

## Determination of Appropriate Topic for Exercise - A Strategy in Succeeding Translation Teaching for Undergraduate Students

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Article history*

Received: August 15, 2019

Accepted: September 30, 2019

Published: October 31, 2019

Volume: 7 Issue: 4

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

#### **Keywords:**

Translation,  
Teaching,  
Material,  
Text,  
Student,  
Course

### ABSTRACT

Translation is a real-life, a natural activity and increasingly needed in globalization era. Although many believe that translation skill is acquired naturally, but many scholars believe it can be teachable. Besides, teaching translation is a difficult to set up and time-consuming activity, it is necessary to plan carefully. Thus, the aim of this article is to describe the steps in providing the appropriate topic for exercise in teaching translation course for undergraduate students. This is a part of study in inventing the model of translation teaching in university setting for non-translation class. As translation is process that involve the intellectuality, it is also viewed as art, thus this article will clarify how the translation material were prepared, what aspect should be considered before giving it in practice. This article also briefly describe the student perception on teaching-learning activities that suggest that the appropriate preparation of material is significant in keeping the student interest on translation teaching.

### INTRODUCTION

In this globalization world, the role of translation as an intercultural bridge is rapidly growing. (Lederer 2010; Baker, 2010). The debate whether translators “are born not made” or “made not born” has had a rather negative influence on translator training. Nowadays there are opinions that some of the highly skilled translators in the industry are self-taught (Gile, 2009: p.6).

The aim of translation teaching or pedagogy is to educate students to be capable of performing well translation and thus to guide and help them to develop the knowledge and skills of translation. The possession of these qualities has been defined as “translation competence”.

The teaching of translation and its role in language learning has been a controversial topic for decades. Translation can be seen as interfering with the acquisition of a second or foreign language due to the constant reference to the students. (Leonardi 2010: p.21), but on the other hand, translation can also be seen as a significant part of the language learning process that help students to gather information to the knowledge they had. (Pym et al. 2013: p.7). Moreover, translation in the process of language learning and discuss the idea of translation as a “fifth language skill” that can be viewed as a method in the language learning process and as a method of assessing the student’s language skills.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation as a language exercise can be easier and possibly more interesting for the learner than having to constantly write essays, which is a commonly used exercise in language learning. When translating texts the student is already introduced to the ideas and content of the text and “only” has to translate or transfer these ideas into another language, thus eliminating the need to create the content and arguments him/herself. However, translation in language classrooms is often limited to traditional exercises: i.e. translating individual words, phrases, sentences and longer units from one language into the other. Pym et al. (2013: pp.126-133) provide many examples of the ways in which translation can be modified to fit prevailing communicative language teaching and learning approaches:

Delisle was one of the first scholar to establish some clear objectives for the teaching-learning process of translation. His suggested the teacher to apply basic teaching principles in their classes, one of the most important principles being the establishment of clear and achievable objectives. The key element in the planning translation teaching are:

- 1) facilitates communication between teacher and students;
- 2) facilitates the selection of the teaching tools, it suggests different learning activities, and it gives a basis for the assessment of learning (Delisle, 1998, pp. 21-22).

In line with Delisle, Nord suggests a very complete model based on the premise that the teaching of translation should simulate professional practice. For Nord, there is no translation exercises without a realistic goal. Before and after prepared it, students should answer some questions to help them do translation exercises designed for developing the translation competence. (Nord, 1991: p. 144).

Delisle and Nord insist the importance of the process in the teaching of translation. In this sense, the teaching of translation should be more concerned with the translation process than merely resulting written product.

Gile follows this same line of thinking. He states that the point is to raise students' awareness of problems and suggests "good translation principles, methods, and procedures" instead of merely giving students texts to translate and then discussing the translations in class, indicating what is right and what is wrong in the different versions presented. For Gile, this approach is especially appropriate for the first translation teaching stages. (Gile, 1995, p. 10),

According to Vienne, the activity in class should be based on a series of translation projects professionally and previously carried out by the teacher, so that they can act as the initiator in the translation process in a more realistic way. Students carry out a contextual analysis of the translation project and that the teacher, acting as the initiator, answers the students' questions and provides them with essential information to do the translation. (Vienne, 1994, p. 52).

Zabalza in Jordan-Núñez (2014) admitted difficulty in make a selection of the contents. According to him, not all that can be taught should be taught and he, therefore, suggests selecting the most basic and/or important content that will allow the students to pursue the learning process in an autonomous way.

Concerning the material selection, Tarasova has an experimental translation teaching on postgraduate students. She considered the psychological aspect in selection of translation material. Tarasova suggests that the selection material should not be overloaded with unfamiliar terminology and not be large in size. (Tarasova, 2015: p.352). In addition, material should stimulate interaction among the students as group, encourage to develop learning skill as well as focus on formal aspect of language. (Siregar, 2017: p.323).

According to Sevilla et al. (2003, pp. 110-111), in designing the syllabus for the course, it is advisable to take into account three fundamental aspects:

- 1) The students' learning needs and the theoretical aspects related to translation that they should acquire.
- 2) The students' level (their expectations and interests), which can be assessed through questionnaires where they can express their opinions.
- 3) The professional practice of translation, the actual difficulties that this practice involves and the strategies applied for solving those difficulties.

Sevilla suggest to hand out a questionnaire to the students at the beginning of the course in order to ascertain both their knowledge of the fields. In line with this suggestion, a preliminary questionnaire has been administered to investigate the student perception on translation course. The results of

such a questionnaire concerning the text material revealed that 75.0% of students preferred the specific text as translating materials compared to general text. Translate specific text focus also required English communication skills in a specific discipline. (Siregar, 2018 p.96-97)

According to Orozco in Jordan-Núñez (2014), a teacher of specific translation has two methodological options to help student acquire the command of a thematic area. The first methodology is focused on the product of translation, investing effort for students to acquire the previous specialized or thematic knowledge and converting the course into an introduction to one of the areas of specialization that is most in demand. While the second option, centered on the process, entails promoting all those skills that allow students to deal with new projects on subjects they are not specialized in. It is the general text.

Moreover, some criterias for selecting the texts for the translation exercises: 1) the texts should come from a real source and should be able to become translation projects; 2) they should be complete texts; 3) they should be varied in terms of subject matter, type and degree of specialization; and 4) they should be able to be translated by students, since a text of excessive difficulty will lack pedagogical value. (Sevilla et al. 2003: p. 298)

As far as designing translation course is concerned, there must be a sort of balance between theory and practice although it is preferred to lean a little bit on practice, because it is practice that actually produces a good translator. Accordingly, the translation course has to be designed in such way that students who take this course will practice translating as much as possible. (Tisga, 2009) The teacher should consider the structure and nature of the course. How long does it take? What kind of degree or certification do you receive at the end; does the coursework reflect your interests while giving you the training you need to succeed in the translation profession?

Moreover, the teacher should weigh carefully the benefits of the course. Try to figure out if the course truly advances your students' ability enough to justify the investment of time and efforts. A translation course should prepare future translators, do you reach that end? (Samudra, 1993: 9.53).

By consider the above statements and general belief that translation competence is becoming one of the main goals in translation training or teaching. Despite this agreement, before the questions arise on how to develop the translation competence, the very initial problem to deal is how to keep the students encouragement in doing translation activities. Thus, this article should clarify the pre and post translation exercise activities, how to prepare the translation material and what aspect should be consider in choosing the appropriate topic of translation in practice.

## METHODS

### Place and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of Economics and Engineering, Universitas Sumatera Utara in

Medan – Indonesia. Two surveys and in-class observation were conducted to investigate the student opinion about the translation exercise. Sixty-two 62 undergraduate students are participating in this study (32 are Economic Faculty Students and 30 are Engineering). The surveys and observation is part of one year study in 2018. However this observation only took three weeks that consist of two sessions of meeting. The first session is thematic preparation and the second session is the review or translation exercise.

**Instruments and Data Collection**

The surveys were administered by online-questionnaire (Google form). The first questionnaire consisted of 7 semi-structured questions with a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires that allow for in-depth information from the students to explore the topic they interested in.

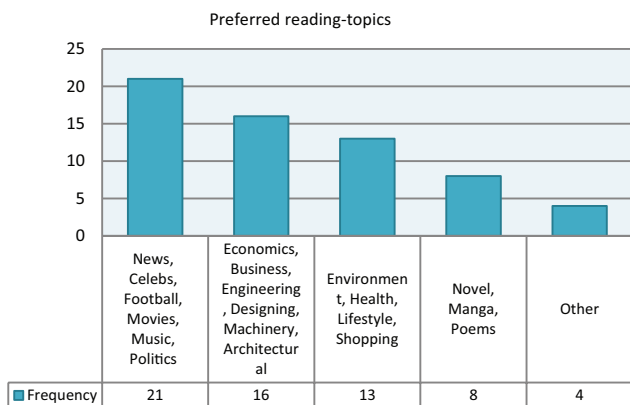
**DISCUSSION**

**Pre-exercise: Capturing the Students Interest on Special Topic**

Before preparation of the text material, teacher question about the topic they interested in. There are some consideration in choosing the text genres for translation exercise.

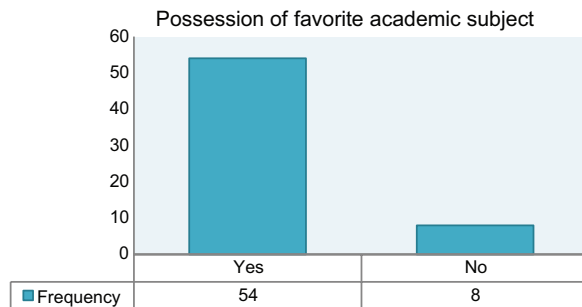
The chosen topic should stimulate interaction among the students are accustomed to discussing translation problems in class, it is likely that they are more critical in evaluating their translation when they work as translators. Beside, the chosen topic should allow students to focus on formal aspects of the language. Therefore, students should be trained to decide how they should restructure the same message in different styles. It also should encourage students to develop learning skills and skills in learning-how-to-learn. The class discussion in discussing the assignments are meant to provide students with efficient translation strategies: how to cope with the problem of long sentences, how to choose words etc.

Similarly, the topic should encourage students to apply their knowledge to work as translators. It is assumed that students will know how to cope with problems of translation after they finish the course. The result of survey indicates that:

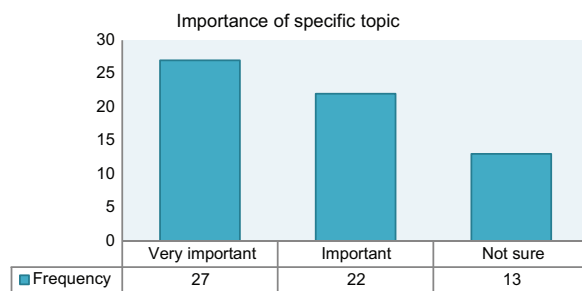


Out of 62 students, in the first place, 21 are prefer news, celebs, football, movies and music, while politics, economics or engineering are 16. Only 8 of students read novel, manga

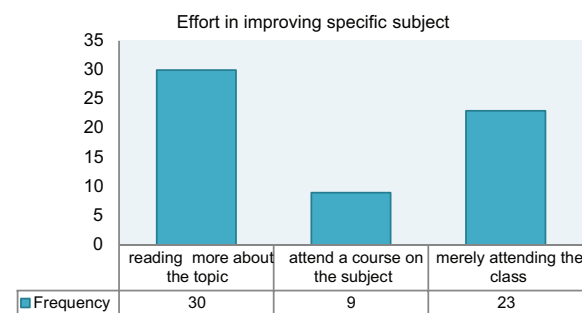
and or poems. While others that indicated other than listed topics specified the psychology, arts, travelling, and gardening.



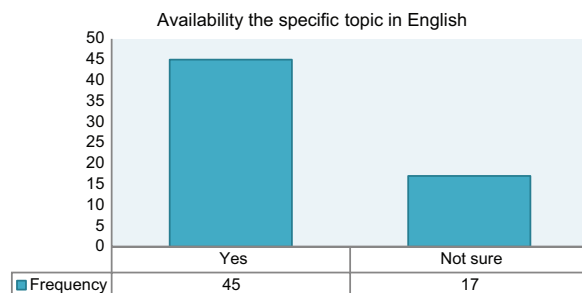
Interesting, out of 62 students, 8 students admitted does not have any favorite academic subject. Although this is on small percentage, the teacher should explore their actual interest in reading for it is also significant in arrange the exercise topics.



This questions intended to describe the awareness of the students about the importance of given topic in exercise. Out of 62 student, 27 argued the specific topic is very important, while 13 students not sure about this point.



The purpose of this question is to urge the student more about the importance of certain subject they interesting in. What effort they made to search for deep understanding about specific subject. Thirty students reading more about the topic, the source they specify are internet and library. Nine students attend the course for any subject they interested in. And 23 student only attending the class.



The purpose of this further question is to find-out the awareness of students on importance of specific topic by questioned the availability of topic in English. Forty-five students argued that the specific topic they search is available in English, while the rest of students not sure about its availability. This result suggest that, most of students involved in translation when they encounter specific topic. The primary source for text is internet.

### In-Class Sessions: Administered the Exercise

The teacher gives a brief description about the exercise that should be conducted that consist of translation exercise topics, benefit of this exercise and exercise duration. Each participant may have one worksheet.

Students are asked to make workgroups. Teacher remind what should be done first before doing translation. Student may use the tools in doing translation, such as: dictionary, smartphone or internet during the exercise. Student may discuss the text in groups, but they should provide themselves translation.

The basic objective of this activity is to familiarize students with this type of document, to work on their ability to understand economic, financial and commercial texts in English, and to work on their ability to do research and to look for information and specialized documents.

The aim of this activity is not only to make students familiar with the documents available for doing their job but also to work on some competences such as the ability to do research, the ability to carry out research tasks and to look for information and specialized documents, and the ability to do conceptual and terminological research.

Student may put comment in space provided in translation worksheet. For example, why she/he decide to translate certain sentences or phrase as it is. Students are asked to collect all the term that have appeared in the texts during the course and to present a selection of Indonesian equivalents and a definition of the concept either in English or in Indonesian.

The main objective of the project is to develop students' ability to learn and to manage their own learning, the ability to apply techniques and to acquire terminology from specialized translation, the ability to carry out research tasks and to look for information and specialized documents, the ability to adequately manage and keep the information and documentation which is necessary for carrying out their job, and the ability to do conceptual and terminological research.

### Post Translation Exercise

Regarding the translation exercise, students are asked, after correcting the translation exercises during the face-to-face sessions, to identify and solve the mistakes in their own work and to prepare a final proofread version of each translation exercise.

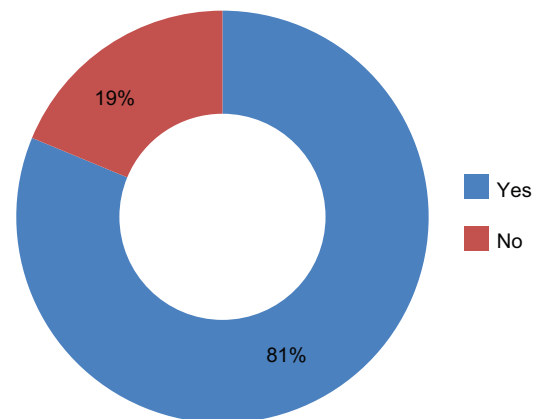
These final texts must be done in the next session. It is important for students not to imitate the versions suggested by their classmates or the teacher in the classroom. They should make their own final version. They should be able to analyze their own work based on those suggestions and

to change just what is necessary. It is also important to take into account the correction suggested by the teacher. The basic purpose of this task is therefore to make students learn to compare the choice in translation and decide the best. However, they are also expected to develop some other competences such as their ability to work with motivation for quality, their ability to learn and manage their self-learning throughout their professional lives and their ability to consider alternatives and take justifiable decisions.

In the final of session, the students ask to fill out the surveys. The given survey results are as follows:

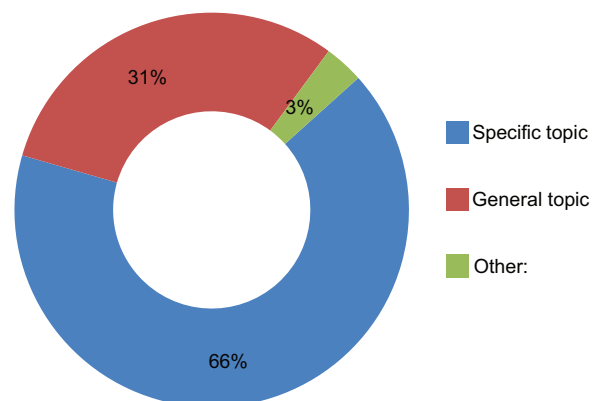
When students asked to specify the translation difficulty, most of students said the phrase and long sentences, other face difficultness in reframing the idea of paragraph. For example, few of students questioned "should I put the translation according to paragraph order?". In other hand, the students put attention to theoretical lesson by translating the idea of paragraph into target language.

Exercise topics relevancy to academic subject

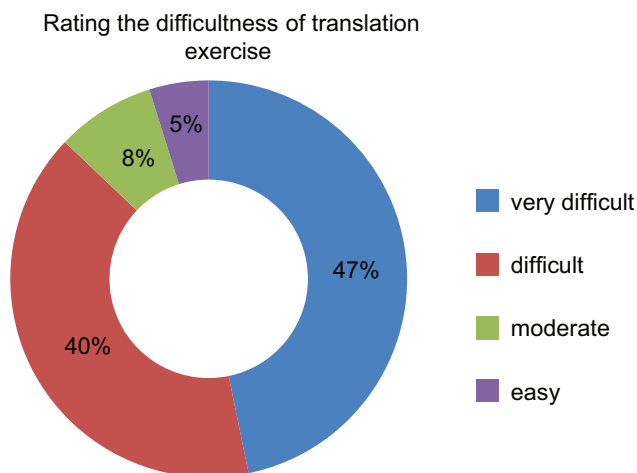


When it is about the relevancy of exercise topics to academic subject, 81% of students argued it relevant, while the rest not aware about it relevancy.

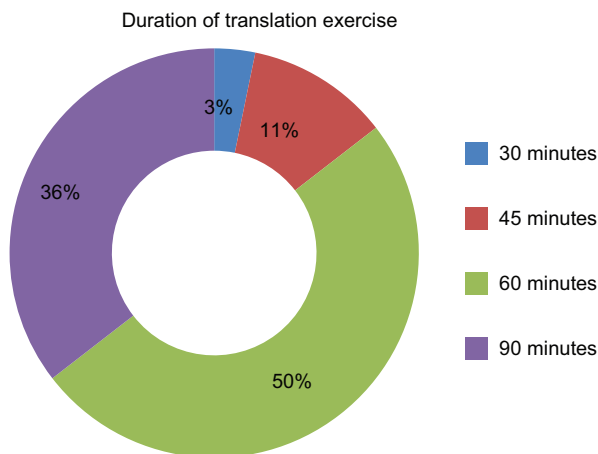
Most difficult topic in translation exercise



The purpose of this question is to stimulate an intellectual and linguistic challenge in students. Sixty-six percent of students argued that specific topics is most difficult. In the second place, 31% of students admitted the general topic is difficult. When the rest specify other topic such as cultural-rich text. The answers to this question implies that student aware the importance of knowledge in relevant field should enable them to find the appropriate equivalent meaning in target language.



Overall, in rating the difficultness of translation exercise, most of students (47%) rate it very difficult, 40% difficult, 8% is moderate and 5% is easy. Some students specify the difficultness in translating word. Sometime a word has more than one meaning, thus it is confusing to decide the best word. Apparently this case is lexically ambiguous. When a phrase or sentence can have more than one structure it is said to be structurally ambiguous. This is not only problematic because some of the alternatives are unintended, that may lead to wrong interpretations.



This question point out the preferred exercise duration in doing translation. Most of students (50%) argued 60 minutes duration is preferred, while 36% of students need longer duration. Only 3% versus 11% students who prefer the exercise duration less than an hour. This data revealed that most of student feels translation is difficult task, thus it need longer time to do so. Some student specify it is not enough time to learn the field of text and comprehend the main its main idea. Some thinks the text to deep and specialized.

## CONCLUSION

Before providing and administering the translation exercise, teacher should regards these aspects: the exercise-topic should relevant to the needs of students; the texts should come from a real-life situation and should be

in coverage knowledge of the students; 3) the text should be varied in terms of subject matter, type and degree of specialization; and 4) the text should be able to be translated by students, since the over-difficult text will lose the students interest in doing translation.

Translation teacher should take into account of exercise duration. The shorter duration will trap the student in a haze task, and resulted the poor quality translation. In the other hand the longer duration may lead the student to linger in the difficult part and over-scrupulous in decide the word or terms equivalent.

It is possible to ask immediate question about the difficultness encounter by student in doing translation and avoiding over-impression on results they got. The students who stressed on exercise-result may quit and no longer attend the learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Syahron Lubis for his constructive suggestion during the preparation of this article.

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### Pre Exercise Questionnaire

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**Participant Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty:**  Economics  Engineering

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Questions

- 1 What do you do in spare time.  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 If it is about the reading or learning, what topic do you prefer?  
 News, Celebs, Football, Movies, Music  
 Politics, Economics, Engineering  
 Environment, Health, Lifestyle  
 Novel, Manga, Poetry  
 Other : *Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 Why do you choose that topic(s)  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 Do you have a or some favorite subject on your academic?  
 Yes  No  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 How important is to improve a specific/specialized topic in your academic subject?  
 Very important  important  Not sure
  - 6 What effort you take to improve your favorite subject?  
 Reading more about the topic  
 Attend a course on the subject  
 Merely attending the class
  - 7 Do you think that subject is available more in English  
 Yes  Not sure
- 

### Post Exercise Questionnaire

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**Participant Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty:**  Economics  Engineering

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Questions

- 1 What your difficultness in translation exercise.  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 Do you think the exercise topic related to your academic subject?  
 Yes  No
  - 3 In which topic you found most difficult term in translation exercise?  
 Specific topic  
 General topic  
 Other  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 Could you tell the benefit of translation exercise?  
*Please specify:* \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 How you rate the translation exercise  
 Very difficult  Difficult  Moderate  Easy
  - 6 How long the duration of exercise should be  
 30 minutes  45 minutes  60 minutes  90 minutes
-