

# Translation as a Learning Strategy Utilized by the Chinese Students in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Class

Yubo Geng

Department of Educational Management, Philippine Women's University, Manila, 1004, Philippines

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the learning situation and attitude of Chinese students in using translation in foreign language learning, hoping to guide students to use translation scientifically and learn foreign language knowledge well. During the study, 250 junior students from a comprehensive University and a professional foreign language University in Hebei Province were investigated and studied by means of questionnaire survey, interview method and case analysis method, so as to clarify the basic data such as the strategies and frequency of using translation in the process of foreign language learning, and analyze the students' learning attitude and translation skills based on the data feedback. The final research results show that students' use of translation in foreign language learning has a certain relationship with knowledge reserve, learning ability and learning depth. They should be rational when using translation, and should not over-rely on translation, otherwise it will have the opposite effect.

## KEYWORDS

Chinese University Students; English as A Foreign Language (EFL); Translation; Learning Strategy; Strategy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

How to learn foreign language knowledge well and improve the learning efficiency and quality has always been the focus of teachers and students, and there are endless learning methods related to it. Through a questionnaire survey on the use of translation in English learning by students from different professional backgrounds in two domestic universities, this study analyzes the use of translation as a learning strategy in college, hoping to provide effective reference for Chinese students in foreign language learning.

## 2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Since the 1970s, communicative foreign language teaching method has gradually become popular and has gradually developed into the most influential foreign language teaching school in the world. The teaching method is characterized by learning a foreign language through a foreign language, which attaches great importance to cultivating students' communicative competence and encourages students to contact and use a foreign language, but the learner's mother tongue is regarded as the opposite of foreign language learning and is abandoned in the classroom. At the same time, translations that are closely related to the mother tongue are also neglected. The reason for this is that some scholars believe that translation will cause language interference, which is not conducive to learners' application of foreign language thinking, and affect language transfer and use, so that foreign language fluency and language acquisition effect will be affected.

The Times are constantly developing and changing, and various theories on foreign language learning are constantly innovating and enriching. Some scholars believe that the flexible use of translation in the process of foreign language learning can reduce foreign language learning obstacles and make foreign language learning more efficient, so the use of translation in foreign language learning should be advocated. It can also be found through teaching observation that many students consciously or unconsciously use translation methods in the process of learning foreign languages. Although teachers encourage students to apply foreign language thinking in class, it is difficult to eliminate the use of translation in students' foreign language learning. In fact, native language translation plays an irreplaceable role in foreign language teaching. It helps students to use translation flexibly in the process of foreign language learning and clarify the meaning of translation application, so that students can realize that foreign language learning is not only carried out through imitation, but also a process of discovering language rules by one's own knowledge. It will fully stimulate students' learning interest and lay a good foundation for their later learning and development.

Of course, the research on the learning attitude and strategy of using translation in the process of foreign language learning has not been long, and the research is still in its infancy. Meanwhile, many researchers believe that only beginners or students with weak English foundation need to use translation in foreign language learning. With the improvement of foreign language level, students' dependence on their mother tongue will be lower and lower. Good learners can even think in a foreign language directly. Therefore, many scholars do not advocate the use of translation in college students' foreign language learning. However, in view of the actual situation, many college students are still accustomed to using translation in the process of foreign language learning. Therefore, this study attempts to conduct research and analysis on relevant issues. By comparing the degree and effect of translation strategies applied by students from different professional backgrounds, it analyzes how to effectively exert translation effectiveness and help students better learn foreign language knowledge.

### **3. LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Language learning is not a blind activity, and it also has its own unique strategies. When summarizing and analyzing the previous research results, the author believes that language learning strategies are the unique behaviors taken by learners to make language learning simpler, faster, more interesting, more effective, more self-directed and more adaptable to the new environment. Strategies can be divided into two types: direct strategy and indirect strategy. Direct strategy means that the use of strategies is directly related to the language learned, and the more common strategies include memory, cognition and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies mainly refer to learning management, which mainly includes metacognitive, emotional and social strategies. Generally speaking, the ideal results in learning a foreign language are usually due to the use of multiple strategies at the same time and the proper use of strategies.

In the field of learning strategies, translation is generally regarded as a cognitive strategy, whose function is to help learners master the learning content through inter-language conversion. Of course, some scholars believe that translation is a memory strategy, and translation plays a unique role in assisting learners to memorize words. In addition, some learners believe that translation is a compensatory strategy, and the use of native language translation can help learners solve the language barrier in the process of foreign language learning. With the deepening of research, some scholars believe that translation is an emotional strategy, which can eliminate their anxiety and tension in language learning, so that they can better use foreign languages to communicate with others. The diversified role of translation can help learners learn foreign languages more quickly, efficiently and diversified, and can better solve various learning problems, which has certain positive effects.

## 4. RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION

### (1) Research problem

This study focuses on solving the following problems: First, it analyzes the relevant situation of university use of translation strategies; The second is to analyze whether there are differences in the use of translation strategies by students with different professional backgrounds; The third is to analyze the differences in the use of translation strategies among students with different professional backgrounds, such as the use territory and frequency.

### (2) Research object

This study selected two representative colleges and universities in Hebei Province, both of which took third-year students as the research objects. One is a comprehensive college and the other is a professional foreign language college. A total of 250 people were surveyed by questionnaires. 241 questionnaires were collected and 234 were valid, among which 110 questionnaires were recorded from comprehensive colleges and 124 questionnaires from foreign language colleges. The average age of the surveyed students is 21 years old, and they have received the same level of English education in primary and secondary schools before entering colleges and universities. Students in comprehensive colleges and universities mainly major in chemical engineering, civil engineering and mathematics, and English is a compulsory course for them. In their sophomore year, they completed College English Test (CET-4) and passed it successfully. Students of foreign language colleges focus on listening, speaking, reading and writing strategys training in their first and second years in college, and pass the TEM-4. In their third year, they focus on translation, education, culture and other special foreign language learning. The work they engage in during graduation is closely related to English.

### (3) Research tools

This study mainly conducted research and analysis through self-made questionnaires, and adopted statistical software spss22.0 for analysis and processing of various data obtained from the study.

### (4) Results and analysis

When analyzing the use of translation strategies by the research subjects, the questionnaire results were summarized as follows:

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of translation strategies used by research objects

	Foreign language college			Comprehensive university			Totality
	English translation	Language and culture	Education	Civil engineering major	Chemical engineering major	Mathematics major	
Number of people	63	30	31	39	36	35	234
Average value (M)	3.29	3.16	2.95	3.65	3.89	4.05	3.50
Standard variance	.308	.40	.403	.35	.512	.481	.409

Combined with Table 1 above, it can be found that the overall frequency of translation strategies used by the survey subjects is 3.50, which is consistent with the high frequency standard. It can be seen that college students, regardless of their major, generally use translation strategies when learning English. Through communication with students, it can be found that they mainly use translation strategies to learn vocabulary, phrases and various grammar knowledge, and they believe that translation can make the learning of these English knowledge easier; Other students said that they can better examine and analyze the learning results when learning reading, writing and speaking with the help of translation. Based on the students' feedback, it can be found that these learning behaviors are consistent with the cognitivism theory of foreign language learning, which indicates that foreign language learning is not just a habitual behavior of imitating a foreign language, but a creative process of learning a foreign language by using the existing cognitive structure of the mother tongue. It can be seen that translation is an insurmountable cognitive activity in the process of learning a foreign language, and foreign language learners will unconsciously use translation as a learning strategy because they have been immersed in their native language since childhood. The above research results are also similar to the study of scholar Wu Yuqin (2022), who analyzed the factors affecting the acquisition of language translation ability under the learning medium of MOOCs in the context of social learning, and believed that to acquire language translation ability, it is effective to properly use some translation software.

When studying whether there are differences in the use of translation strategies by students with different major backgrounds, the statistical analysis by using independent sample t test shows that there are obvious differences in the use of translation strategies between foreign language majors and students with comprehensive majors, as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Results of independent sample t test data

	Number of people	Average value (M)	Standard variance	t	Df	P
Foreign language college	124	3.13	.37	4.06	233	.006
Comprehensive university	110	3.86	.45			

When comparing the average frequency of translation strategies used by the surveyed students in foreign language colleges and comprehensive universities, it can be found that the frequency of translation strategies used by the surveyed students in foreign language colleges and comprehensive universities is 3.13 and 3.86, respectively. The former belongs to the medium usage rate, while the latter belongs to the high usage rate, which also reflects from the side that with the deepening of learners' familiarity with foreign languages and the improvement of their comprehensive foreign language ability, the former is the highest usage rate. Their dependence on native language translation will be reduced. This view is also consistent with the research of scholar LAN Qingqing (2023), who, from the perspective of machine translation, believes that as learners acquire more English knowledge, their dependence on translation software will decrease. The research of scholar Zhang Shimin (2023) shows that foreign language learners prefer to use their first language due to the influence of habitual thinking in the process of foreign language learning, which can effectively eliminate their sense of tension and relieve learning pressure. Compared with students who systematically learn English in foreign language colleges and universities, students in comprehensive colleges and universities tend to focus more on learning professional courses in their daily learning. In addition, they are less likely

to engage in English jobs in the future, and the requirements for English proficiency of their majors are lower than those of foreign language colleges and universities, so their comprehensive English literacy is significantly lower than that of students in foreign language colleges and universities. The frequency of using translation in learning English knowledge is also higher. For students in foreign language colleges and universities, they are more likely to engage in English jobs in the future and have strict professional requirements and standards. Therefore, they will devote more time and energy to English learning in daily learning and have less dependence on their mother tongue. Scholar Lin Ke nan (2022) also said that the use of software translation to learn foreign languages has certain negative effects and should be applied with caution.

Of course, it should be noted that students' attitude and strategies in using translation in the process of English learning will also affect the final learning effect. During the survey and interview, some students said that they rely too much on translation in the process of English learning, and they habitually use the translation software of mobile phones or other electronic devices to understand when checking English reading content. When writing English, they like to write an outline in Chinese first, and when practicing English listening, they are also used to translate the Chinese they hear into Chinese in their minds first. When you use English, you decide what to say first in Chinese. Although the frequent use of translation strategies can effectively eliminate their anxiety in English learning, it also has certain side effects, such as the frequent use of "Chinglish" and the existence of understanding errors in English learning. In some cases, it may even restrict the development of self-learning. For example, some students want to read some classic original English works. There are more obstacles in reading, reading speed is slow, it is difficult to concentrate when reading, and the reading experience is not good. For this reason, although the positive role of translation in English teaching cannot be denied, both teachers and students should dialectically view the role and value of translation in English learning, help students establish a correct attitude towards using translation in English learning, and master various learning strategy scientifically. On the one hand, before using translation, it is necessary to evaluate and analyze whether the difficulty of the English to be learned should be translated, and whether using translation can achieve twice the result with half the effort; On the other hand, it is necessary for students to actively strengthen their learning, master more English learning methods and strategies, and reduce their dependence on the use of translation strategy.

In short, translation, as a set of effective learning strategies, is frequently used in students' foreign language learning. The only way for teachers to fully realize the positive role of translation in foreign language teaching is to help students gradually transform their daily unconscious translation behaviors into conscious translation behaviors, so as to better play the translation role and provide services for foreign language learning. Of course, we should be careful when using translation to learn English. We should not over-rely on translation, otherwise it will have the opposite effect, which is not conducive to students' language transfer and application.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Wu Yuqin. A Study on International Understanding and Language Translation Acquisition in the Context of Social Learning: A reflection on Interlingual MOOCs in Foreign Language Teaching [J]. *Journal of Xinyang Agriculture and Forestry College*, 2022, 32 (02): 149-152.
- [2] Lan Qingqing. Influence of machine translation on foreign language learning and its coping strategies [J]. *Journal of Nantong Vocational University*, 2023, 37 (04): 56-59. (in Chinese).
- [3] Zhang Sumin. The Effects of "continuing Translation" on translation strategies and foreign language learning Anxiety under the Dynamic System Theory [J]. *Foreign Language Circle*, 2023, (05): 56-63.
- [4] Lin ke nan. On the negative impact of translation on foreign language learning [J]. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*, 2022, 29 (01): 58-63+112.
- [5] Adamska-Salaciak, A. 2010. Examining equivalence [J]. *International Journal of Lexicography*, 23(4): 387-409.
- [6] Andersen, B. & Leroyer, P. 2008. The dilemma of grammatical data in travel dictionaries [J]. *Lexikos*, 18: 27-45.