

## L1 to L2 Translation Practices in Foreign Language Teacher Education: Student Teachers' Views

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to elicit student teachers' views regarding the translation practices they were engaged in within the content of a compulsory 'L1 to L2 translation' course. During a 12-week translation class in 2018 Spring semester, 22 student teachers were asked to translate different types of texts: literary texts, recipes, magazine articles, official documents, and oral texts. They also deal with different translation practices such as prepared translation, unprepared in-class translation with and without dictionaries or online translation tools, constructing multiple-choice translation test items, and oral translation. At the end of the training, the student teachers were asked to rank those different practices and text types according to their usefulness and difficulty. They were also asked to explain their reasons for those ideas. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the obtained data showed that each translation practice and each text type had its advantages and disadvantages for student teachers in their way to become foreign language teachers. A number of suggestions and implications are also provided for student teachers and teacher trainers for the translation courses in teacher education programs.*

**Keywords:** translation, foreign language, teacher education, student teachers

### 1. Introduction

Translation from one language to another is a complex phenomenon. In particular, translating from the native language (L1) into a foreign language (L2) is a reasonably more demanding task for language learners. Nevertheless, it is a required skill especially for the ones who are foreign language teacher candidates, and all over the globe, translation courses are given to language learners and language teacher candidates. The difficulty of translation lies on the ground that it entails a comprehensive expertise in the languages of translation (either L1 to L2 or L2 to L1) for their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic assets as well as a certain degree of inspiration and imagination (Zengin & Kaçar, 2011).

A famous discussion concerning the role of translation in language-related work is

Grammar-Translation Method for language teaching vs. use of translation as a L2 learning practice in foreign language contexts. Although the former views translation as an end, the latter takes it as a useful means. In point of fact, Carreeres (2006: 5) summarizes the oppositions related to the use of translation as a language teaching device as follows:

1. Translation is an artificial, stilted exercise that has no place in a communicative methodology. Also, it is restrictive in that it confines language practice to two skills only (reading and writing).
2. Translation into L2 is counterproductive in that it forces learners to view the foreign language always through the prism of their mother tongue; this causes interferences and a dependence on L1 that inhibits free expression in L2.
3. Translation into L2 is a wholly purposeless exercise that has no application in the real world, since translators normally operate into and not out of their mother tongue.
4. Translation and translation into L2 in particular are frustrating and demotivating exercises in that the student can never attain the level of accuracy or stylistic polish of the version presented to them by their teacher. It seems an exercise designed to elicit mistakes, rather than accurate use of language.
5. Translation is a method that may well work with literary-oriented learners who enjoy probing the intricacies of grammar and lexis, but it is unsuited to the average learner.

The use of translation in language learning teaching, on the other hand, is favored thanks to certain elements it holds for the language learners, especially the L2 learners. According to Calis and Dikilitas (2012), translation gives students the opportunities to compare and contrast the L1 and L2, which consequently results in more cognitive, memory, compensation and social strategy use by L2 learners. Moreover, translation is a useful tool for vocabulary gain and awareness (Koletnik, 2015). Furthermore, a recent study has revealed that FL teacher candidates use translation extensively as a learning strategy for understanding the meaning of a word or grammatical structure throughout the process of FL learning (Pekkanlı, 2012).

Considering the role of translation in language teaching and teacher training, the methods to provide this training is also an important issue. At university level teaching, teacher training in this case, translation might be viewed as a theoretical or a practical activity, or both. According to Viaggio (1994: 97), translation theory should be taught "at the university, where the theoretical rationale of the practical do's and don't's is to be learned". However, (Gile 1995: 12) ascertains that "the usefulness of such theoretical courses is often challenged on the grounds that they are too abstract or remote from actual translation practice and are therefore not useful to students". Hence, it might be a far better idea to provide translation students /the teacher candidates) with a

translation course which is rather based on hands-on experience.

Even though a practice-based translation training is approved by scholars, teachers, teacher trainers, and most importantly students, what sort of texts and which translation methods should be used are the two unanswered questions. In many institutions, to our knowledge and experience, translation teachers select some texts for in-class translation, assign them to the students weekly, students translate those texts at home and bring to class, and finally the translated texts are discussed sentence-by-sentence under the moderation of the class teacher. However, especially after the appearance of online translation tools on the web, students are not spending the necessary effort on translation: copy the text, paste it on the screen, press 'translate', and paste the result on the paper. Despite other forms of translation instruction are also possible (i.e. oral translation, unprepared translation, etc.), no specific inquiry has been published in the literature to focus on the effectiveness and areas of use of these exercises. Then, a brief review of the literature and a current experience about teaching a translation course lead to the following research questions:

1. Which text type(s) do student teachers find rather difficult?
2. Which text type(s) do student teachers find more useful?
3. Which translation practice(s) do student teachers find rather difficult?
4. Which translation practice(s) do student teachers find more useful?

## 2. Methodology

This study is a mixed-design inquiry as it employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. It can also be characterized as a teacher-initiated action research as the classroom teacher organized the study, implemented the classroom tasks and research tools, and interpreted the results obtained.

### 2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 22 students (15 male and 7 female) studying at Anadolu University Faculty of Education English Language Teacher Training Program. They are considered as teacher candidates (or student teachers) as they were the senior students at a teacher training institution. All participants had a similar educational background. They took courses related to language improvement, linguistics, literature, and language teaching methodology during their years in the program. As 4th grade students, they were taking a few more courses like translation, guidance and counselling, and language testing and evaluation. They were also completing their teaching practicum at state or private schools as part of their graduation requirement.

## 2.2 The Context

The study took place during a compulsory course entitled 'INÖ402 Translation: Turkish-English' in 2017-2018 Spring semester. In this course, students are supposed to translate different types of Turkish (L1) texts into English (L2) employing different techniques for translation for 12 weeks. Throughout the semester, the following text types were selected by the instructor considering the students' interests and needs:

- literary texts,
- recipes,
- magazine articles,
- official documents,
- oral texts.

The students also dealt with translation work using various techniques for translation. The reason behind this idea was that teacher candidates would be in need of translating texts from different disciplines in numerous contexts in their professional lives after graduation. Besides, it would be boring and of limited use if they followed a single technique for the whole semester. These practices were as follows:

- prepared translation (translating at home, checking in the class),
- unprepared in-class translation using dictionaries or online translation tools,
- unprepared in-class translation without dictionaries or online translation tools,
- constructing multiple-choice translation test items,
- oral translation practices.

## 2.3 Data Collection Tools

The necessary data for the aim of the study were collected at the end of the semester as soon as all the practices were completed by the students. The instructor constructed an opinion questionnaire to elicit teacher candidates' views regarding the 12-week translation course. The questionnaire included eight questions in total. The first four were closed questions in which the participants were asked to rank the classroom translation practices and text types for translation according to their usefulness and level of difficulty. The four questions were as follows:

1. *Please rank the text types from the most difficult to the easiest.*
2. *Please rank the text types from the most useful to the least useful.*
3. *Please rank the translation practices from the most difficult to the easiest.*
4. *Please rank the translation practices from the most useful to the least useful.*

The remaining four questions were open-ended ones, which aimed to elaborate student answers related to their ranking on a qualitative basis. The questions were as follows:

1. *Can you please explain the contribution of the text type(s) that you have found useful to your personal/professional development?*
2. *Can you please explain the contribution of the translation practice(s) that you have found useful to your personal/professional development?*
3. *Do you have any suggestions related to text types and/or translation practices that we have not dealt with during this course?*
4. *Please write any other thing you would like to express about this course.*

## 2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

As the study was a mixed-design one, the quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted separately. For the quantitative analysis, each ranking by the participants was quantified and given a score between 1 and 5. Then, the researcher counted and quantified the rankings by each individual participant and identified the most and least frequently stated items (text type and translation practice) in terms of usefulness and level of difficulty. Frequency analysis was enough for the quantitative part. For the qualitative analysis, a content analysis was conducted. Here, the researcher co-worked with another rater and each party analyzed the data independently. The task for both raters was to label each idea in terms of (a) level of difficulty and (b) usefulness. After that, the two raters came together for a revision and negotiation session and compared the analyses. For any possible controversies, a further discussion and/or reanalysis sessions were held. The two raters, finally, were 100% consistent about the categories emerged while they only held discussion sessions about labelling the categories.

## 3. Presentation of the Findings

Although the quantitative and qualitative data analyses were conducted separately, the findings are presented jointly since the two types of analysis work complementarily; in other words, the qualitative data supported the quantitative data.

### 3.1 RQ1. Which text type(s) do student teachers find rather difficult?

The quantitative analysis of the first question of the questionnaire specified the ranking of the text types used for L1-L2 translation according to their level of difficulty. Each ranking by the participants was quantified and given a score between 1 (the most difficult) and 5 (the easiest). Hence, a lower score means a higher difficulty level. Table 1 below presents the results.

**Table 1.** Difficulty level of the text types

Rank	Text Type	Score	NoO 1 <sup>st</sup>
1	Translating official documents	38	10
2	Literary text translation	44	8
3	Oral translation	78	4
4	Translating magazine articles	92	0
5	Translating recipes	98	0

*NoO1<sup>st</sup> = Number of occurrence in the 1<sup>st</sup> rank*

As Table 1 shows, translating official documents was found to be the most difficult text type for L1-L2 translation. The second most difficult text type was the translation of a literary text. As the scores and number of occurrences in the first rank prove (38 and 44; 10 and 8 respectively), these two were by far the most difficult text types for L1-L2 translation practices according to the participant foreign language teacher candidates. Oral translation practices were at moderate level of difficulty (NoO1<sup>st</sup>=4), translating recipes and magazine articles, on the other hand, were relatively easy for them.

### 3.2 RQ2. Which text type(s) do student teachers find more useful?

The quantitative analysis of the second question of the questionnaire specified the ranking of the text types used for L1-L2 translation according to their usefulness. Each ranking by the participants was quantified and given a score between 1 (the most useful) and 5 (the least useful). Hence, a lower score means a higher level of usefulness. Table 2 below presents the results.

**Table 2.** Level of usefulness of the text types

Rank	Text Type	Score	NoO 1 <sup>st</sup>
1	Translating magazine articles	36	12
2	Oral translation	62	6
3	Literary text translation	72	0
4	Translating official documents	78	2
5	Translating recipes	80	2

*NoO1<sup>st</sup> = Number of occurrence in the 1<sup>st</sup> rank*

As Table 2 shows, translating magazine articles was noticeably found to be the most useful for student teachers' personal and professional development as a text type for L1-L2 translation (Score=36; NoO1<sup>st</sup>=12). The second most useful one was the oral translation practice (Score=62; NoO1<sup>st</sup>=6). On the other hand, literary text translation,

translating official documents, and translating recipes were the three least useful text types from the student teachers' perspective in terms of their score and number of occurrences in the first rank (72, 78, and 80; 0, 2, and 2 respectively).

As for the qualitative analysis of the data, student teachers indicated their ideas about the usefulness of dealing with different text types. Positive views regarding the use of different texts centered on the following points:

- Student teachers gained awareness related to different uses of vocabulary.
- They learned new words.
- Different texts gave grammar practice opportunities.
- Constructing multiple-choice items helped them prepare for public language proficiency tests.
- They learned technical terms and technical language use by translating official documents.

The negative ideas, on the other hand, were related to the following issues:

- Student teachers did not think of doing translation of certain texts such as official texts, drama translation, MC item in their future career.
- Some text types, especially translating recipes, required limited creativity for translation.
- Translating recipes did not help for language improvement.

### 3.3 RQ3. Which translation practice(s) do student teachers find rather difficult?

The quantitative analysis of the third question of the questionnaire specified the ranking of the translation practices used for L1-L2 translation according to their level of difficulty. Each ranking by the participants was quantified and given a score between 1 (the most difficult) and 5 (the easiest). Hence, a lower score means a higher difficulty level. Table 3 below presents the results.

**Table 3.** Difficulty level of the translation practices

Rank	Translation Practices	Score	NoO 1 <sup>st</sup>
1	Oral translation practices	38	14
2	Unprepared in-class translation without dictionaries or online translation tools	54	4
3	Constructing multiple-choice translation test items	60	4
4	Unprepared in-class translation using dictionaries or online translation tools	78	0
5	Prepared translation	96	0

NoO1<sup>st</sup> = Number of occurrence in the 1<sup>st</sup> rank

As Table 3 shows, oral translation practices was outstandingly found to be the most difficult translation practice for L1-L2 translation by the participants (Score=38,

NoO1<sup>st</sup>=14). Doing unprepared translation without dictionaries or online translation tools (Score=54, NoO1<sup>st</sup>=4), constructing multiple-choice translation test items (Score=60, NoO1<sup>st</sup>=4), and dealing with unprepared translation using dictionaries or online translation tools (Score=78, NoO1<sup>st</sup>=0) were at moderate level of difficulty for the student teachers as translators. On the other hand, participating in prepared translation practices in the class was the easiest task for the teacher candidates (Score=96, NoO1<sup>st</sup>=0).

### 3.4 RQ4. Which translation practice(s) do student teachers find more useful?

The quantitative analysis of the fourth question of the questionnaire specified the ranking of the translation practices used for L1-L2 translation according to their usefulness. Each ranking by the participants was quantified and given a score between 1 (the most useful) and 5 (the least useful). Hence, a lower score means a higher level of usefulness. Table 4 below presents the results.

**Table 4.** Level of usefulness of the translation practices

Rank	Translation Practices	Score	NoO 1 <sup>st</sup>
1	Unprepared in-class translation without dictionaries or online translation tools	58	8
2	Unprepared in-class translation using dictionaries or online translation tools	58	6
3	Constructing multiple-choice translation test items	70	4
4	Oral translation practices	72	2
4	Prepared translation	72	2

NoO1<sup>st</sup> = Number of occurrence in the 1<sup>st</sup> rank

As Table 4 shows, the two most useful translation practices, according to student teachers, were unprepared in-class translation with or without dictionaries or online translation tools in terms of the total scores and the number of occurrences in the first rank (58 and 58; 8 and 6 respectively). On the other hand, constructing multiple-choice translation test items, oral translation practices, and prepared translation tasks were found to be less useful by the student teachers in terms of the total scores and the number of occurrences in the first rank (70, 72, and 72; 4, 2, and 2 respectively).

The qualitative analysis of the data, furthermore, put forward a number of issues related to the possible usefulness of the translation practices employed in the class. The positive views were as follows:

- Student teachers gained awareness related to different uses of vocabulary.
- They learned new words.
- Different texts gave grammar practice opportunities.
- Constructing multiple-choice items helped them prepare for public language



proficiency tests.

- Prepared translation practices provided a self-study opportunity.
- Oral translation practices were great oral language practice tools.
- The practices taught overall textual and discourse knowledge.

The negative ideas concerning the use of different translation practices, on the other hand, were related to the following issues:

- Student teachers did not think of doing oral translation in their future career.
- Some practices, especially oral translation, were very challenging.
- Some practices, especially prepared translation, was not challenging but simple.

#### 4. Discussion of the Findings and Conclusion

This study aimed to find out about the views of student teachers about a translation course they were engaged in during their senior year at a foreign language teacher training institution. The analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data collected within this purpose resulted in several findings.

According to the student teachers, translating official document was a challenging task despite its usefulness for giving them the necessary technical language samples and teaching some technical vocabulary. On the other hand, although translating magazine articles that were written in daily language was not found to be difficult task, they were considered as the most useful text type to be used for translation. Therefore, one can claim that difficulty level may not be an indicator of usefulness. Some text can be challenging but useful while some others are simple but useful. From the opposite side, it is also possible for some text types to be less challenging but useful or less useful. A totally opposite argument is also true considering the fact that recipes were the most challenging and the least useful text type for translation.

A similar discussion can be given in terms of the translation practices conducted in the classroom. Although oral translation practices were placed in the top in terms of the difficulty level for translation, they were not found as useful as other practices excluding prepared translation practices. Furthermore, a noticeable finding was related to the use of unprepared in-class translation practices done in the class time. Unprepared in-class translation both with and without dictionaries or online translation tools were identified as the two most useful translation practice types by the student teachers despite dealing with unprepared in-class translation without dictionaries or online translation tools was one of the most challenging tasks for in-class translation. Thus, it is now once again proved that difficulty level and usefulness don not have to be in positive correlation with each other. The situation may change according to the text type, level of difficulty, or even both of them. Another interesting finding was related to the implementation of prepared translation practices. In the study, this task was considered as the simplest and

the least useful translation practice by the student teachers. One of the student teachers mentioned this issue in his/her own words as follows:

*In the first moment I was challenged, I referred to google translate, so I did all of them easily, but when it comes to translating a text in the class that I see for the first time, I really felt that I was actually dealing with the translation work. (St. 8)*

In addition to the suggestions given above, the student teachers in this study had certain recommendations related to the text types and translation practices to be used in translation classes. For example, translating idioms and proverbs from L1 to L2 can be integrated into the syllabus. Another suggestion is translating a TV series (a 20 minute-long sit-com) in the form of subtitles, as it would give student teachers a real-life sense for what they are doing. Additionally, one student teacher commented on the benefit of providing students with some theoretical information related to translation as follows:

*At the beginning of the semester or each class, it would be good to watch short video clips about common translation errors or most frequent problems in translation and how to deal with them, etc. (St. 6)*

Another suggestion was on the use of group work for translation. One student teacher wrote:

*Each group may be given a different subject like 'Do you know this?', and the following week, each group searches, translates, and presents in the classroom. This is important to give us a purpose to listen to each other. (St. 10)*

Finally, student teachers' ideas related to the translation course were rather positive. They indicated that dealing with different text types and various translation practices not only helped them become better translators but also contributed to their self-confidence about translation and gave them fun time. The following extracts exemplify the point:

*Everything we did in the class was good and enjoyable. In the first semester, we all did the same thing: translating at home, discussing in the class. After some time, it was really boring. Dealing with translation in the class rather than at home was useful and enjoyable. (St. 16)*

*This semester was more challenging to me, I liked it. It's because we did Turkish-English translation, which is more difficult than doing English-Turkish translation. I also believe that translation is a special skill, not every student has. (St. 4)*

*Dealing with different texts and different methods was really good. I was able to*

*discover my translation ability. At the beginning, I wasn't self-confident about translation, but then, I realized that I was really successful in translation, I gained self-confidence. (St. 11)*

As a final point, this study has some implications for translation teachers who are supposed to prepare, implement, and evaluate translation courses in language programs, especially in teacher training institutions. First of all, dealing with various text types in translation classes will give students a chance to see the translation work from different aspects. Second, dealing with various translation practices in translation classes (especially real-life practices) will not only improve students' language skills but also will give them an understanding of the real-life translation options. Here, we suggest that translation trainers "view the translator as a life-long language learner and the language learner as a natural translator" (Carreres, 2006: 18). Third, theoretical knowledge should be followed by practice; in other words, students should be equipped with certain translation skills, trained for use of dictionaries and other tools, and most importantly, be informed about the probable obstacles they might face during translation. Fourth, turning translation into a fun activity is at utmost importance as students will benefit more when they think they are having fun. Finally, informing teacher candidates about the fact that translation is a language practice activity both at the initial and later stages of learning is vital. This, then, will help them shape their ideas about translation practices and about how to deal with translation work they are likely to face in their future careers. We would like to conclude the discussion with Carreres's (2014: 131) following impressive words: "It has been my intention, however, to invite those involved in translator training to engage more actively with research in SLA and with practices in language teaching, as well as to recognise the natural connection that exists between language and translation education".

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