Abstract

This article presents the results of an experiment using English newspaper as scaffolding in teaching translation from Thai into English. The research objectives were to study the students’ overall translation quality, their syntactic and lexical developments in the pre and post tests. The six-week experiment involved 15 graduate students who were taught to translate Thai news into English using English newspapers presenting the same news story as scaffolding. The results revealed that there were significant differences in the translation quality and syntactic development. There was a slight increase in the use of words in the post-test, but it was not significantly different. The results imply that English newspapers can be one of the effective teaching materials for teaching translation from Thai into English.

Introduction

Traditionally, a common translation teaching method from Thai into English involves a teaching situation that a teacher assigns students a given text to translate either in class within a limited period of time or at home with ample of time. A list of related vocabularies is given and students are allowed to use bi-lingual dictionaries and a dictionary of collocations as well as a grammar book to use as tools to facilitate translation. Students are then left to struggle through a translation process of dividing the original text in Thai into sentences, choosing whatever words or vocabularies in English they have acquired to substitute the original words they think appropriate word–by–word, or sentence–by–sentence. What they concern while translating is putting right words in a grammatically correct sentence. Most of the time, students produce their tasks with errors on
the use of the right words, or diction. They lack vocabularies to translate and thus they are unable to use the right words. This drawback leads to misunderstanding of the original text. What students do to cope with the inability of not having adequate words to translate the original text is to omit whatever part they don’t have the words to substitute, and do only the part they can. Such translated tasks deprive readers of getting complete information from the original text. Other errors involve writing ungrammatical sentences. They make wrong use of articles, nouns, pronouns, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, and etc. They frequently write fragments instead of sentences. They also make errors on comma slice and run–on sentences. Because of the errors students make, the quality of translated text needs to be improved. Teachers have tried hard to find ways to develop the teaching of translation so that learners or students will benefit from what they learn to become better translators.

Objectives.

The objectives of the research were the following:

1. To analyze the pre and post tests in terms of translation quality.
2. To analyze students’ syntactic use by comparing the number of error–free t–units between the pre and post tests to detect students’ syntactic development.
3. To analyze students’ lexical or vocabulary use by comparing vocabulary size and types of word lists used between the pre and post tests so as to detect students’ lexical development.

Review of the Related Literature

The review includes the following:

1. Scaffolding in the framework of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
2. T–unit analysis
3. VocabProfile Program

1. Scaffolding in the Framework of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Actually, the idea of scaffolding on teaching is not new. It has been used with the teaching of language skills in the second language learning. The concept of scaffolding was introduced by Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist. He drew educators’ and researchers’ attention to the utility of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the framework which brings all of the pieces of all of the learning setting together: the teacher, the learner, their social and cultural history, their goals and motives, as well as resources available...
He insisted that in learning, two developmental levels of the individual must be taken into account: the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The help is provided because the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help. (Mitchell & Myles, 1998: 147–162). The teacher as a part of the ZDP can arrange a learning environment that creates a scaffold so that the learner can attain a higher goal of learning. The instruction or guidance given before the learner’s development can be compared with a scaffold built to facilitate building a house. Once the learner shows signs of self-control and ability to function independently, the help can be withdrawn. The same notion is similar to the scaffold being taken away as soon as the building of a house is completed.

In this study, Thai and English newspaper were used. Thai news items on various themes such as university students, environment, crimes, political issues, traffic, and holidays were used as original text assigned to participants to translate. English news items on the similar themes were used as scaffolding to provide help to facilitate translation.

2. T-unit Analysis

Hunt (1970) proposed t-unit analysis as a measuring device for the development of writing and speaking skills. It is one of the well known measures used to indicate both students’ writing ability and their development between previous and later writing production.

According to Gaies (1980), t-unit analysis can be a superficial measurement of syntactic development, but it cannot measure the communicative ability or the appropriate choice of styles. In the first language study, the t-unit length is used as an index in measurement of syntactic maturity. However, an error-free t-unit analysis is considered a more valid measurement in second language research. This is an effect from the fact that errors occur more frequently in second language data than in the first language data.

However, the use of error-free t-units as an index has some problems because each research defines error-free t-units differently. The different criteria give different results. Gaies (1980) suggests that there should be an establishment of the rate of errors. According to him, error-free t-unit refers to a sentence without grammatical errors, not including
punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling mistakes. Most researchers follow this suggestion, and so did the researcher of this study.

Additionally, as a tool, t-unit analysis in second language has two limitations:

1. It is not suitable in the data with too many grammatical and lexical errors.
2. It cannot distinguish between the low proficiency learners and the high proficiency learners clearly. As such, Gaies (1980: 58) recommends errors-free t-units as a suitable measurement for syntactic development of each informant.

(Hunt, 1970; Gaies, 1980; Kanteesan, 2004: 8–9)

A t-unit refers to an independent clause and all its dependent clauses (Hunt, 1970: 4–5; Gaies, 1980: 56). A sentence that consists of coordinators: and, or, but, so, will be segmented into two t-units.

For example:

Tom gets up early. (1 t-unit)

Tom gets up early, so he can catch the train. (2 t-units)

Tom gets up early so that he can catch the train. (1 t-unit)

In this research, the t-unit was used as a tool to analyze the pre and post tests to detect the participants’ syntactic development.

3. Vocab Profile Program

A computer software program so called VocabProfile Program developed by Nation (1995) was used in the study to analyze participants’ lexical use between the pre-test and the post-test. This program groups words into four word lists:

Base List One includes the first 1,000 most frequently used words of English.

Base List Two includes the next 1,000 most frequently used words.

Base List Three includes words which are frequently used in the upper secondary and university texts.

List Four includes words which are not in any of the three Base Lists. Words such as proper nouns and acronyms are categorized into this list. However, word families are not included in the list.

In this research, VocabProfile Program was used to analyze the participants’ pre and post tests. Then the number of words used and the types of word lists used were compared to detect participant’s lexical development.

Methodology

The research was conducted after the following procedures:
1. Participants

Participants of the study were 15 second-year graduate students enrolling in a translation course at graduate level in the second semester of academic year 2005 at a state university in Bangkok. All of them worked during weekdays and attended classes on weekends. Nine of them are elementary school teachers, three work as government officers, and the others work in private companies.

2. Data Collection

At the beginning of the second semester, academic year 2005, fifteen graduate students taking a translation course in the second semester of academic year 2005 were assigned to translate a piece of Thai news item into English as a pretest. Then the participants were taught translation through the use of English newspapers as scaffolding for six weeks. After the 6-week instruction, the same piece of news item used as the pretest was administered as the post-test to the same group of students. The pre-test and post-tests were used as the data of the study for translation quality, syntactic use and lexical use to see the improvement after the instruction.

3. Method of Teaching Translation

The teaching involved the following steps:

1. Select Thai and English news items that have similar news content. The news topic varied from environment, university students, political issues, crimes, holidays, to traffic news.

2. At the beginning of the course, a piece of English news that has a similar content to the Thai news should be selected. Later, as the students progress in the course, a piece of news that is less corresponding to the Thai news is more appropriate.

3. At the micro level, the teacher should discuss the vocabulary, structures and cultural notions with students. The Thai sentential concept should be taught and explained to students.

4. At the macro level, the teacher pointed out different rhetorical patterns on the topic sentence, the body, and the ending of the news in both Thai and English version.

5. Let the students translate one short paragraph at the first stage. The teacher focused on grammatical English and translation corresponding to the original. At a later stage, when students were more proficient, they should be told to reorganize the rhetorical pattern according to the expectation of English-speaking audience. At the final stage, if the students are proficient enough, the scaffold can be removed.
6. Students were told that they have to revise their work several times.

(Thep-Ackrapong 2006: 2)

4. Data Analysis

Fifteen pre-tests and fifteen post-tests of the 15 participants were used as data to study the followings:

1. Translation quality

Three raters who are teachers teaching translation courses at undergraduate and graduate levels for over ten years rated the data for translation quality. They employed the theoretical framework of de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) to assess the quality of the text. According to de Beaugrande and Dressler, a text has seven attributes or seven standards of textuality: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, situationality, informativity, intertextuality and acceptability. If any of these standards is not satisfactory, the text will not be communicative.

After the rating, the scores given by the three raters in the pre-test and post-test were calculated for reliability using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The scores from the pre and post test were then analyzed for Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test to compare the differences of ability of the participants before the instruction and after the instruction. If the reliability is between 0.80–1.0, it indicates that the scores of the raters have high reliability.

2. Syntactic use

T-unit analysis was used to analyze the data in order to detect the number of error-free t-units in each participants’ pre and post test. A certain criteria were established before determining an error-free t-unit, specifying that it is a sentence without grammatical errors, not including punctuation, vocabulary and spelling mistakes.

The researcher then compared the number of error-free t-units of the pre and post tests to see the improvement of each participant’s syntactic use. If the number of error-free t-units in the post-test increased, there was an indication of syntactic growth.

3. Lexical use

The researcher used VocabProfile Program to analyze the data to study the number of words, and types of words the participants used in the pre-test and the post-test. The steps in this analysis of words used were as follows:

1. The 15 pre-tests and 15 post-tests were keyed into the computer applying VocabProfile Program.

2. The words used in the pre and post tests were grouped into four lists.

3. The number of words in each base list were calculated in percentage.
4. Then the Means and Standard Deviation of the data were compared using the t-test to see whether lexical use in the pre-test and the post-test was significantly different.

Findings

The findings of the study were presented in tabular forms.

Table 1 presents correlations of scores given by the three raters in the pre-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre R1</th>
<th>Pre R2</th>
<th>Pre R3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre R1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre R2</td>
<td>.838</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre R3</td>
<td>.862</td>
<td>.856</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Table 1 showed that the scores given by the three raters in the pre-test had reliability at the correlations of 0.838, 0.862, and 0.856, and the correlation is significant at .01 level.

Table 2 presents correlations of scores given by the three raters in the post-test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post R1</th>
<th>Post R2</th>
<th>Post R3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post R1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post R2</td>
<td>.730</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post R3</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Table 2 showed that the scores given by the three raters in the post-test had reliability at the correlations of 0.730, 0.861 and 0.877, and the correlation is significant at .01 level.
Table 3  Difference between scores in pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Pre</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.1333</td>
<td>5.55321</td>
<td>-5.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Post</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7333</td>
<td>4.09646</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at .01 level

Table 3 showed that the Mean of scores in the post-test was higher than in the pre-test. The $t$-score was $-5.511$ with significant difference at .01. It was clear that participants' translation quality improved after the instruction.

Table 4  Use of error-free t-units in pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.4188</td>
<td>22.68178</td>
<td>-3.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55.0592</td>
<td>18.81261</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at .01 level

Table 4 showed that there was an increase use of error-free t-units in the post-test. The difference in use was significant at .01 level. Results showed that participants could produce more error-free t-units after the instruction. This showed an increase in syntactic development.
Table 5  Use of words in pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word tokens in pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>223.60</td>
<td>28.628</td>
<td>-.381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word tokens in post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>226.47</td>
<td>18.795</td>
<td>-.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list one in pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>155.33</td>
<td>22.943</td>
<td>-.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list one in post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>156.73</td>
<td>16.140</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list two in pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>2.669</td>
<td>.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list two in post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.93</td>
<td>2.939</td>
<td>.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list three in pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>4.284</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base list three in post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>3.453</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List four in pre-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43.73</td>
<td>6.239</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List four in post-test</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.87</td>
<td>5.643</td>
<td>.343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 presented the use of words in pre-test and post-test. Results showed that when the use of words in pre-test and post-test was compared, there was a slight increase use of words in the post-test in terms of word tokens, words in Base List One, Base List Two, and List Four. However, words used in Base List Three which includes the academic words used at university level decreased slightly in the post-test. There was no evidence of significant difference between the use of words in the pre-test and the post-test. The results did not significantly show lexical development after the instruction.

Conclusion

This study experimented the use of English newspaper as scaffolding in teaching translation from Thai into English. The objectives were to study the students’ overall translation quality, their syntactic and lexical developments in the pre and post tests. The six-week experiment involved 15 graduate students taught to translate Thai news into English using English newspapers which presented the same news story as scaffolding. The results revealed that the scores in the post-test were higher than the scores in the pre-test in terms of translation quality, syntactic use and lexical use. There were significant differences in the translation quality and syntactic developments, but the difference in lexical development was not significant. The findings imply that English newspapers can be a useful teaching material for teaching translation from Thai into English.

Discussion

The results of study revealed that there was an effectiveness of using English newspapers as scaffolding in teaching translation from Thai
into English. The participants’ post-tests showed significant improvement in translation quality and syntactic use. However, the lexical improvement was not significant although there was an indication of slight growth in the use of vocabulary. As the length of experiment was limited to six weeks with three contact hours per week, totally 18 hours, it was hard to detect the improvement in lexical use. If the length of time of experiment was extended, the result might prove different. There is a tendency that students will improve their lexical use significantly.

**Application**

The findings of the study revealed that English newspaper was a useful teaching material used as scaffolding. Scaffolding somehow gives psychological support so that students feel more confident when they are usually left to themselves to struggle translating the translated work. The teacher, when assigning students to translate any task, should realize that there is a big gap between the two languages. It is a very difficult task for students to translate any text from Thai into English if they are not competent enough in both languages. Teachers should be aware that the use of English newspaper as scaffolding should be gradually withdrawn when students can work independently. At first the teacher should select the news items both in Thai and English that have similar news content closely corresponding to each other. At the first stage of teaching, the teacher guides students to use newspapers as a study tool. After that students examine both news word for word and sentence for sentence. Through teachers’ guide and self-study they learn the right words used in specific context and field of content, and how the sentences tied together. They gradually learn how to write the same news items when they understand the content of the news that they learn from the experienced writer transferring the message from Thai into English. Whatever they learn through analysis of the language or through imitation of the language is considered beneficial as long as they can express the language and transfer what they learn into another language communicatively.
References


Appendix

Thai news item to be translated used as the pre-test and post-test of this research.