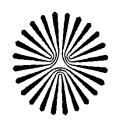# In The Name of Allah Almighty

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign

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(TEFL)

The Impact of Studying the Translation of Technical Text on the Understanding and Long –Term Recall of the Iranian High –Intermediate EFL Learners and Understanding of the Original Texts in the target Language (a Study on Cognitive Strategies)

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Abstract

Although the use of translation in learning is much maligned by language teachers, translation is widely used in learners' foreign language learning process. It appears that learners often use translation as a learning strategy to comprehend, remember, and produce a foreign language. However, relatively little research attention so far seems to have been devoted to a consideration of the use of translation in language learning. Thus, this study aimed to explore the effect of using the translation of technical texts on the achievement and recall of the Iranian EFL students. Another purpose of the study was to determine if the gender of the learners influences their uptake from the translated texts. To fulfill the purpose of the study, 52 Iranian high intermediate EFL learners were chosen. Two intact classes were chosen, one as the experimental group and the other as the control group. This experiment took place in their four-unit Methodology classes. The teaching material that was used in this study was some chapters of the students' textbook already assigned by their instructors as their textbook in methodology course, and the testing material that was used in this study was a knowledge test that was administered in their classes. The experimental group underwent the treatment and then both groups were tested through similar knowledge tests. The results from both parametric and non-parametric statistics demonstrated that the experimental group outperformed the control group. In addition it was found that the translation of the technical texts enhances achievement and long- term recall of the Iranian EFL students of the original texts while the performance of the female and male students of the both groups was not significantly different.

Key words: , learning content knowledge, gender, translation, achievement

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List of Abbreviations

L2	Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
RC	Reading Comprehension
VLSs	Vocabulary Learning Strategies
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
LLS	Language Learning Strategies
L1	First Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
ESL	English as a Second Language
MC	Multiple Choice
CG	Control Group
EG	Experimental Group
K-S	Kolmogorov-Smirnov

Chapter One

Introduction

1.3 Overview

Oxford (1990) states that second language (L2) learning strategies are specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning. A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. What makes a strategy positive and helpful for a given learner, according to Oxford (1990) is:

a) The strategy relates well to the L2 at hand.

b) The strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another.

c) The student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies. Strategies that fulfill these conditions make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (p.8).

Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners, yet students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective (Oxford, 1990). Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies.

To many researchers, strategy use often relates to style preferences. If students are not encouraged by the teacher or forced by the lesson to use a certain set of strategies, they typically use learning strategies that reflect their basic learning styles (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1989a). However, as Oxford states, teachers can actively help students "stretch"

their learning styles by trying out some strategies that are outside of their primary style preferences. This can happen through strategy instruction (p.11).

1.2. Significance of Strategy Use

Many second language acquisition (SLA) studies of adults and children (Bialystok, 1985; O' Mallley & Chamot, 1994) were conducted on the basis of assumptions that learners had particular cognitive traits, affective orientations, motivations, past experiences, and other individual characteristics, and that they used particular individual learning strategies, all of which affected their L2 learning. In an early SLA study, for example, Oxford (2003) suggests the following in the case of successful L2 learners and states that the secret of great success of language learners can be attributed to special combination of interests, inclinations, skills, temperament, needs and motivations that comprised their personality.

As Larsen-Freeman observed in a survey of SLA research in 1991, SLA researchers until then had been preoccupied with discovering the cognitive processes of language acquisition and the effects of learners' characteristics on these processes. L2 learning, from this perspective, was the process by which individual learners internalized language forms in interaction with available L2 input. SLA research was concerned with discovering how these individual learners managed their interactions with L2 input and organized their L2 output. In this way, as Naiman , Stern, and Todesco (1978) suggest, language learning was described as mental processes such as perceiving, analyzing, classifying, relating, storing, retrieving, and constructing a language output .According to Lai (2005), learner autonomy is defined as learners accepting and learning about their own learning habits and taking initiatives to give shape and direction to the learning process. Learner centered approaches focus on the learner learning to acquire learner autonomy in the ESL classroom. Researchers like Nunan (1991) realizes that working with individual differences can be dealt with effectively if learners are taught to be self-dependent and this can be done through 'learning-how-to-learn' strategies.

1.3. Definition and Classification of Language Learning Strategies

Different scholars have various views about language learning strategies and how they can be classified. Rubin(1995) is one of the earliest researchers in the field of strategy training who provided a very broad definition of learning strategies. According to her language learning strategies are the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge. She identifies two kinds of learning strategies: those which contribute directly to learning, and those which contribute indirectly to learning. The direct learning strategies are divided into six types (clarification, verification, monitoring, memorizing, guessing inductive, deductive reasoning, and practice). According to her, indirect learning strategies are of two types: creating opportunities for practice, and producing tricks (Rubin 1995).

Oxford (1990) emphasizes six basic strategies in language learning .Based on her opinion language learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self- directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations (1990) .She also believes that learning strategies are operations that are employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and the use of information. These strategies include Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Meta-cognitive, Affective, and Social Strategies.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) are also two prominent figures within the field of strategy training and define strategies as special ways in information processing that enhance comprehension, learning or retention of information. They also have summarized that learning strategies can be divided into Meta-cognitive, Cognitive and Social Affective Strategies. According to O' Malley and Chamot (1990):

> Meta-cognitive strategies are defined as strategies of learning that involve thinking about or knowledge of the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring language while it is taking place or self evaluation of learning after the task has been completed. Cognitive strategies on the other hand, are strategies that reflect mental manipulation of

tasks whereas social/affective strategies involve mental control over personal effects that interferes with learning (p.4).

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Students of L2 utilize various strategies in the process of L2 learning. Scholars advocate the use of strategies in L2 learning and there is abundant of research articles written on the advantages of applying learning strategies in this field. Translation is one of those strategies that students can take advantage of in their learning. There are different views about the application of this strategy in this process. Some scholars are of the opinion that it should be banded totally while others, on the other hand, have a positive view about the utilization of this strategy in the process of L2 learning and believe that this strategy use can yield good results. Cohen (1995) used a survey given to bilingual and multilingual university students to explore factors influencing language learning strategies. He found not only that people with access to two or more languages frequently use their L1, but also shift between two languages. It is easier to think in one language than the other and the brain automatically shifts between languages. According to him, translation as a cognitive strategy has a significant role in L2 learning. From this perspective, it seems crucial to investigate the role of translation as a cognitive strategy and examine whether this strategy can assist language learners to be more successful in this process or not.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The aim of this paper was to touch upon the importance of use of translation as a cognitive strategy in particular. As Richards and Rodgers (1986) state, within the era of Grammar-Translation in methodology in the 1840s to the 1940s, translation was the sole method of learning foreign languages. Students were presented with difficult texts to translate from one language into another language. It was believed that the more difficult translation texts were, the better language learning would be. However, with the emergence of new methods in

language teaching, such as Direct Method and Audiolingualism, translation lost it popularity and was somehow abandoned. Since then, it was believed that while studying a L2, any direct contact with mother tongue will prohibit proper language learning. This idea was prevalent among scholars of the time for some while. Then with the emergence of Cognitivism in language teaching and awareness of the importance of different strategies in learning a foreign language, some scholars began to innumerate various effective strategies in L2 learning and classify them in different ways. There are several classification systems for those strategies. One of them is that of O'Malley and Chamot (1994). Within their classification system, there are three main categories including metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective strategies. Translation is one of the cognitive strategies that are important in language learning. In our country, the use of translation is prevalent among students, and they can take advantage of it in language learning. Students sometimes resort to translation when they face problem in understanding new vocabularies or reading comprehension, so it does worth studying whether translation is an effective strategy and increase achievement and recall of the students or not.

This experiment has been carried out for investigating the role of translation as a cognitive strategy in Iranian EFL students. Since cognitive strategies are vital for both teachers and students, an investigation for predicting students' performances will be facilitative for their success. Pedagogically, the findings of the present study have implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators in the realm of EFL and education in general. It help teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English in EFL contexts where learners have less exposure to language compared to ESL contexts. The findings of the present study can be used for improving instruction. Students using translation of the technical terms as a cognitive strategy may take advantage of it in their learning process and deliberately utilize this strategy in other conditions. Enhancing EFL learners' learning and thinking is another application of this study. By raising the awareness of EFL learners of cognitive strategies, the learners may

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learn to apply selective and appropriate strategies to meet the requirements of various tasks.

Theoretically, it was decided to let teachers, learners, syllabus designers, material developers, and textbook writers know and benefit from the program. Based on Round's point of view (2003), translation involves a communicative activity, a cognitive process, and a cultural experience that could eventually be implemented in a L2 classroom to help students become involved with all those different activities in order to have a broader vision of the uses of language. By bringing translation exercises into L2 classroom, we can reinforce students' use of grammar, broaden their vocabularies and help them become aware of different situational contexts (as cited inTuck, 2003).

Theoretically, textbook writers, and teacher, especially in the context of EFL can also take advantage of the findings of the present study. A need for the inclusion of an emphasis on learning strategies is obvious; therefore, they can include a sufficient amount of information of this strategy in their textbooks and courses.

1.6. Research Questions and Hypotheses

As it has been mentioned before, most of the students are not aware of the significant role of the strategy training in their language learning. Few studies specifically examined the effect of using translation of the technical terms on the achievement and recall of the students. In order to investigate the role of translation on reading comprehension and recall of the students, the following research questions and hypotheses were formulated.

RQ1: Does the translation of technical texts increase achievement of the Iranian High – Intermediate EFL students of their original texts in the target language?

RQ2: Does the gender of learners influence their uptake from the translated texts?

RQ3: Does the translation of technical texts increase the long-term recall of the Iranian High – Intermediate EFL students of their original texts in the target language?

In order to answer the questions, the following null hypotheses were put forth:

Hypothesis 1

Translation as a cognitive strategy has no significant effect on the achievement of the Iranian High –intermediate EFL students of the technical texts.

Hypothesis 2

Translation of technical terms has no effect on the long-term recall of technical texts of the Iranian High –intermediate EFL students.

Hypothesis 3

The gender of learners has no influence on their uptake from the translated texts.

1.7. Definition of Key Terms

Learning styles

Learning styles are the general approaches, global or analytic, auditory or visual that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subjects. These styles are the overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior (Cornett, 1983) .In other words, learning style is a set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others. Recently, the development of students' practical communication abilities is emphasized. Under this circumstance, teachers are reconsidering the aim of EFL. Teachers have tried to include activities which are more effective in learning the four skills. Many teachers have tried to shift their teaching styles from a traditional method to a communicative one. Thus, a study of teaching techniques is very popular among teachers. However, a study of students themselves has not had much focus yet.

Learning strategies (LS)

In a survey article, Mayer (1988) defines learning strategies (LS) broadly as behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning to influence his encoding process. Later, Mayer more specifically defines LS as learners' behaviors that are intended to influence how he processes information. These early definitions from the educational literature reflect the

roots of LS in cognitive science, with its essential assumptions that human beings process information and that learning involves such information processing. Clearly, LS are involved in all learning, regardless of the content and context. LS are thus used in learning and teaching math, science history, languages and other subjects, both in classroom settings and more informal learning environments.

Language learning strategies

Within L2 education, a number of definitions of LLS have been used by key figures in the field. Early on, Cohen (2001) defines LS as an effort to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language so that the learner be able to incorporate these into his interlanguage competence. Rubin (1997) later states that LS are strategies that contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly. In their seminal study, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define LS as the special thoughts or behaviors used by individuals to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Finally, Oxford (1990) provides specific examples of LLS .

> Language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or the use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for helping communicative ability (p.18).

Translation

It may be important to point out that translation has been defined in many ways, and every definition reflects the theoretical approach underpinning it. As Cowie (1997) observes throughout the history of research, the phenomenon has been variously delimited by formal descriptions, echoing the frameworks of the scholars proposing them. For example, Bell (1991) starts with an informal definition of translation, which runs as follows: the transformation of a