The impact of native language utilization on sentence structure and pattern learning

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Abstract
This study aimed to investigate the effect of utilizing learners' native language in the process of learning sentence structural slots and patterns. The sample consisted of 50 college students enrolled in the first level of an English Translation program. They study linguistic courses to enhance their English proficiency. The study employed two tests: a pre-test conducted after the explanation of sentence structures and patterns, and a post-test conducted after incorporating the use of the students' native language during the explanation process. The findings of the study revealed a significant impact of translation on the overall performance of the students. The utilization of the native language demonstrated a substantial effect on sentences with optional slots and simple slots. However, the effect was comparatively lower for sentences with compound slots. The results suggest that incorporating the learners' native language in the learning process can enhance their understanding and acquisition of sentence structures and patterns. This finding aligns with the notion that utilizing familiar linguistic resources can facilitate comprehension and retention of new language concepts (Omidire and Ayob, 2020). The implications of this study highlight the potential benefits of incorporating translation techniques in language instruction.
Key words: sentence pattern, translation, structure, native language, learning

1. Introduction

Although the translation method of teaching a foreign language has received serious quibbles from linguists and educators since the late of 19th century for not engaging students properly in the process of learning, some still see it as workable in some language classes (Bonilla Carvajal, 2013). The use of the mother tongue of learners in teaching a foreign language is becoming a controversial issue these days. Based on personal observation of Saudi learners of English (EFL), Almoayidi (2018) reported that learners with no exposure to Arabic, the native language of learners, outdid those who were exposed to their native language in classes in all skills. On the other hand, some recent studies registered positive effects and positive attitudes towards using the native language of learners in language classes to facilitate the process of learning (Calis and Dikilitas, 2012; Karimian, Branch & Talebinejad, 2013; Djelloul & Neddar, 2017, Adel, 2020).

While the debate surrounding the use of the mother tongue in language classes can be contentious, it is important to focus on the benefits that learners can derive from incorporating it. The use of the mother tongue can provide a strong foundation for language learning, as it allows learners to understand and grasp concepts more easily. It can foster a sense of familiarity and confidence, enabling learners to engage in meaningful communication and express themselves effectively. Additionally, utilizing the mother tongue can promote cultural awareness and sensitivity, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Ultimately, by recognizing the advantages that the use of the mother tongue brings, we can create an inclusive and effective language learning environment for learners.

Some researchers pointed to the fact that the role of learners' native language in acquiring a second or foreign language can vary according to the targeted skill and competence level (Al-Musawi, 2014, Adil, 2020). This is considered a crucial factor

in this discussion. Learners need to grasp some concepts and grammatical rules of the foreign language to be able to produce that language effectively. In this concern, the 360 undergraduate students participated in giving feedback on an Inventory for Translation as a Learning Strategy designed by Al-Musawi (2014) revealed that r the use of translation to learn English vocabulary, read, write, and check comprehension and the tendency not to use translation to learn English idioms, phrases, expressions, proverbs, and grammatical rules. Supporting this idea, Adil (2020) warned teachers of the heavy dependence on translation in language classes since this might lead to an inability to master the foreign language.

Based on that assumption, the positive role of learners' mother tongue, the current study tries to investigate the role of translation in raising students' understanding of the different English sentence patterns. From personal experience, students face difficulties in identifying sentence patterns. So, this study, through using the mother tongue of the learners, tries hopefully to find an effective way to help students overcome such difficulty.

2. Review of the Related Literature
2.1 History of Main Language Teaching Methods
Language teaching methods have significantly evolved over time. In the 16th century, the Grammar-Translation Method was prevalent. This method focused on the study of grammatical rules and translation of texts. This method was based on studying grammatical rules to help learners translate texts into and from their target language (Stern, 1983). In the 19th century, the Direct Method emerged. This method emphasized direct communication in the target language without using the mother tongue (Richards & Rodgers, 2016). In the early 20th century, the Audio-Lingual Method gained popularity. It emphasized repetition, drills, and dialogues to develop oral skills (Alemi & Tavakoli, 2016). In the 1960s, the Cognitive Approach introduced the use of mental processes and problem-solving in language learning, and in the 1970s, the Communicative Approach emerged, focusing on meaningful communication in real-life situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2016). In recent years, technology has played a significant role in language teaching. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and online platforms provide interactive and engaging learning opportunities (Richards & Rodgers, 2016). It is worth noting that various factors, such as cultural, social, and technological advancements, have influenced the development of language teaching methods throughout history.

After presenting different ideas for learning strategies that employed mental and written translation, Cohen (2001: 99-101) believes that "if learners pay more conscious attention to their use of translation, they can mobilize it as one more effective set of strategies for learning and using the target language."

2.2 Translation and Language Learning
The translation method has received serious criticism and has been neglected for a long time. Those who oppose this method hold the belief that it is essential to avoid using the learners' L1 while teaching a foreign language. However, over the past few decades, ongoing research has been conducted to reassess the use of translation as a teaching tool in EFL classes (Djelloul & Neddar, 2017). It was clear that despite the ongoing controversy surrounding the effectiveness of translation in language learning, there continues to be a strong interest in studying this topic to this day.

Using translation in language classes can be seen as a facilitator for students in supporting the new concept of learner-cantered language learning, and in their study, Karimian, Branch & Talebinejad (2013) emphasized this assumption. Relying on tests, questionnaires and interviews, they found that translation had a positive role in Iranian EFL classes.

Duff (1989) argues that translation was criticized in the past for being uncommunicative, without purpose and irrelevant. But, he said, teachers and students now use translation to learn, rather than learning translation.

Sheelagh Deller and Mario Rinvolucri (2002), in their book "Using the Mother Tongue" assure that language classes live "a revolution," and one of the sources of this is thinking to look at using the first language of learners as a tool of teaching although this method has been criticized at the end of the 19th century.

Khan (2016) explored the impact of native language use on Foreign Language vocabulary learning. His sample included Saudi students at Buraydah Community College, Qassim University. The findings of that study supported the use of the translation method of native language in understanding words and expressions of foreign language and taking them directly to the core meaning of those words or expressions.

Šimurka (2020) states that translation is more than just changing the words from one language to another. He thinks that translation serves as a means to establish connections between different cultures, enabling individuals to engage with cultural elements that would otherwise be unfamiliar and challenging to comprehend from their cultural perspective.

Chen (2020) believes that utilizing knowledge transfer from the native language (L1) is crucial for promoting second language acquisition (SLA). To improve the quality and efficiency of English learning, Chen thinks it is important to fully utilize positive transfer from the native language while preventing negative transfer. To achieve this, focus should be given to vocabulary acquisition, and attention should also be placed on strengthening sentence patterns and comparative sense.

Swarnananda Gamage (2020) conducted a study at Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka with a sample of sixty students to investigate the effectiveness of the Grammar Translation method in the pedagogical application of teaching English as a second language. Regardless of the study limitations, the Grammar Translation method, which includes techniques like translation and memorization, was found to significantly benefit language learners and improve the teaching and learning process. These results indicated that incorporating key techniques from the GTM into current teaching practices could enhance learning outcomes.

In another recent study, Adil (2020) studied the effectiveness of translation as a language teaching approach in Saudi Arabia. The results of the study were based on interviews with 20 professors and lecturers teaching university-level students. Although translation was positively effective, Adil (2020) assured that this method "must be handled carefully" because this might lead to a decreased interest in the target language.

From the previous review and despite differing opinions, the study of translation in language learning remains a relevant and intriguing area of research. It is important to mention that this study highlights the utilization of translation as a valuable tool for students to comprehend sentence structure and patterns. The word "translation" in this study doesn't imply the professional translation. Rather, translation, in this study, is specifically designed to cater to the needs of students, ensuring that they can effectively utilize and benefit from it, which seems to be a shared interest among language researchers.

3. Methodology

This study is based on the assumption that translation into the learners' native language can help them recognize the slots of sentences and, consequently, their patterns. In order to achieve this aim the performance of students on two similar written exams has been compared.

3.1 Participants
The participants of the present study included 50 freshman college students. They are Saudi female native Arabic-speakers and learn English as a foreign language (EFL). They are enrolled in the department of "English Translation" at the College of Languages, Princess Nourah University. One of the main learning outcomes of a course named "Grammar in Use", which is a required course they take at their first level, is to recognize the slots of sentences and identify their patterns.

3.2 Instruments
The instruments of the study include two written exams containing sentences to identify their slots and patterns. The first one is given after explaining the different slots of sentences, and the second one is given after guiding students to make use of translating the sentences into their native language to obtain the requirements of the test.

3.3 Significance of the study
The study examines the effect of translation on students' performance in recognizing the slots and patterns of English sentences, which holds great significance. Firstly, understanding the slots and patterns of English sentences is crucial for effective communication and comprehension of the English language. By investigating the impact of translation on this aspect, the study provides valuable insights into the role of translation in language learning. Secondly, the findings of this study can inform language educators and curriculum developers about effective teaching methods and strategies to enhance students' ability to recognize sentence structures. This knowledge can contribute to the development of more efficient language learning programs and materials. Additionally, the study's results can help students by providing a better understanding of how translation can aid or hinder their language learning process. Overall, this study's significance lies in its potential to improve language learning practices and facilitate students' acquisition of English sentence patterns.

3.4 Hypotheses of the study
1. In general, using translation in explaining the structure of sentences leads to more understanding of the structural slots of those sentences and their patterns.
2. No significant effect of translation on sentences with only simple required slots.
3. The effect of translation is noticeably recognized on sentences with optional and compound slots.

3.5 Study Design
This qualitative research followed the following steps:
- Two written tests have been designed in a way that can reflect the aim of the study. The two tests have been designed in a similar way with similar but not the same sentences. Each test contained 12 sentences: 4 have just required simple slots, 4 have optional slots besides the required ones, and the last 4, some of their required slots are compound.
- All participants took the two tests. Each time they were asked to identify the slots of each sentence and its pattern.
- The first test was given before making use of the native language of the students (Arabic) in the explanation of the patterns of English sentences.
- The second test was given after directing students to translate sentences into their native language to decide their slots and patterns. It is worth noting that the translation here is not a professional one.

The two tests (pre-test and post-test) are as follows:

Pre-test	Post-test
Identify the slots of the following sentences, then decide their patterns:	
My favorite color is blue.	The sentence is long.
Math class has started.	They have named their baby Mohammed.
The flowers smell beautiful.	The new English teacher seems a tough person.
Most of the students chose A the correct answer.	I like fresh apples.
I went to the store.	The cat is sleeping on the chair.
I usually read books in my free time.	They made the atmosphere funny with their jokes.
They made the situation worse after their discussion.	We had a fantastic time at the park yesterday.
Before the game, the teacher gave them the instructions.	After the class, the students send their teacher an email.
My sisters and brothers prefer meat well-cooked.	Both Amal and Sara have pets.
The girl with a beautiful voice is nice and modest.	My brothers always wash and shine their cars.
The students cleaned and organized the lab.	Nadia did not invite neither Sara nor Nora.
They will choose either Huda or Nora to lead the team.	That man with blue eyes is a great and popular musician.

Table 1: The evaluation tests

4. Data collection

The present study was conducted on a sample of 50 students, and two tests were administered to assess the effectiveness of different teaching approaches in learning sentence patterns. The first test involved a teaching method where the sentence patterns were explained solely in English, without any support from the learners' native language. This approach aimed to immerse the students in an English-only environment, challenging them to comprehend and apply the sentence patterns in a foreign language. By excluding the native language, the intention was to promote language acquisition and encourage students to think and express themselves solely in English during the test.

In contrast, the second test employed a different instructional approach. Here, the native language of the learners was utilized to support the teaching of sentence patterns. The use of the students' native language aimed to enable them to grasp the concepts more easily. By incorporating the native language, learners could draw on their existing linguistic knowledge and transfer it to English. This method aimed to facilitate understanding and reinforce comprehension of the sentence patterns by leveraging the learners' mother tongue as a bridge between languages.

Both tests were corrected with equal attention and care. 1 mark is devoted to each sentence. The scores obtained from each test were duly recorded. The total score (out of 12) is calculated based on three distinct components: 4 sentences without optional or compound slots, 4 sentences with optional slots, and 4 sentences with compound slots. Each part contributes to the overall assessment, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the test-taker's performance.

Pre-test results				Post-test results			
Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Total	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Total
1	1.5	0	2.5	2	2	0	4
1.5	.5	.5	2.5	2.5	4	1.5	8
2	1.5	1.5	5	3.5	3.5	4	11
2	.5	.5	3	2	2.5	1.5	6
2	2	1.5	5.5	2	.5	2	4.5
1	1	2.5	4.5	3	2	.5	5.5
1	1	2	4	3	2	.5	5.5
2.5	1.5	1	5	3.5	1.5	2	7
2.5	2	1.5	6	3.5	2	1	6.5
2.5	2	1.5	6	2.5	3.5	2	8
1.5	2	1.5	5	2	3	0	5
2	1	1	4	3.5	3	.5	7
2	3	2	7	3	2.5	1.5	7
2.5	1.5	1.5	5.5	2.5	1.5	1.5	5.5
3.5	2.5	1	7	3.5	2	1.5	7
2	1	1	4	4	1.5	2	7.5
3	1.5	1	5.5	3	3	3	9
1.5	0	1	2.5	3	2.5	2	7.5
2.5	2.5	1	6	3	2.5	2	7.5
1	1	1.5	3.5	3.5	2.5	1	7
2.5	1	3	6.5	3	4	3.5	10.5
1.5	.5	.5	2.5	0	1.5	0	1.5
2	2	2.5	6.5	3	2.5	2.5	8
0	0	1	1	2	1.5	.5	4
1.5	2	1.5	5	3	2	3.5	8.5
2	1.5	4	7.5	2.5	4	3	9.5
3	3	2	8	3	3	2.5	8.5
3	2.5	2.5	8	3.5	3.5	3.5	10.5
3	2.5	2.5	8	3	2.5	3	8.5
2	3	3	8	3.5	2.5	3	9
2	1	1.5	4.5	3	4	2	9
1.5	.5	2.5	4.5	2.5	1.5	2	6
1	1.5	0	2.5	1.5	2.5	.5	4.5
1.5	1	1.5	4	3.5	4	4	11.5
1.5	.5	3	5	2.5	2	2.5	7
1.5	.5	2	4	2.5	2.5	1	6
3.5	3.5	4	11	4	4	4	12
2.5	3.5	3	9	3	2.5	2.5	8
1	1	.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	.5	5.5
2	1.5	2	5.5	2.5	3.5	3	9
1.5	1.5	1.5	4.5	2.5	1	1.5	5
1	.5	0	1.5	2.5	2	1.5	6
1	2	2	5	1.5	2.5	2	6
2.5	.5	3	6	2.5	3	4	9.5
2.5	3.5	3.5	9.5	3.5	4	3.5	11
2	1.5	2.5	6	2.5	1.5	2	6
2	2.5	1.5	6	3.5	4	4	11.5
1.5	1	1.5	4	3	2.5	3	8.5
3	2	2.5	7.5	3	3	2.5	8.5
1.5	.5	1.5	3.5	1	.5	1.5	3

Table 2: The students' scores on the two evaluation tests

5. Data Analysis

The statistical method "T-test" that is commonly used to compare the means of two groups, to determine if there is a significant difference between them, was used to achieve the purpose of the present study. In this context, the two groups would be the scores of the tests taken by students, with one group being the scores on the test without translation and the other group being the scores on the test with translation. The analysis is divided into 4 parts:

1- The first one tests the effect of translation in recognizing the slots and patterns of 4 sentences with only simple required slots.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	1.93	2.76
Variance	0.540918367	0.56367347
Observations	50	50
Pearson Correlation	0.458665464	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	49	
t Stat	-7.589099934	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.07948E-10	
t Critical one-tail	1.676550893	

Table 3: the effect of translation on recognition of slots and patterns of sentences with simple required slots

The above table shows that there is a significant difference in the students' performance on the two tests. When comparing the test statistics: the "Mean" of the post-test is higher, and the P-value is greater than the Critical value, so we can conclude that the difference is significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

2- The second tests the same effect on 4 sentences with sentences that have optional slots besides the required ones.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	1.55	2.55
Variance	0.849489796	0.869898
Observations	50	50
Pearson Correlation	0.264113561	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	49	
t Stat	-6.286185571	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.23126E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.676550893	

Table 4: The effect of translation on recognition of slots and patterns of sentences with optional slots

This part also shows a significant effect of translation on the students' performance.

3- The third tests the same effect on 4 sentences that have compound required slots.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	1.74	2.05
Variance	0.94122449	1.359694
Observations	50	50
Pearson Correlation	0.561946267	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	49	
t Stat	-2.160407483	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.017829505	
t Critical one-tail	1.676550893	

Table 5: The effect of translation on recognition of slots and patterns of sentences with required compound slots

The above table shows clearly a positive effect of translation on the students' performance. The P-value of (0.017829505) is less than the level of significance (0.05), so the difference is considered statistically significant.

4- The last one reveals the effect of translation on the overall performance of the students on the whole exam.

|	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	5.22	7.36
Variance	4.47102	5.306531
Observations	50	50
Pearson Correlation	0.609786	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	49	
t Stat	-7.72493	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.52E-10	
t Critical one-tail	1.676551	

Table 6: The effect of translation on the students' overall performance

The "Mean" of the post-test is greater than the "Mean" of the pre-test. The difference between these means (5.22 for pre-test and 7.36 for post-test) indicates and effect difference between the two tests. The P value is extremely small value (less than the significant value 0.05). These statistics indicate strong evidence against the null hypothesis. In other words, these statistics suggest that the observed results are statistically significant and not due to chance.

The percentage of students' performance on each part has been calculated as follows:

	Pre-test	Post-test
Part 1	48.25 %	69%
Part 2	38.75%	63.75%
Part 3	43.5%	51.25%
Part 4	43.5%	61.3%

Table 7: The percentage of students' performance on the tests' parts

Figure 1: Comparison between students' performance on the evaluation tests
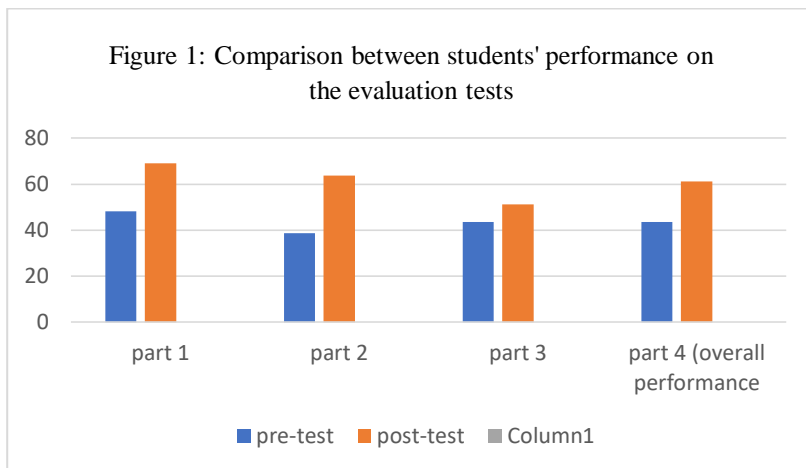
6. Discussion

Based on the above analysis, the hypotheses of the study can be processed as follows:
In general, using translation in explaining the structure of sentences leads to more understanding of the structural slots of those sentences and their patterns.
Based on data analysis, particularly the overall performance of students on the two tests, the research supports the hypothesis that translating sentences into the students' native language enhances their comprehension of the structural slots and patterns within those sentences. The present study presents evidence that when students are used as a helping tool in classrooms to teach the structure of English sentences, students are better able to grasp the underlying structure and arrangement of words in sentences. This understanding of structural slots and patterns aids in their overall comprehension and interpretation of the language.

No significant effect of translation on sentences with only simple required slots.
The analysis of the study doesn't support this hypothesis. The study shows a noticeable statistically significant difference between the students' performance on the two tests (part 1).

The effect of translation is noticeably recognized in sentences with optional and compound slots.
Although translation registered a significantly positive effect on students' performance on all parts, the least recognized effect is on those sentences with compound slots, which is against this hypothesis, but the sentences with required compound slots show the highest significant effect of translation on students' performance. The effect of using the native language of the learners, according to this study and the percentages of the students' scores on each type, follows a hierarchy from greatest to least in the following order: sentences with optional slots (25), sentences with only simple required slots (20.75), and sentences with compound slots (7.75).

7. Conclusion

While using translation as a method in language learning may have lost some prominence during certain periods, its role and importance have persisted, and its usage continues to adapt to the needs and practices of language learners. This study is based on the assumption that translation can support learning a foreign language but not dominate the whole teaching process. In other words, teachers should have

complete control over the use of the learners' first language in a way that ensures the target language environment is maintained in the classroom (Adil, 2019: 182).

The results of this study have shown that the use of students' native language has played a fundamental role in improving their performance in recognizing the slots and patterns of English sentences. It is noticeable that students could establish stronger connections between the grammatical structures of their language and those of English. This gives them a solid foundation to understand and apply the rules and conventions of English more effectively. In addition, by recognizing the patterns and structures of sentences in their native language, students can transfer that knowledge to learning English, which allows them to identify and use the correct structures more easily.

The main findings of the study include the following:

1- Students' scores are higher after using their native language in explaining the sentence structures.
2- All types of sentences used in the study: simple sentences, sentences with optional slots, and sentences with compound slots, registered a significant positive effect of translation on the students' scores.
3- The effect of translation shows its lowest level on students' performance in those sentences with compound slots.
4- The effect of translation shows its highest level of significance on students' performance on the sentences with optional slots.
5- The improvement of students' scores on simple sentences is significantly recognized after the use of translation as a supporting method in the class.

In summary, the findings of this research suggest that incorporating translation as an assisting tool in language learning can be an effective strategy for facilitating a deeper understanding of sentence structure and patterns. Educators and curriculum designers may consider integrating learners' native language as a supplementary tool to enhance their understanding of complex sentence structures. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of incorporating the native language in language learning and investigate the impact on other linguistic components beyond sentence structures and patterns.

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