

The Impact of Translation on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Knowledge of Dependent Clauses

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Abstract – The role of first language in L2 learning and teaching has been the subject of controversy. The current research was designed to investigate the effect of translation on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses. In other words, this paper was conducted to examine the effect of using translation from second language to first language on improvement of EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses. In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, 40 Iranian female intermediate EFL learners were chosen by means of administering a homogeneity test. The participants were divided into an experimental and a control group (n=20). The pretest was given to both groups. Then, the experimental group received 10 dependent clauses in each session and the teacher translated the dependent clauses into Persian with simple words. For the control group, everything was similar to that of the experimental group, except that there were no translations of the dependent clauses into Persian. At the end, a post-test was given to both groups and the mean scores of the two groups were identified. The Paired and the Independent Samples *t*-tests revealed that the treatments had positive effects on the EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clause.

Keywords: Grammar, Clause, Dependent Clause, Translation

1. INTRODUCTION

Although English teachers often neglect or reject incorporating translation into language classrooms because of its close association with the grammar translation method, some researchers (e.g., Whyatt, 2009; Weydt, 2009; O'Muireartaigh, 2009) have proven that it is promising to apply translation tasks to improve L2 learner proficiency in language control and reading skills. In spite of the abandonment of translation, as a pedagogical tool in teaching a foreign language, by many language practitioners, second language (L2) learners inevitably use it as a viable learning strategy. The utility of translation as a teaching technique in L2 classes has a long history and has always been the core of the controversies regarding whether or not it would be used as a valid and effective tool in foreign language teaching and learning process.

It is completely clear that grammar has a significant role in both teaching and testing areas. According to Bourke (1989), grammar does not work in isolation; it is a means of presenting semantic relationships and is controlled by discursal factors. The raising of consciousness about the aspects of the grammatical role in the total language system is the major argument for taking pedagogical grammar seriously into account.

As a subcategory of grammar, clauses are classified as dependent or independent clauses. "In English grammar, a dependent clause is a group of words that has both a subject and a

verb but (unlike an independent clause) cannot stand alone as a sentence. Also known as a subordinate clause” (*dictionary.com*, 2016).

1.1. Translation

Translation is considered to have a valid role in teaching literature; hence it should have its place in the language courses of English Departments. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define Translation as “the process of rendering written language that was produced in one language (the source language²) into another (the target language²), or the target language version that results from this process ” (p. 610). It is obvious that literature can be considered as a functional rather than an ontological term; also, it has a transitory, not fixed value. Generally, readers with different cultures assign value to the literature, making use of their own literary experience as a standard for evaluating its quality and worth.

“Words that have been changed from one language into a different language: words that have been translated” (Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary). Translation is the process of rendering written language that was produced in one language into another or the target language version that results from this process. Translation in which more emphasis is given to overall meaning than to exact wording is known as free translation. The terms translation and interpretation are often used interchangeably. While both activities involve transferring a message between two different languages, translation refers to transfer between written texts and interpretation refers to spoken discourse and the unrehearsed transfer of a spoken message from one language to another. Translation is seen as a vehicle for a better teaching of literature since it is specifically related to the students of English. Larson (1984, p.4), claimed that translation is a skill which comprises trying to “discover the meaning of the source and to use receptor language forms which express this meaning in a natural way”. Translation provides us with the chance of entering to the world literature. It makes it possible for us to go into the people’s minds from other times and places. While literature is different over time (diachronically), it is also different across cultures (Larson, 1984). Finally, Bell (1991) asserts translation is the expression in another language (or target language) of what has been expressed in another, source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences. “Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions” (Toury, 2000, p. 200).

1.2. Translation Categorization

According to Jakobsen's translation categorization, translation can be divided into three categories. The first type is "intralingual translation" or rewording which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other sign of the same language. The second type of translation is "interlingual translation" or translation proper which I an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. And the third type of translation is "intersemiotic translation" or translation which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of sign of non-verbal sign system. Here the translation is about a text that, for example, based on which a piece of music, a movie, or painting is created (Jokobsen, 2002).

1.3. Grammar in L2 Teaching

Throughout the history of language teaching, grammar teaching has been the subject of various changes. It began from teaching forms as one of the significant stages in language learning and moved to considering it as an unnecessary and insignificant part in teaching and learning a language. Nevertheless, recent research has shown the need for formal instruction for learners in order to reach high levels of accuracy. At the early stages of the language teaching, lots of approaches and techniques have been utilized to realize that how language is learnt the best. At first, grammar oriented teaching resulted in a linear behaviorist model comprising of explicit grammar teaching, repetitions of models, memorization of short dialogues and mastering an item at a time (Long, 2000). As a reaction to the dissatisfaction with the grammar-oriented teaching as a weak method, and the need for more communication-oriented methods, meaning based approaches found support from second language researchers (Prabhu, 1987; Allwright, 1984). According to Long (2000), the lessons concentrating on meaning were entirely communicative since the second language learning was supposed to be implicit and incidental, not intentional, similar to the first language learning. Likewise, grammar rules were believed to be learned implicitly and incidentally by being exposed to input.

According to Richards and Rogers (1986), from the very beginning stages of language teaching, teaching grammar has been one of the most controversial issues occurring at the heart of the field. During these early stages, language teaching was recognized as teaching grammar items explicitly, while language learning was considered to be the learning of grammatical items of the language in a conscious manner.

1.4. Dependent Clauses

Clauses are classified as dependent or independent clauses. “In English grammar, a dependent clause is a group of words that has both a subject and a verb but (unlike an independent clause) cannot stand alone as a sentence. Also known as a subordinate clause” (*dictionary.com, 2016*).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| ▪ <i>Independent Clause</i> | <i>Dependent Clause</i> |
| ▪ <i>I hurried</i> | <i>because I was late</i> |

Dependent clause that modifies the principal clause or some part of it or that serves a noun function in the principal clause, as when *she arrived* in the sentence *I was there when she arrived* or that *she has arrived* in the sentence *I doubt that she has arrived*. A dependent clause is a group of words that also contains a subject and a verb, but it is not a complete thought. Because it is not a complete thought, a dependent clause cannot stand on its own as a sentence; it is dependent on being attached to an independent clause to form a sentence. For example:

- *Because I woke up late this morning... (what happened?)*
- *When we arrived in class... (what occurred?)*
- *If my neighbor does not pay his rent on time... (what will happen?)*

Dependent clauses can often be identified by words called dependent markers, which are usually subordinating conjunctions. If a clause begins with one of these words, it is

dependent and needs to be attached to an independent clause. In other words, a dependent clause is not a complete sentence on its own. It has to be added to an independent clause, which is what gives it its other name - the subordinate clause - because it's subordinate to the independent (or main) clause. It, too, has a subject and a verb. For example,

- *I love you because I am blind.*

The dependent clause here is 'because I am blind.' The verb is 'am' and the subject is 'I,' but 'because I am blind' cannot function as an independent sentence. Thus, it is subordinate to our independent clause, 'I love you.' 'Because' connects the dependent clause to the independent clause and is called a subordinating conjunction.

1.4.1. Dependent Clause Types

Dependent clauses function in different ways within sentences, giving us the ability to add information about nouns and verbs. Different types of dependent clause are:

- A *noun clause* is a type that forms the subject of a sentence:

What I do is my own business.

'What I do' is a dependent clause that forms the subject.

- An *adjective clause* is a type that functions as an adjective, modifying a noun:

*The apples **that we bought yesterday** have already been eaten.*

'That we bought yesterday' is a dependent clause that modifies the noun 'apples.' This type of clause is also called a **relative clause**. Relative clauses begin with the relative pronouns that, which, whom, whose, who, when, why, and where.

- An *adverb clause* provides more information about the action that was taken in the sentence:

*The farmer chose to grow apples **because she loves apple pie**. Or,*

*The baker bought a dessert cookbook **after the apple harvest**.*

'Because she loves apple pie' and 'after the apple harvest' are dependent clauses that modify the actions taken in the sentences.

- A *complement* is a type that provides necessary information about the verb in a sentence:

*Frank wanted **to join the group**.*

'To join the group' is a complement to the verb 'wanted.'

1.5. Statement of the Problem

Beginning with the early stages of the language teaching, various approaches and techniques have been tried to find out how language is learnt the best. At the early stages, grammar oriented teaching gave rise to a linear behaviorist model consisting of explicit grammar teaching, repetitions of models, memorization of short dialogues and mastering an item at a time (Long, 2000). Teaching grammar has been one of the most debatable issues taking place at the center of the field. At these stages, language teaching was perceived as teaching grammar items explicitly, language learning referred to the learning of grammatical

items of the language consciously (Richards & Rogers, 1986). However; there are contradictory arguments regarding using various techniques in teaching grammar especially using the learner's mother tongue into teaching. Moreover, this research tried to investigate translation and its probable impact that it may have on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses. It was aimed to describe translation and its importance in language teaching and learning and also the impact of the two variables on each other.

1.6. Research Hypotheses

H1. Translation does not have any significant impact on knowledge of dependent clauses of Iranian female EFL learners' intermediate learners.

H2. There is no any meaningful significant difference between the scores of the learners in the control and the experimental group.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

80 Iranian female EFL learners ranging from 18 to 25 years old in Ostad Language Institute in Tehran were selected to participate in this study. In order to homogenize the learners, they took part in a homogeneity test preliminary English test (PET). After administration of the test, 40 intermediate EFL learners were chosen to participate in this research and the participants were divided into two groups; an experimental and a control groups with 20 EFL learners in each group.

2.2. Instruments

The main research instruments utilized in the present study were a PET for determining the proficiency level of participant and a pretest and a post test of dependent clauses.

2.3. Procedure

At the beginning, the whole population of this study was selected then they took a test of language proficiency (PET) to become homogenized. Next step is grouping the homogenized participants into two different equal control and experimental groups (n=20). The learners of the groups took part in the pretest in order to determine their performance in the dependent clauses before the treatment. After that, the participants were prepared to take part in the treatments.

The whole instruction for both the experimental and the control groups took place in 16 sessions (each group received 8 sessions) and each session lasted for 90 minutes. For the experimental group, 10 dependent clauses were presented each session, and the teacher translated the dependent clauses into Persian. On the whole, 80 dependent clauses were taught in the treatment. For control group, everything was similar to that of experimental group, except that there were no translations of the dependent clauses into Persian.

After a period of sixteen sessions (about 1 month), the posttest was given to both the control and the experimental groups. The learners of the groups took part in the posttest in order to determine their performance in the dependent clauses after the treatments.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

In this part, the participants' scores in terms of evaluated values have been presented in the following tables and the figure.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental and the Control Groups

Group		N	M	STD	Min	Max
Experimental	Pre	20	9.15	1.927	6	12
	post	20	15	1.589	11	17
Control	Pre	20	9.80	1.508	7	13
	post	20	12.95	1.504	10	16

The results shown in Table 1 revealed that the mean score of the experimental and the control groups had substantial increase in the posttest in comparison with pretest stage. It was observed that mean score of the experimental group was greater than the mean score of the control group in the posttest stage. It can be concluded that the treatment for the experimental group was effective and the translation had a better effect on improvement of Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses.

3.2. The First Null Hypothesis

To investigate the first null hypothesis, the pretest and the posttest of the experimental and the control groups was investigated by the Paired samples t-test.

Table 2: Paired Samples Test for the Experimental Group

	Paired Differences				t	df	P (2-tailed)	
	M	STD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Post-Exp Pre-Exp	5.850	2.300	.514	4.773	6.927	11.363	19	.000

The results shown in Table 2 revealed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group ($t(19) = 11.363, P < 0.05$). The results revealed that Persian translation had positive results on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses. For that reason, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: Paired Samples Test for the Control Group

	Paired Differences				t	df	P (2-tailed)	
	M	STD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				Upper
Post-Con Pre-Con	3.150	1.226	.274	2.576	3.724	11.482	19	.000

The results shown in Table 3 revealed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of the control group ($t(19) = 11.482, P < 0.05$). The instruction for the control group had positive results on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' knowledge of dependent clauses.

3.3. The Second Null Hypothesis

In order to investigate pretest and posttest of the experimental and the control groups, the Independent samples t-test was used.

Table 4: Independent Samples T- Test in the Pretest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	P.	t	df	P. (2-tailed)	MD	SED	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.657	.207	-1.198	38	.242	-.65000	.54712	-1.75759	.45759
Equal variances not assumed			-1.198	35.923	.243	-.65000	.54712	-1.75970	.45970

Based on the results of Levene's Test in Table 4, there was no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups in the pretest stage.

Table 5: Independent Samples T-Test in the Posttest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	P.	t	df	P. (2-tailed)	MD	SED	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.174	.688	4.188	38	.000	2.05000	.48923	1.05961	3.04039
Equal variances not assumed			4.188	37.883	.000	2.05000	.48923	1.05951	3.04049

Based on the results of Levene's Test in Table 5, there was significant difference between posttest score of the experimental and the control groups in the posttest stage. It means that the mean score of the experimental group was more than the mean score of the control group. Therefore, translation has significant impact on knowledge of dependent clauses of Iranian female intermediate EFL learners. For that reason, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the current study advocate that learners had a more positive view towards their native language (Persian) and they favored first language as the language of instruction in educational system. The results of the two research hypotheses showed that the learners' first language (Persian) had positive effects on the improving of knowledge of English dependent clauses and the learners who received instruction through first language were more successful than those ones who were not in that setting. In fact, using L1 instruction to teaching dependent clauses did help the learners to acquire a better and comprehensive understanding of dependent clauses. The learners in the experimental group received instruction in their first language (Persian). They found deeper understanding of their mother tongue and gained language awareness. The use of translation in foreign or second language teaching has always been essential. The benefits of using translation to teach a foreign language certainly overcome the teaching shortcomings. Despite the importance of translation in L2 teaching, there are some shortcomings to use it. In this regard, Soares (2006) comments that "translation will be harmful in FLT whenever it is used as a core learning method, when the teacher assumes that, by translating as to check comprehension, students will learn, and when interferences that translation might cause are not eradicated" (p. 7). Heltai (1989) argues that "translation is a dangerous exercise, since it enhances interference from the mother tongue" (p. 292).

The results of the current research are also in accordance with the research findings of Ghaiyoomian and Zarei (2015) who conducted to examine the effect of using translation from L1 to L2 on the improvement of EFL learners' language accuracy. They concluded that using translation from L1 to L2 improves the language accuracy of Iranian junior high school students. In addition, the findings were consistent with those in some previous studies including Aslikhosh et al. (2014) who supported the use of L1 as a medium of instruction for

teaching English. The study investigated the role first language (L1) on the grammatical acquisition of Iranian students. The results of the study suggest that learners had a more positive view towards their native language and they favored L1 as the language of instruction in educational system.

The results of this study support Atkinson's (1987) statement who introduces translation from L1 to L2 as a means of improving the accuracy of the newly learned structures: an exercise involving translation into the target language of a paragraph or set of sentences which highlight the recently taught language item can provide useful reinforcement of structural, conceptual and sociolinguistic differences between the native and target languages.

The results of this research are in line with the findings of Vaezi and Mirzaei (2007) who investigated the effect of using translation from L1 to L2 on the improvement of linguistic accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in language institutes. They found that first language translation on the improvement of linguistic accuracy of Iranian EFL learners in language institutes was effective.

Similar to the previous research, Cook (2001) and Dujmovic (2006) who supported the use of L2 as a medium of instruction for teaching English. Positive role of the mother tongue has recurrently been acknowledged as a rich resource which can assist second language teaching and learning (Cook, 2001).

In contrast, the results of this research are in line with the findings Tavakoli, Ghadiri and Zabihi (2014) who conducted to examine the effect of translation on the enhancement or deterioration of Iranian Elementary EFL learners' writing ability. Results revealed that although translation may be of help to some learners, it cannot be an effective strategy to enhance the writing ability of all learners.

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