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EFL Students' Perception on Translation Effects Toward Their L1 and L2 Empowerment: Reestablishing the Use of Translation in FL Teaching

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss EFL students' perception on translation effects toward their L1 and L2 empowerment. The data were taken from fifty-two students who had passed the course of translation, both L1 to L2 and L2 to L1. To gain the data, a researcher-developed questionnaire was distributed to find out students' perception, consisting of a closed-ended and an open-ended questionnaire. From the statistical findings, it was revealed that in terms of the four main language skills, namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing, students perceived that translation was able to empower their L1 and L2 reading, listening, and writing, but with little contribution to their L1 and L2 speaking. In addition to these three language skills, the translation course was also able to empower students in the L1 and L2 grammar and vocabulary mastery.

Key words: *perception, translation, L1 and L2 empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

The use of translation in foreign language teaching has been a long story. Historically, the implementation of this approach has taken place for a very long period of time (Munday, 2001; Tsagari and Flores, 2013). In this span of time, the use of translation in foreign language teaching, however, has involved some different names (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The existence of translation in foreign language teaching is claimed by House (2009: 60) that for many years, translation had become "an established technique" in foreign language teaching. In this case, it can be said that translation had been quite inherent as an approach in foreign language teaching. Almost all teachings in universities in the Medieval Age, for example, included translation as one of their approaches (Duff, 1989: 5).

In terms of its history, the use of translation in foreign language teaching had resulted in a setback. This is designated, for instance, with an accusation that involving translation as a tool in foreign language teaching had brought a lot of disadvantages (Newson, 1988 in Mogahed, 2011). One disadvantage concerned the notion that translation had obstructed the spoken capabilities in a foreign language (Newson, 1988 in Mogahed, 2011). In the development, translation had been assumed to have emphasized more on reading and writing capabilities rather than listening and speaking abilities (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 6). In the period of Communicative Approach, which focused more on fluency rather than accuracy in a foreign language mastery (Brown, 2007; Richards and Rodgers, 2001), translation had been viewed as a hindrance rather than an aid for mastering the language (Bowen, 2016). In other words, teaching a foreign language through translation was not considered "communicative".

The accusation addressed to translation as an "incommunicative approach" in foreign language teaching can be traced back into the tradition of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) applications during the history

of foreign language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Richards and Rogers, 2001). This approach was very much concerned with the accuracy of foreign language use and the inclusion of the first language or mother tongue by the students (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011; Richards and Rogers, 2001). Such a teaching and learning practice has been assumed to lead, at least, to two disadvantages toward the student learning: psychologically and linguistically. The former concerns students' motivation and interest when they think they fail to master the accuracy insisted on the learning, for example, grammatical or lexical mastery (Artini, 2016; Gorski, 2016; Mogahed, 2016). The latter deals with the absence of practicing the speaking and listening skills of the foreign language because of focusing more on reading and writing abilities (Mogahed, 2016; Richards and Rogers, 2001). The absence of speaking and listening practices in the foreign language learning can also occur due to the situation that allows the first language or mother tongue use during the learning process.

Apart from the accusation addressed to the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), the use of translation in foreign language teaching, nevertheless, has given a number of advantages. Many studies, particularly undertaken in nonnative countries of English language where the language is learnt in their national schools or colleges, have been considered to provide more advantages rather than disadvantages. The results of studies involve a wide range of varieties from how students perceive translation as a learning or assessing tool in foreign language learning (see e.g. Fernández-Guerra, 2014; Kokkinidou and Spanou, 2013; Sun and Cheng, 2013) and what language skills can be empowered through the use of translation (Korosèc, 2013; Lee, 2013; Rido, 2011) to how it should be taught to students in the classrooms (Clavijo and Marín, 2013; Permana, 2014).

With regard to students' perception on the use of translation in foreign language learning, a study conducted by Fernández-Guerra (2014) showed that translation was preferable and motivating for student learning. Through translation, students were facilitated for more understanding about the form and content of the source language. Besides, translation was able to increase students' awareness of the differences between the source and target language systems. Other than students, the use of translation has also been well-perceived by teachers as an important aspect in foreign language learning (Kokkinidou and Spanou, 2013).

The use of translation in foreign language learning has helped students to acquire the learnt language. In this case, some language aspects and skills can be promoted through the inclusion of translation, such as grammar (Korosèc, 2013), vocabulary (Belpoliti and Plascencia-Vela, 2013), and cultures (Beecroft, 2013). With regard to language skills, Rido (2011; see also Lee, 2013) claimed that translation could improve students' English reading and writing competence. More interestingly, according to Rido (2011), by involving translation in learning, students tended to become active learners.

The significance of translation in foreign language learning has generated an effort on how it should be taught in the classrooms. A number of studies have been carried out dealing with teaching strategies or methods that can be used for translation courses. Pertaining to this, a study conducted by Clavijo and Marín (2013) designated that teachers applied different teaching strategies, resources, and activities in translation courses. For example, Permana (2014) employed a portfolio-based approach in developing students' translation ability. In this case, to achieve an acceptable piece of translation, students concerned some drafts involving feedback, revision, and reflection.

Taking into consideration about the advantages of using translation in foreign language learning illustrated above, the researcher proposed to examine EFL students' perception on translation effects toward their L1 and L2 empowerment. In this concern, it is reported that the use of translation in foreign language learning has been considered to be able to empower students, either in their L1 or L2.

RESEARCH METHOD

Considering the aim of the study, a survey was therefore used as the method. A survey is a method in research tradition to find out the opinion, attitude, and perception of the subjects being investigated (Alwasilah, 2000; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2008; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The subjects of the study were fifty-two students who had passed the translation courses, either from the L1 to L2 or from the L2 to L1 translations. L1 referred to the Indonesian language and L2 referred to the English language. The students came from two different study programs: English Education and English Literature Programs. However, they were selected randomly in the sense that the researcher did not determine which

students were from the English education program and which ones were from the English literature program. Above all, they had passed the translation courses consisting of two subjects, namely *Introduction to Translation* and *Practicum of Translation*. Each of these subjects has three credits in one semester.

Data collection was undertaken through the distribution of questionnaire involving close-ended and open-ended questionnaires. The close-ended questionnaire was utilized to gain quantitative data, whereas the open-ended questionnaire was to attain qualitative data. The involvement of these two types of questionnaire was required in this study for the sake of data triangulation, that is the use of various methods in collecting the data (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2008). Data triangulation is the effort of “checking and rechecking” toward the data to convince whether the obtained data are true or false (Putra, 2011: 189). In the present study, the questionnaires were self-developed by the researcher on the basis of the research needs. The development of questionnaire was done by referring to the Likert scale (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007; Dörnyei, 2003). The scale consisted of four items, namely 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Data analysis was conducted in two ways: statistical technique and thematic analysis (Dawson, 2009). A statistical technique concerned the data of closed-ended questionnaire. The data were quantitatively analyzed using a technique called a frequency count. Meanwhile, a thematic analysis dealt with the data of open-ended questionnaire. The data were qualitatively analyzed involving several steps, namely reviewing the data, reducing the data, relating categories, and developing analytic frameworks (Creswell, 1998: 140-142; see also Miles and Huberman in Milal, 2011). All the data gained were then interpretatively discussed by relating them with a number of relevant previous studies (Creswell, 2008: 388).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The table below illustrates the survey results on EFL Students’ perception on translation effects toward their L1 and L2 empowerment with a total of 29 questions. As Table 1 indicates, it can be recognized that, in general, *Introduction to Translation* and *Practicum of Translation* courses had been perceived by students to be able to empower their language competence, either in English (97, 1%) or Indonesian (85,3%). The highest degree of agreement is on the improvement of listening skill (94,1%) for English language competence and writing skill (91,2%) for Indonesian language competence. The lowest degree of agreement is on English speaking skill (55,9%) and Indonesian speaking skill (41,2%). It is also revealed that the students 100% agree the courses can improve their English grammar and vocabulary while 91,2 of them agree the courses can improve Indonesian grammar and 94,1 of them agree the courses can improve Indonesian vocabulary. Another significant finding is that 100% of them agree that translation is not a once-finished task but needs a process/revision, that producing a good piece of translation needs feedback and revision, and that a dictionary has a very important role in translation. Further details can be seen in the following table.

No	Statement	Degree of agreement
1	In the translation course, I translated a text from English into Indonesian.	100
2	In the translation course, I translated a text from Indonesian into English.	100
3	I feel that the translation course can improve my English.	97,1
4	The translation course can improve my English reading skills.	91,2
5	The translation course can improve my English listening skills.	94,1
6	The translation course can improve my English speaking skills.	55,9
7	The translation course can improve my English writing skills.	91,2
8	The translation course can improve my English grammar.	100
9	The translation course can improve my English vocabulary.	100
10	The translation course can improve my self confidence in using English and Indonesian.	85,3
11	The translation course can improve my general knowledge.	97,1
12	I realize that translation is not a once-finished task, but needs a process/revision.	100
13	I realize that producing a good piece of translation needs feedback and revision.	100
14	I realize that feedback from peers can help me to revise my translation.	91,2

15	I realize that feedback from the lecturer can help me to revise my translation.	85,3
16	How easy the text is, I never underestimate it in translation.	94,1
17	For me, a dictionary has a very important role in translation.	100
18	For me, a dictionary is not only the tool in translation but I need other tools, such as encyclopedia, books, newspapers, the internet, and the like, to produce an acceptable translation.	94,1
19	I feel that the translation course can improve my Indonesian.	85,3
20	The translation course can improve my Indonesian reading skills.	76,5
21	The translation course can improve my Indonesian listening skills.	85,3
22	The translation course can improve my Indonesian speaking skills.	41,2
23	The translation course can improve my Indonesian writing skills.	91,2
24	The translation course can improve my Indonesian grammar.	91,2
25	The translation course can improve my Indonesian vocabulary.	94,1
26	The translation course can improve my skills in editing a text.	97,1
27	Through the translation course, I realize my weaknesses in English and Indonesian.	94,1
28	Through the translation course, I feel that I still have to improve my Indonesian competence.	94,1
29	I feel that the translation course is useful for improving my English and Indonesian.	94,1

Table 1: EFL Students' perception on translation effects toward their L1 and L2 empowerment

B. Discussion

Data discussion in relevance with the research findings will be focused on language skills and aspects. Language skills to be discussed are those which have been categorized as the main language skills involving four major skills, namely reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Brown, 2001; Nunan, 2003; Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor, 2006). Meanwhile, language aspects are concerned with the written text taking account of the importance of grammar and vocabulary in the operation (Bowen, Madsen, and Hilferty, 1985; Brown, 2001; Nunan, 2003; Ur, 1991). These two types of knowledge play a significant role in the practice of translation. The emphasis on the written text is in view of that translation (translating) refers to written texts in order to distinguish it from interpreting prioritizing spoken texts (Munday, 2001; Rido, 2011). Although translation courses had been perceived to empower language competence, either in English (97, 1%) or Indonesian (85,3%), the detailed findings on the language skills ranges. These phenomena can be explained as follows:

The translation course can empower students' reading skills, either in English (91, 2%) or Indonesian (76, 5%). This empowerment of reading skills is obtained by students, among others, through reading various texts which were the tasks in the translation course. Before translating, the students were asked to understand first the content of the text to be translated. Very often they had to read it repeatedly to get more understanding about the text content. In this concern, the principle is that students never translate the text until they really understand the content of the text to be translated (Hoed, 2006; Permana, 2015). In other words, students must have the attitude of "not to underestimate every text" (Hoed in Machali, 2000). This is admitted by the majority of students in the present study, some of whom expressing: "The course required me to understand the text so that I had to read it more deeply" (S1) or "I had to read the text carefully to know the type of the text to be translated so that I could translate it based on the context and appropriate choice of vocabulary" (S2).

The two statements of the students above are in line with the analysis stage of the translation process that before translating, the translator must comprehend the content of the text he or she will translate (Nida and Taber, 1974: 33; see also Munday, 2001; Bassnett, 2002; Hoed, 2006; Permana, 2014). This can be carried out by comprehensively reading the text to be translated. The effect of translation toward the students' reading empowerment is relevant with the research findings conducted by Rido (2011) that translation was able to develop students' reading competence in foreign language learning, especially English. Similarly, in the context of EFL classroom, another study by Lee (2013) showed that translation helped students in reading comprehension. In respect to the empowerment of reading competence in the target language, several students stated that the translation course could also empower their Indonesian reading skills as they said: "By reading the whole text, this improves my reading skills" (S1) or "I can read the Indonesian text appropriately and accurately" (S2).

The translation course can empower the students' writing skills, either in English (91, 2%) or Indonesian (91, 2%). This is because translation is basically the activity of re-writing the message of the source text (Lefevere, 1992: vii). This re-writing activity of the source text, according to Bassnett (2002: 6), should be done creatively by the translator so that an acceptable equivalence in the target language can be produced. When the translator expresses his or her creativity for gaining an acceptable equivalence, he or she, actually, is doing practice of writing, which can gradually bring him or her to the position of "writer".

Concerning the empowerment of writing skill in the present study, the students attempted to produce an acceptable piece of translation based on the grammar without changing the meaning of the text. In addition, they also practiced making sentences in relevance to the transfer of message of the source text into the target text. In making sentences, the students were required to take account of the rules of writing, either in English or Indonesian. The empowerment of writing skill can be seen from some statements expressed by the students, for instance, "The course required me to rewrite a text from one language into another language. Thus, I can understand how to write appropriately and accurately" (S1). In this agreement, S2 pointed out "I can write more appropriately depending on what kind of text I want to write". The effect of translation toward writing empowerment is also in line with the research results conducted by Rido (2011) that in addition to reading, translation can also develop the students' L2 writing skill. This finding of Rido's is supported by Sun and Cheng (2013) that there is a correlation between students' performance on translation and their competence in writing. In other words, when students are good at translating, they are also good at writing.

The translation course can empower the students' listening skill, either in English (94, 1%) or Indonesian (85, 3%). Some students argued that this happened because of the feedback given, either by the lecturer or peers. In this accordance, it frequently occurred that before discussing the students' translation, the lecturer read first the source text and the students indirectly listened to what the teacher read, either in terms of meanings or pronunciation. However, what more significantly increased the students' listening skill is when the lecturer gave feedback by discussing it with the students. The questions asked by the lecturer to the students had made them think to give an analysis or an answer why a piece of translation was considered acceptable or unacceptable. Pertaining to this, S3 stated: "With the feedback from the lecturer, the students listened to the points conveyed by him or her in reference to the discussion of translation so that this subject was very helpful to increase the students' listening skill in the class" or as pointed out by S4: "Through the feedback from the lecturer, thus, we listened to what the lecturer said, what feedback were given about the text so that we understood that the correct translation was like that". The statements expressed by S3 and S4 indicate that to increase listening skill in a foreign language can also be done through translating, not only with interpreting, as Rido (2011) examined. Much more importantly, this finding contradicts the idea that translation obstructs listening skill in foreign language learning (see, e.g. Richards and Rogers, 2001).

The translation course can empower the students' grammatical competence, either in English (100%) or Indonesian (91, 2%). Concerning this, Schäffner (2002) as cited in Aqel (2013) stipulated that translation "consolidate L2 structures for active use". In reference to the findings in the present study, this can be caused, among others, by the nature of translation as the written re-expression of the message in the source text into the target text. In re-expressing the message, the students attempted to do it as good as possible, namely by consulting a dictionary which could provide information about the formation of words into sentences. In the dictionary, it can be identified if a word functions as a noun, a verb, or another word class. All of these are very much connected with the grammatical accuracy in word use. Concerning this, S1 explained: "Because we were required to write, in addition to improving my writing skill, I could also enhance my grammatical competence in using words". What S1 said is supported by S2 admitting: "I become to care very much with grammar in the text and the text that I am going to write". These witnesses from S1 and S2 prove a research finding by Korosèc (2013) that the use of translation in language learning can help students to acquire grammatical competence in the learned language.

Besides due to the nature of translation as the re-writing of the source text, the empowerment of students' grammatical competence was also generated by the feedback given during the process of translation, either by the lecturer or peers. Through the feedback, the students attempted to revise their translation, that is, one of which was the ones in connection with the aspect of grammar, particularly when translating from Indonesian into English. As English is a foreign language for the students, they must pay more attention to the grammatical accuracy in English when they use the language as the introductory language. With regard

to this, S3 declared: “With the corrections of tenses, grammar, ... through feedback from peers and the lecturer, this can enrich students’ knowledge on correct English grammar” or as also stipulated by S5 as follows: “By correcting every wrong sentence and grammar in English, I discussed it with peers and the lecturer”.

The translation course can empower the students’ vocabulary competence, either in English (100%) or Indonesian (94, 11%). This is in line with what Kokkinidou and Spanou (2013) found that translation is an important aspect in foreign language learning, especially for vocabulary acquisition. In this connection, Schäffner (2002) as cited in Aqel (2013) claimed that translation can “expand the students’ vocabulary in L2”. The empowerment of vocabulary mastery cannot be separated from the students’ understanding about grammar. Even, in another perspective of language, the term of grammar and vocabulary is often combined with one name “lexicogrammar” (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

With regard to the present study, the empowerment of students’ vocabulary occurred because when translating the students were required to bring a dictionary and used it as effective as possible to support their tasks of translation. Through dictionary consultation, students know the word meaning and use it based on the rules of the learned language. In this relation, S6 declared: “In translating we used a dictionary so that this course helped me to improve my vocabulary knowledge”. This is relevant with what S7 pointed out: “My vocabulary competence developed when editing a text and using a dictionary as the reference so that I knew a lot of new words I hadn’t heard before”. Concerning the use of dictionary, all the students (100%) admitted that a dictionary was a very important tool in translation. The significance of dictionary consultation in translation corresponds to the research findings undertaken by Permana (2014) that the drafts of student translation were different each other between the ones with and without dictionary consultation. Hence, students are to be made self-aware about the significance of consulting dictionaries for acceptable equivalents in translation, or they “corrupt” the message of the source language.

Besides because of dictionary consultation, the empowerment of students’ vocabulary can also be generated by the use of other sources, such as the internet, encyclopedia, newspapers, and other reading sources. Almost all the students (94, 1%) claimed that the sources helped them very much in producing an acceptable piece of translation. In relation to the empowerment of students’ vocabulary due to these sources, S8 stated that his vocabulary increased by “consulting a dictionary, browsing the internet, and reading texts”.

Different from the effect of translation toward the empowerment of reading, writing, listening, grammar, and vocabulary competence as illustrated above, the translation course was less considered to have empowered students’ speaking skill, either in English (55, 9%) or Indonesian (41, 2%). Moreover, the crosschecking with the data gained from the open-ended questionnaire even showed that the majority of students pointed out that the translation course had only given little contribution toward the empowerment of their speaking skill, either in English or Indonesian. As a result, it can be concluded that translation can less empower students’ speaking skill, either in English or Indonesian as expressed by S5: “In my opinion, this course had no effect to how I speak English”. Further S5 also contended: “There is no influence because in the discussions with peers and the lecturer, it didn’t matter how we spoke (whether it was in English or Indonesian, in the appropriate and accurate way or not)”. What S5 said is in harmony with what S6 expressed that either toward English or Indonesian speaking skills, this course “didn’t have too much effect, but more than on the ability to translate a text”.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the present study it can be revealed that in general the translation course was able to contribute to the students’ L1 (source language) and L2 (target language) empowerment. Except toward the speaking skill, the translation course has been considered to be able to empower students’ English and Indonesian language abilities. It can be said that there has been the empowerment of source and target languages generated by translation. Concerning the present study, the language skills that can be empowered through translation include reading, listening, and writing. It is not found that translation could empower students’ speaking skill, either in English or Indonesian. In addition to reading, listening, and writing skills, the translation course is also able to empower students’ knowledge of language, either in English or Indonesian. The empowerment of students’ knowledge includes the aspects of grammar and vocabulary.

Meanwhile, in view of that the translation course did not contribute to the empowerment of students' speaking skill, it is important to consider some strategies accordingly. One way that can be carried out is to require students to use English when they are engaged in class discussions, either in the stage of analysis, namely comprehending the content of the text before the translation begins, or after the stage of restructuring when the translation has been produced and then it is to be discussed. In this context, the principle of "Teaching English through English" (Willis, 1981) can be implemented. This can be relevant in the sense that translation courses usually require students to have passed some core subjects, such as grammar, reading, and vocabulary. The lecturer asks the students for an equivalent in English, and the students are also to answer it in English. In this concern, the lecturer must realize that students tend to use Indonesian in giving an answer, so he or she should condition the class to speak in English. This is in line with what a student impressed in the present study arguing that "There is no effect because in the discussion with peers and the lecturer, it didn't matter how we spoke (whether it was in English or Indonesian, in the appropriate and accurate way or not)". Therefore, the students must be forced to communicate in English.

Last but not least, due to the study limitation, more research can be conducted using different method to confirm further to what extent the translation course is able to empower students' English and Indonesian language abilities.

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