Program Bestari telah dihapuskan untuk memberi laluan kepada pelaksanaan program tersebut (Hasuria, 2003). Walau bagaimanapun, apakah pula yang boleh kita lakukan untuk kelas-kelas bahasa Inggeris itu sendiri? Di sinilah terjemahan memainkan peranan.

Terjemahan merupakan salah satu kaedah pengajaran yang boleh diaplikasikan ke atas pelajar bahasa kedua untuk melancarkan pembelajaran. Namun demikian, masih terdapat tentangan terhadapnya semata-mata berlandaskan kepercayaan dan pendapat bahawa terjemahan menghalang pembelajaran bahasa kedua. Sejurus itu, kajian ini diadakan untuk mengetahui sama ada kepercayaan dan pendapat tersebut adalah berasas atau menyesatkan. Ini telah diikhtiarkan melalui kajian berbentuk kuantitatif yang lebih telus dan boleh dipercayai daripada hanya bersandarkan kepercayaan dan pendapat.

Fokus kajian ini adalah terjemahan perkataan (isi perkataan) dan bukannya struktur dan tatabahasa (perkataan fungsi). Ini adalah kerana asas pembelajaran sesuatu bahasa ialah pembelajaran kosakata (Wallace, 1982). Tambah lagi, walaupun disingkirkan perkataan fungsi dari sesuatu mesej, ia masih mampu difahami (Stubbs, 2001) sementara mustahil untuk memahami mesej yang disingkirkan isi
perkataan. Kajian ini bertumpukan kosa kata yang mempunyai kekerapan rendah (Thorndike and Lorge, 1959) dan kosa kata abstrak (Carroll, 1994) kerana ia menimbulkan kesukaran dalam pembelajaran. Oleh itu, terjemahan digunakan bagi melancarkan pembelajaran yang menyukarkan.


Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua kaedah (terjemahan dan Bahasa Inggeris sahaja) melancarkan pembelajaran bahasa kedua.
Walau bagaimana pun kaedah terjemahan didapati lebih melancarkan pembelajaran daripada kaedah Bahasa Inggeris sahaja. Ia bukan sahaja berkesan, malah sangat berkesan dalam melancarkan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua. Secara umum, keputusan kajian jelas menunjukkan keberkesanan pelaksanaan kaedah yang pernah terkenal satu ketika dahulu. Oleh demikian, kemunculan semula minat terhadap kaedah terjemahan kini berkemungkinan besar mendatangkan banyak kebaikan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
In the Name of Allah
The Most Gracious and The Most Merciful

May peace be upon the holy prophet Muhammad S.A.W., and his family

This thesis would not be completed without the contribution and cooperation from very special people. My heartfelt gratitude goes to all of them.

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for the inspiration and encouragement to further my studies in the field of education.

Secondly, words could not express my appreciation towards the members of my Supervisory Committee, especially towards the main supervisor, Dr. Arshad Abdul Samad for his ceaseless dedication in guiding me constructively throughout the years spent on this thesis. I am also blessed to have Associate Professor Dr. Jegak Uli as my co-supervisor. His endless support and understanding owed to the process of making this thesis less stressful and possible. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Jayakaran Mukundan, for his feedback and support.

Next, I would like to extend my gratitude to the administrators, teachers and students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Bandar Baru Seri Petaling whose cooperation had made this study possible.
Also, thank you my dearest husband for allowing me to do my thesis even on our honeymoon and throughout the years.

Last but not least, I am blessed to have my son as an inspiration since the day he sat in front of the computer with me inside my stomach and after birth, on my lap ... sometimes dejected when I could not come and spend time with him when he pulled my hand away from the keyboard. Although I could not bear to see him sad, this was also done for him. May this piece of writing be a memento of my love for him when he is old enough to understand, God-willing.

I certify that an Examination Committee has met on 22 MAY 2007 to conduct the final examination of Erlina Melati Mahpar on her Master Science thesis entitled “The Facilitative Effect of Using Translation in Learning Low Frequency and Abstract Vocabulary” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:
Datin Dr. Sharifah Md. Nor, PhD
Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Malachi Edwin N. Vethamani, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Dr. Ghazali Mustapha, PhD
Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Abdul Rashid Mohamed, PhD
Associate Professor
Centre of Educational Studies
Universiti Sains Malaysia
(External Examiner)

HASANAH BTE. MOHD. GHAZALI
Professor/Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date:
This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

Arshad Abdul Samad, PhD
Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)
Jegak Uli, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

Jayakaran Mukundan, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

AINI IDERIS, PhD
Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 13 DECEMBER 2007

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In recent years, we have observed many positive signs towards the emphasis on English, among which are the Cabinet’s approval of ETeMS (Teaching of English in Mathematics and Science) in 2002, its implementation for standard one, form one and lower six students in January 2003 by the Ministry of Education (Hasuria, 2003); the Orientation Program for Science and Mathematics in English (OPSME) for form one students in January, 2006; the initiation of EST (English for Science and Technology) as a subject for form four and form five science stream students in 2004; and the requirement for undergraduates to sit for Malaysian University English Test (MUET) since 1999. One of the reasons for the last observation is that the English of many Malaysian undergraduates is not proficient irrespective of 10 to 13 years of schooling. According to Abdul Hamid and Mohmadisa (2003), eighty percent of the total candidates between June 2000 and December 2002 are categorized in band 3, in which bands 4, 5 and 6 are
regarded as proficient while bands 1, 2 and 3 as not proficient and inadequate in reading comprehension (p.45). This was not commonly observed before Malaysia gained independence.

One critical feature of the education system before independence was that lessons in government schools were conducted in English as the medium of instruction (Penerbit Femina’s Authors, 2003). The exposure towards English in school was therefore adequate and conducive for an English learning environment. However, the exposure gradually declines after independence with the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in schools (Abdul Hamid and Mohmadisa, 2003).

Due to the prevalent use of English within and beyond the school boundaries before independence, students were geared towards learning English and had fewer difficulties learning English than students nowadays (Isma, 1997). Besides that, English as a subject in school did not receive as much emphasis as Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics, which were compulsory to pass in examinations. However, hope for recovery remains as the government had noticed the predicament, especially with the developing age of information technology. Among the measures initiated to confront this problem are the implementation of ETeMS, EST and MUET (as previously explained). Thus, the education policy plays a significant role in second language education. This is stressed by Baker