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Maximizing German to English Translation Proficiency: A Bottom-Up Approach Study

Abstract

In the realm of language education, the adoption of effective teaching methodologies holds paramount importance. This study addresses the discernible gap in the literature concerning the impact of a bottom-up approach on German-to-English translation. By scrutinizing the discrepancy between theories and practices, this research aims to shed light on the transformative potential of this innovative pedagogical approach. Conducted within the German Language Education Study Program at the Faculty of Language and Literature, Makassar State University, this qualitative descriptive research encompasses students enrolled in the *Einführung in der Uebersetzungswissenschaft* (Introduction to Translation) course during the odd semester of 2020/2021. The study's focal points include assessing students' mastery of translation theory as a foundational element for achieving overarching learning objectives, examining the strategies employed by instructors in implementing the bottom-up approach, developing tailored materials designed to inspire and engage students for optimal learning outcomes, and evaluating students' proficiency in translating German texts into English following the application of the bottom-up approach. Through comprehensive assessments utilizing testing as a primary data collection method, the results unequivocally demonstrate the affirmative impact of the bottom-up approach on the translation proficiency of students in transmuting German texts into English. This study reaffirms the pivotal role of innovative pedagogical approaches in enhancing language learning outcomes and underscores the significance of incorporating the bottom-up approach into German-to-English translation courses.

Keywords: Bottom-Up Approach, German-English Translation

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized age, nations are characterized by their openness, competitiveness, and mutual reliance, underscored by the vibrant interplay of languages and cultures (Olalla-Soller, 2018). This underscores the need for the ability to translate knowledge and progress from more advanced countries into English, enabling active participation in these global developments (Liao, 2006). The demand for transferring information, science, and technology from source languages to English has elevated the urgency of honing translation skills (Yao, 2017). This pivotal role of translation in knowledge dissemination is widely acknowledged, especially in a country like Indonesia, where a substantial portion of educational reference materials is published in foreign languages such as English, German, French, Arabic, and others.

Furthermore, translation proficiency is the competence or skill exhibited by an individual in adeptly converting text or speech from one language to another. It is a nuanced ability that transcends mere word-for-word translation (Pym, 2003). A proficient translator does not merely change words but effectively conveys the original meaning, tone, and context (Göpferich, 2009). This is crucial because language serves as a vessel for culture, emotion, history, and identity. In our globalized era, the role of such translators is indispensable (Shreve & Angelone, 2010). They bridge the gap between diverse cultures, ensuring that the core essence and sentiments of content remain intact across linguistic borders (Wilss, 1996).

Thus, the importance of this proficiency cannot be overstated. It safeguards against potential misinformation, especially in critical domains like law, medicine, and diplomacy,

where misinterpretations can have grave consequences (Colina, 2003). From an economic standpoint, businesses heavily rely on accurate translations to navigate international markets, with inaccuracies risking financial losses or missed ventures (Campbell, 1998). Furthermore, in academia, proficient translation propels knowledge dissemination, enabling groundbreaking research to reach a global audience (Alves & Gonçalves, 2007). Ultimately, a translator's proficiency is pivotal in fostering mutual understanding, respect, and collaboration in our interconnected world (Shreve & Angelone, 2010). Through this concerted effort, educational institutions are not only preparing students for their careers but also nurturing a cohort of linguistically adept professionals who will be instrumental in fostering cross-cultural understanding and intellectual progress on a global scale (Siepmann, 2019)

In addition, in the realm of translation learning, the bottom-up approach emerges as a systematic methodology that emphasizes mastering foundational elements before delving into complex linguistic structures. The use of linguistic cues in perception mechanisms is referred to as bottom-up processing (Khuziakmetov & Porchesku, 2016). This approach initiates the learning journey at the granular level, focusing on the basic components of both source and target languages, such as individual words and rudimentary grammatical structures. For instance, a learner delving into German-to-English translation would prioritize understanding common German verbs and nouns before grappling with idiomatic expressions like "Das ist mir Wurst," which, rather than a direct reference to sausage, means "I don't care" in English. As learners solidify their grasp on these foundational elements, they progressively tackle intricate linguistic nuances, from compound sentences to the tone and style of texts. Moreover, the advanced stages incorporate cultural sensitivities and historical contexts, ensuring translations resonate with both linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness. This structured learning pathway not only fortifies the knowledge base, preventing potential translation errors but also instills confidence in learners. Such an incremental approach, which ensures no stone is left unturned, serves as an effective antidote to translation incompetency.

Furthermore, in translation teaching, two predominant approaches are commonly employed: the bottom-up approach and the top-down approach. The choice between these approaches is contingent on the learners' linguistic proficiency. Baker (1992) posits that the top-down approach is more accessible for learners with limited linguistic mastery. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective of Harvey et al. (1995), who advocate for the bottom-up approach. While both approaches have their merits, Newmark (1991) and Kussmaul (1995) lean towards the efficacy of the bottom-up approach, emphasizing its requirement for a comprehensive analysis of source language texts in terms of lexicon, style, and reader register prior to translation. In light of the intricacies of the translation process, the application of appropriate approaches becomes paramount.

However, the abundance of these resources is rendered futile if users lack proficiency in the respective language. This makes translated language a hybrid product influenced by many language users (Bisiada, 2017). This predicament underscores the challenge of disseminating scientific and technological knowledge to a broader community, particularly within the academic sphere.

Finally, in accordance with the theoretical framework, the German Language Education Study Program at FBS Makassar State University offers a three-semester

curriculum to train students in translation. In the third semester, students start with an introductory course on translation theories and practices. By the fifth semester, they move to a more practical course where they actively practice translation. In the seventh semester, there is an advanced course for those wanting deeper knowledge in specific translation areas. The goal is to ensure students understand translation theory, get practical experience, and have the chance to specialize, preparing them for real-world translation challenges. This program aims to produce well-rounded graduates ready for the translation industry. So, from the theories before, this study delves into the bottom-up approach, known for its meticulous linguistic analysis, to uncover its impact on enhancing German-to-English translation proficiency.

METHOD

The research was conducted in the "Einfuehrung der Uebersetzungswissenschaft" (Introduction to Translation) course at the Faculty of Language and Literature, Makassar State University. The researcher aimed to assess the effectiveness of a structured, bottom-up approach in improving German-to-English translation skills among students. A total of 15 students, already possessing a foundational understanding of both languages, participated in the study. This cohort primarily consisted of beginners, some of whom had no prior exposure to the German language in high school, thus indicating a foundational level of linguistic knowledge. Given this context, the research employed a bottom-up approach to provide these novice learners with a structured introduction to translation theories and practice. This methodological choice was deemed most suitable to establish a robust foundation for subsequent translation exercises.

Employing the Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach, the study was designed across 16 sessions. Classroom action research can be used to solve problems that arise in the classroom based on the context, can be done quickly and directly, and allows teachers to design their own learning management systems properly (Impedovo & Ferreira-Meyers, 2019; Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014). The initial seven sessions focused on fundamental aspects of translation, delving into vocabulary differences, grammar rules, and cultural influences on translation. These sessions culminated in a comprehensive review to ensure students' grasp of the core concepts. To investigate the impact of the bottom-up approach, a range of translation exercises were administered. These exercises spanned various linguistic levels, including word, phrase, sentence, and clause translation (Newmark, 1991). Feedback sessions and discussions were incorporated to address questions and challenges encountered during the exercises. The data collection process extended throughout the duration of the course to allow for a comprehensive evaluation of the students' progress.

The eighth session marked the midterm examination, designed to evaluate students' theoretical understanding alongside practical translation abilities. Following the midterm, subsequent sessions were devoted to revisiting key concepts, addressing prevalent errors from the exam, and introducing advanced translation techniques. This rigorous preparation led to the final examination in the sixteenth session, which tested students on the entire spectrum of their learning. Data collection consisted of scores from both examinations. Additionally, feedback was gathered from students' post-midterm and at the conclusion of the course. By juxtaposing scores from the initial and concluding stages of the course, the researcher sought to elucidate the tangible benefits of the bottom-up approach

in enhancing translation proficiency. Moreover, initial scrutiny focused on individual translations to assess accuracy and adherence to translation theories. Subsequently, performance across different linguistic levels was compared to identify any discernible patterns or areas necessitating improvement. Feedback and discussion records were organized and examined to glean insights into specific challenges faced by the students. The overall progress of the class was also evaluated to gauge the effectiveness of the bottom-up approach in enhancing translation proficiency among beginner-level learners.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the sample class, the translation learning process was structured over 16 sessions, with 14 dedicated to theory presentations and two sessions designated for assessment through midterm and final semester exams. The initial seven meetings were primarily focused on in-depth discussions of the course material. The eighth session marked the midpoint of the course, during which a comprehensive midterm exam was administered. This exam was strategically designed with two distinct components: the first aimed to evaluate students' comprehension and mastery of the discussed theories, while the second encompassed translation tests involving sentences and phrases. This dual-pronged approach served to gauge their proficiency in applying the acquired theory to practical translation exercises.

Subsequently, sessions nine through fifteen revisited theories not covered in the preceding meetings, emphasizing a comprehensive understanding before progressing further. Prior to delving into new material, additional attention was given to rectifying any recurring application errors. The final session (session 16) was dedicated to the culmination of the course - the final semester exam. Similar to the midterm examination, it encompassed two segments: one assessing the students' grasp of theory and the other, a translation test. However, the translated texts used to evaluate their translation skills were notably more intricate, comprising short passages structured with simple sentence patterns tailored to their proficiency level.

The sample exam highlighted several challenges students faced. For instance, the German sentence *Der Hund schläft im Garten* was initially translated as "The dog sleeps in garden," missing the English article "the". Another example is *Ich esse gern Schokolade*, which was translated as "I eat gladly chocolate," revealing a tendency towards literal translation. These early translations indicated struggles with vocabulary acquisition, understanding German's unique grammatical nuances, and an inclination to produce translations that felt unnatural in English.

After the intervention, there was a clear shift in the students' translation abilities. A deeper grasp of common German words led to fewer basic vocabulary errors. Their improved understanding of German grammar, a direct result of the bottom-up approach, allowed for more accurate translations of intricate structures. Furthermore, with foundational knowledge secured, students began crafting translations that were more idiomatic to English. The newfound confidence was evident as students tackled complex translations with increased assurance. The progression of their skills also became evident in their handling of idiomatic expressions.

Revisiting the aforementioned sample sentences post-intervention provides a clear illustration. The German *Der Hund schläft im Garten* was accurately translated as "The dog

sleeps in the garden." Similarly, *Ich esse gern Schokolade* evolved to the more natural "I like to eat chocolate." These refined translations demonstrate the students' progress from mere word recognition to a deeper understanding of context, grammar, and cultural nuances.

This meticulously structured approach to the translation learning process not only ensured a balanced integration of theory and practical application but also provided a comprehensive evaluation framework. The inclusion of progressively complex translation exercises aimed at enhancing their proficiency levels. The combination of theoretical comprehension and practical translation skills assessment in both midterm and final semester exams facilitated a thorough understanding of their progress over the course duration. By employing this strategic framework, the students were not only exposed to a diverse range of translation challenges but also provided ample opportunity for growth and development in their German-to-English translation abilities.

The application of the Bottom-Up approach yielded a discernibly positive impact on the learning of German-English translation. This assertion is substantiated by the notable progression in students' performance. Specifically, the average score in the mid-semester exam stood at 71.6, which saw a commendable increase to 80.1 in the subsequent end-of-semester evaluation.

Table 2. Students result

Student No	Mid-Semester Score	End-of-Semester Score
1.	70	82
2.	72	80
3.	75	83
4.	67	79
5.	73	78
6.	70	81
7.	71	82
8.	69	78
9.	74	80
10.	72	83
11.	68	77
12.	76	81
13.	70	79
14.	73	84
15.	72	80
Average	71.6	80.1

This upward trend unequivocally underscores the pivotal role of a comprehensive understanding of translation theory in enhancing practical translation abilities. In essence, the Bottom-Up approach, characterized by its foundational emphasis on theory before progressing to practical exercises (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019), significantly contributes to the acquisition of proficient German-to-English translation skills. By systematically commencing with the provision of theory and transitioning to translation practice, which initially entails exercises involving simple sentences or phrases before advancing to more complex texts, students are adeptly guided toward achieving a higher level of competence in translating German texts into English. It is crucial to understand the intricate differences

in the composition and intention of texts in both languages. For instance, the differences between the English and German texts are manifold (Snell, 1999).

Utilizing a structured methodology, learners are endowed with the vital theoretical foundation, laying a robust groundwork for enhancing their translation skills. The bottom-up approach in translation learning distinctly showcases its potency by the noticeable enhancement of students' ability to translate sentences, phrases, and concise texts. This progress can be pinpointed to several crucial elements integral to the learning journey.

First, the reiterated emphasis on theoretical elucidation is crucial. This repeated exposure consolidates students' grasp of translation theory, moving beyond mere acquisition to deep-seated application. By periodically revisiting these foundational concepts, learners become adept at contextualizing them during translation tasks. This iterative connection to theory deepens understanding, ensuring a more profound grasp of its core tenets. Secondly, vocabulary mastery is indispensable in translation. Proficiency in vocabulary considerably heightens students' reading comprehension and auditory understanding. Furthermore, the deliberate tactics adopted by instructors, aligned with the stages of the bottom-up approach, are fundamental for successful outcomes (Yeldham, 2015). By consistently applying this method, educators forge a seamless and evolutionary learning landscape. It guarantees that students first encounter the bedrock concepts of translation theory, paving the way for more intricate challenges. This methodical advancement aids in supporting their academic journey, incrementally enhancing their prowess and assurance in translating from German to English.

Moreover, the careful selection and adaptation of teaching materials constitute a critical component of the learning process. In particular, materials related to the provision of sentences, paragraphs, or texts are tailored to align with the students' existing knowledge and linguistic mastery. This customization ensures that the content is appropriately challenging yet within their grasp, striking a balance that encourages both engagement and comprehension. By aligning the materials with the students' proficiency level, instructors facilitate a learning experience that is both accessible and conducive to meaningful progress.

In conclusion, the success of translation learning through the bottom-up approach hinges on a multifaceted approach (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019). The strategic repetition of theoretical explanations, adherence to structured learning stages, and the careful selection of tailored teaching materials collectively contribute to the students' improved proficiency in translating German texts into English. This holistic approach reinforces theoretical foundations and cultivates a dynamic learning environment that nurtures practical skills. By addressing the diverse needs of learners and providing them with the necessary tools and guidance, educators play a pivotal role in shaping the success of translation learning through the bottom-up approach.

CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the research findings and extensive discussions surrounding the application of the bottom-up approach in learning German to English translation, several key conclusions emerge. Firstly, for learners at the beginner level, it is imperative to employ the bottom-up approach in translation education. This foundational approach ensures that students receive the necessary groundwork in

translation theory before embarking on practical exercises. Secondly, the positive impact of implementing the bottom-up approach on the learning outcomes of German-to-English translation is evident. This is substantiated by the notable increase in average scores achieved by students, both in the mid-semester and final semester examinations. The success of this approach is closely tied to its meticulous application, particularly among beginner-level students who require fundamental knowledge in translation before engaging in practical exercises. Furthermore, the effectiveness of bottom-up translation learning is attributed to its systematic progression, guiding students through the gradual implementation of theories prior to delving into translation practice.

Building on these findings, several recommendations emerge: First, the selection of an appropriate approach to learning is pivotal in ensuring that educational objectives are optimally attained. It is imperative to tailor the approach to the specific needs and proficiency levels of the learners. Moreover, the adoption of the bottom-up approach in translation learning is strongly advised, given its demonstrable positive impact on learning outcomes. This approach has proven to be particularly effective, especially for novice learners. Additionally, to facilitate the successful implementation of a bottom-up approach in translation education, adequate human resources are essential. Instructors, serving as the linchpins of the learning process, play a crucial role in steering students toward achieving maximum learning objectives.

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