

## Review Article

### A REVIEW ON THE EFFECT OF BACK-TRANSLATION ON STUDENTS' TRANSLATION ACHIEVEMENT

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#### ABSTRACT

Back-translation is a practice that has received little attention and less study in cultural and communication investigations. Global communication and interaction across cultures highlight the dominant role of high-quality translations. The purpose of this investigation is to review the existing studies on back-translation and its effect on students' academic achievements in Iranian or foreign academic context, to investigate different outcomes in this regard. In the current study, the databases were investigated from 1970 to 2021 and related articles were reviewed. The findings revealed that back-translation developed students' creative writing skills, knowledge of grammar, equivalence, and self-efficacy in translation classes. Besides, findings highlighted back-translation as an effective practice-oriented process of knowledge and culture transmission which accomplished superior quality assurance and enhanced learners' language skills in the academic context. On the other hand, inappropriate vocabulary selection and transposition were the dominant challenges for implementing back-translation. It seems crucial to consider back-translation as an instructional tool in translation classes. Consequently, the current investigation is useful for language practitioners and instructors in higher education.

**Keywords:** Back-translation, Academic performance, Translation Studies.

#### INTRODUCTION

According to Newmark (1988), translation is used to transmit knowledge and culture. Lack of common culture between people in academic context can be solved by translation. Translation is recently seen as a specialized endeavor, which promotes "learners' autonomy and responsibility towards group work and quality" (Maruenda-Bataller & Santaemilia-Ruiz, 2012, p.97). According to Kelly (2005) far from the transmissionist methods of translation instruction, researchers in translation studies are in favour of generating a cooperative context via simulated translation instructions (Kelly, 2005). In this regard, Gile (2009) emphasizes that translation instruction should be parallel to the real exercise of translation. Thus, in the field of translation, practice - oriented teaching is needed in academic setting. Based on Horn and Sanders (1998) students taught by practical instructors gain more than those who are trained by less practice - oriented instructors. According to McGowan (2014), back-translation is a quality assessment technique used for all kinds of localization and translation projects. It aids clients assess the equivalences between the original and target text. It implies that the back- translation process considers the same text being translated twice, with one translator implementing the forward translation and the other conducting the backward translation. Thus, back-translation is a process which involves both forward and backward translations. According to Klausen (2016), forward translation involves translating texts from the original to the target language, while backward translation involves translating the identical manuscript from the target language back to the source language. Consequently, back-translation works as a quality appraisal technique which provides translation agency customers with correct translation which attains a superior quality assurance (McGowan,2014). Besides, it helps learners to assess the equivalence of connotation between source

and target manuscripts. Back-translation assist students become conscious of the changes between two languages, in word choice, collocation and sentence structure (Shu-ling,2016). According to Chen and Boore (2009) the use of back-translation method in translation classes informs students about language development and it will enhance learners' cultural awareness. Based on Yanti, Syarif and Hamzah (2020) back-translation has significant effect on students' translation achievement. The researchers believe that back-translation is a good method to be applied in teaching translation since the students will learn and understand both Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) deeply. Academically, little attention is given to the back-translation method; as a result, the current investigation reviewed the effect of incorporated back-translation instruction on translation achievement of translation students.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

If we want to look at this issue theoretically, we can say that the procedure of translating a document that has already been translated into a foreign language back to the original language, preferably by an independent translator is the back- translation (Pym, 2010). This method serves different purposes. For instance, in 1970s, by using this technique, a structural and conceptual comparison was made between source and target language translation of the Sacred texts. In the same way it was considered as a gloss translation of the primary version of the holy book (Gutt,1991). Based on Brislin's (1970, 1980) perspective, it is a way for checking the precision of translation in multi-country research. In back-translation, a text is translated into Target Language (TL) by a person fluent in two languages, after that the text is translated back into the source language by another bilingual person. Then, both types which are the original and the back-translated one are compared regarding the differences and similarities. The precision of back-translated type is regarded as the accuracy of the target translation. Cross-cultural social research is a general term that covers diverse are such as

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anthropology, cross-cultural psychology and educational studies. Cross-cultural researchers require to assess the quality of translation via asking the target text to have the same meaning as the source text. In this regard, back-translation is the best technique for quality assessment in international and cross-cultural social research. The idea of bringing together cognitive linguistics and translation studies is highlighted in this realm. In 1993 Elzbieta Tabakowska published a pioneering work which focused on cognitive framework to translation. According to Evans and Green (2006) cognitive linguistics is “an approach that has adopted a common set of guiding principles, assumptions and perspectives which have led to a diverse range of complementary, overlapping theories” (p.3). Cognitive linguistics is thoroughly associated with the development of cognitive science in the 1960s and 1970s, especially to the research on human categorization, in addition to prior traditions such as Gestalt psychology (Evans & Green, 2006). Thus, quality of translation and equivalence assessment can be implemented based on back-translation and this procedure is based on the objectivist view of linguistic meaning. In this regard, cognitive grammar, as a dominant theory in the general paradigm of cognitive linguistics, argues that meaning resides in conceptualization, and that interlocutors actively negotiate meaning in order to understand each other. Consequently, back-translation is an ideal platform for such negotiation. The central condition for the success of this process is to make sure that all its participants, particularly reviewers, comprehend the nature of linguistic meaning and share with each other their understanding of specific expressions (Tyupa, 2011).

## METHOD

In this review, the data were gathered using keywords and phrases of translation, back-translation academic performance, EFL/ESL students and a combination of those via searching several data bases from 1990 to 2021. The results of the studied articles were summarized.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Klaudy (1996) back-translation occurs when a translated text is translated (back) into the original language and the author may verify whether the translation captures all the characteristics of the original. In this regard, Khosravani *et al.*, (2013) claim that “back-translation is a common approach to test the accuracy of the translation, although its implementation in different contexts is sometimes significant subject to dispute” (p.43). Besides, Pym (2010) describes the process of back-translation as “taking the translation and rendering it back into the source language, then comparing the two source language versions” (p.30). In other words, back-translation is a technique to assess the accuracy of translation in multi-country study (Brislin 1970, 1980). The significant point is that Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) have considered back-translation as a procedure in which a text which has been translated into given language is re-translated into the source language. On the other hand, Ozolins (2009) highlights back-translation as a technique that has received little attention and much less study in cultural and communication researches. Some significant instructions about back-translation are introduced by Paegelow in 2008. These instructions serve as a basis in many investigations. Firstly, when applying back-translation, one has to keep the same quality control process as the original translation. Secondly, regarding the original and back-translated texts, only the differences that are significant should be compared. Lastly, the writer of the original source text should clear the ambiguities in the source text. Recently back-translation is frequently applied by translation agencies to provide high quality translations. Moreover, it is a procedure of quality control for

translations. It is worth noting that back-translation may occur at the end of a translation workflow, and it is used for translating the same document back from the target language to the original language (Roy, 2009). In this regard several studies (e.g., Brislin, 1970, Champman & Carter, 1979; Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki & Welch, 2014; Christensen, 2016; Prabhumoye, Tsvetkov, Salakhutdinov & Black, 2018; Werner & Campbell, 1970) highlighted the efficacy of this task in translation studies.

## Related studies in the world

Back-translation has not been entirely researched except some studies, which came close to this research concept. In this regard, back-translation for cross-cultural research by Brislin (1970) is one of the most quoted one for the concept of back-translation. Brislin's research focused on two aspects. First, elements that impress translation quality and second, how equivalence between source and target versions can be measured. Brislin's findings revealed that some back-translation texts may seem imperfect when they are written in target language version and the bilingual translation from the source language to the target language may keep many of the grammatical rules of the source text. As Brislin (1970) noted, the more literal the translation, the closer the back-translation will be to the source. Consequently, back-translation tends to favor literal translations, recognizing them as better translations.

**Table 1. Evolution of back-translation studies over the world**

Authors	Year	Main Findings
Hulin, Drasgow, & Parsons	1983	Translators with advanced technical abilities, provided acceptable back-translations. Besides, translations that kept the grammatical structures of the source language were not hard to back-translate.
Klaudy	1996	Findings demonstrated that the word count increased significantly when a Hungarian literary work was translated into English and then back-translated into Hungarian language.
Holmes	1988	It was observed that all the back-translation text by five translators differed from each other and the original text.
McKenna & Doward	2005	Based on the findings of this survey, items translated utilizing the two-panel technique were considerably preferred to those relying on back-translation.
Baker	2018	Back-translations supplied readers with an outline of the structure from the translated text.
Ling	2016	Back-translation helped English learners enhance their Chinese-English and English-Chinese translation skills, as well as their knowledge of language learning.
Rosyidah, Kharis, & Afifah	2017	Findings showed that the majority of students' work was equivalent to its source text. The translation challenges were mainly caused by inappropriate vocabulary selection and transposition.
Prabhumoye, Tsvetkov, Salakhutdinov & Black	2018	The findings revealed that back-translation was proper not just for style transfer, but for applying style, and removing style too.
Yanti, Syarif, & Hamzah	2020	Implementing back-translation technique improved students' translation achievement.
Mohammedian	2021	Back-translation developed creative writing skills and enhanced students' academic self-efficacy.

### Related studies in Iranian academic context

English translation is often complicated and difficult for EFL learners (Fotovatnia & Amiri, 2012). Because of the quick development of knowledge and global interaction, the attendance of skilled translators is felt more than previous decade in Iranian context (Ganji & Sadeghi, 2020). As translation has a significant role in technical, medical, business, and legal context, presenting translation syllabus has become a main concern in most universities. According to Sadeghi (2011) learners' communicative ability is dominant factor in university context. One feature of this communicative capability could be enhanced through translation tasks. While some courses are accessible for EFL students in translation studies, the productivity of such lessons is not suitable. Based on Sadeghi (2011) majority of the translation students in Iranian context experience diverse difficulties which may be related to the role of L1 transfer in collocational or prepositional structure and lack of adequate language base specially in vocabulary and grammar. In this regard, back-translation can assist EFL learners to overcome these difficulties. Although translation challenges are dominant factor in EFL context, less studies have focused on the field of the back-translation (e.g., Afrasiabifar, YaghmaeiFarideh, AbdoliSamereh & Abed Saeidi, 2006; Fotovatnia & Amiri, 2012; Khosravani&Dastjerdi,2013) in Iranian EFL context.

### Implication of the Study to the Educational Researchers

Back-translation has been utilized in cross-cultural studies mainly to evaluate the quality of the translation over 50 years. This was the first linguistic quality evaluation technique used in cross-cultural studies and has long been considered as a standard translation procedure (Dept, Ferrari, & Halleux, 2017; Edwards, Harkness & Villar, 2010). Thus, the application of this technique merit further attention in academic context. The results of the investigations credited to several factors namely the contexts of the study, ESL or EFL, the extent of the treatments, socio-cultural features and English expertise of the participants. Therefore, variety of components can affect the outcomes of the back-translation research. Following suggestions are provided for future investigation.

- Further research is needed to focus on the effect of collaborative back-translation on willingness to communicate of the learners.
- The effect of classroom discourse on students' performance through teacher's feedback during back-translation task implementation in translation classes
- The relationship between students' metacognitive knowledge awareness and its effect on learners' back-translation outcome.
- Further research is needed merely focus on incorporating students' feedback and student's interaction during back-translation task.

### CONCLUSION

As highlighted in this review, back-translation is a procedure of quality control for translations. This technique helps to recognize any areas of fault, ambiguity, mistakes or confusion that could arise with translation task. In this sense, translation can be regarded as an art rather than science (Toader, 2007). Review of studies highlighted that back-translation technique allows the students to compare and see their translation with the real text so that they became aware of the appropriateness of the translation in particular conditions. Implementing back-translation technique improves students 'self-efficacy and their translation achievement. Besides, students can enjoy the learning process since they would understand the gaps

between their knowledge and the language itself. Thus, back-translation is suitable to be applied in teaching translation and it helps students to learn and understand both SL and TL languages deeply. In this regard, the instructor should select an appropriate English text and students have to compare the back-translated text with the original manuscript. Likewise, it seems crucial instructors select material based on students' level of language proficiency. It can be noted that back-translation can be applied via students and instructor's interaction with in the social context of the class.

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