

The Role of Translation as a Pedagogy for Improving Written Communication: An Indian B-School case study

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Abstract

Business communication has gained vital importance in the conduct of any business around the globe. English is accepted as the global language. It is essential for students from non-English speaking countries to know the language and strengthen their vocabulary. This paper has experimented with the usage of translations as a means of enhancing English vocabulary. Students were trained in translating essays from Hindi to English and vice versa, to help them think of new and appropriate English words while doing so. A comparison was made between these students and others who were not subjected to the translation exercises through a vocabulary test to understand if the translation exercises made any significant difference in terms of improving the vocabulary of those who were trained.

Keywords

Translation, Communication, Vocabulary, English, Training, Language

Introduction

A business management degree from a reputed B-school ensures that the student holding the degree has adequate managerial skills required to face the corporate world (Shukla, 2013). The management education system is built on knowledge that needs to be regularly updated. Up gradation of curriculum, teaching styles and the syllabus, designing content to match corporate requirements, integrating corporate needs with the students' skills and delving into relevant areas of research are the need of the hour. There is also a need to upgrade pedagogical styles from time to time. With the introduction of digital media and AI, the chalk and board style of teaching has become obsolete in many subjects that are being offered at B-schools. The

lecture style has been dominantly used for over a period of several decades. This method also is fading away in the Indian B-school teaching context. In the lecture method, students typically become so concerned and engrossed about the technical and theoretical derivations that they miss the practical value of learning (Giles & Voola, 2006). Faculty at many B-schools have trying and testing different forms of teaching methodologies to create an environment for active and engaged learning in the classroom.

Business communication has been an integral part of every B-school's curriculum. According to Piran and Sheenan (2009), communication involves transferring information to permit those who receive the information to interpret it and initiate appropriate actions. Communication is the process passing on of a message from one person, which is received and understood by others. Media involved for communication is a tool for storing and transmitting data to deliver information (Elving & Hansma, 2008).

Companies that recruit B-school students expect them to be eloquent and articulate in English (Latha, 2023). These organizations require skilled employees who are proficient in the English language. Hariharasudan (2018) analyzed the need for Business English communication in the Garments Industries in Tirpur, India. Showed that garment traders needed to be well versed with the English language if they wanted to successfully run their business. English not only plays an important role within India, but is also useful in international interactions. In terms of international interactions, English chiefly acts as a global lingua franca (Sneddon, 2003).

(Traxler & Gernsbacher, 1992) suggested that written communication requires three mental representations. One representation is what the writer want to convey, another representation is of the text as it is written, and finally the interpretation of the reader. In the Indian context, written business communication in English needs to be taught in the classroom through lectures, exercises and workshops as English is the second language of most Indians.

In a typical Indian B-school classroom scenario, a facilitator or the faculty spend a minimum of 90 minutes with the students for delivering one single lecture. For practicing written English, the following pedagogical styles have been employed by the researcher to assess the students' ability to write and the level of improvement desired.

1. Translation

- a. Process- The facilitator distributes research work carried out in Hindi by Indian authors among the students. Students are supposed to read these articles and translate them into English. Each article could run up to 5 or 6 pages.
- b. Purpose- literary translation involves taking ideas expressed in one language and ‘carrying them across’ into the terms of another (The art of translation in a continuous world by Tim Ingold).

Language scholars and professors have considered translation as an inappropriate pedagogical tool in a classroom situation, and attributed it as the major cause of students’ inability to learn a new language (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). Studies suggest that encouraging students to speak and write in English while avoiding any use of their first language is the key to excel in English (Almoayidi, 2018). The main concern here is the belief that translations promote impractical and unnecessary language content (e.g., memorizing unneeded vocabulary and grammar) which in turn could deter learners from accepting the target language and cause a cognitive overload (Liu & Shi, 2007). However, language students have the ability to understand foreign languages by relating them to the known native languages (Cook, 2007). For instance, adult learners depend on their native language to learn any foreign language. Beginners or lower-level students can learn English by using their first language (Pan & Pan, 2012; Mutlu, Bayram, and Demirbüken, 2015; Putrawan, 2019). (Dulay et al 1982) characterize such habit as an adults’ cognitive factor in the form of conscious language learning. Furthermore, Harmer (2007) believes that translation is a natural process of learning a foreign language when students translate foreign language into their first language. This idea is supported by the emerging recognition of translation as a learning strategy from recent publications (Aktekin & Gliniecki, 2015; Al-Musawi, 2014; Asgarian & Musayeva Vefalı, 2015; Bagheri & Fazel, 2011; Calis & Dikilitas, 2012; Dagilienė, 2012; Kuluşaklı, Boynukara, & Genç, 2018; Liao, 2006).

- c. Output - Hindi-operating businesses all over India want to establish themselves in English speaking market. For this, it is essential to know and understand the intricacies involved in both English and Hindi to ease the translation process. The major benefit of translating content from Hindi to English is to get rid of any misunderstandings that may lead to losses.

Implementation

A study was carried out to test the ability of students to change and rephrase an essay written in English.

Students were divided into 2 groups. Students from Group A and B of the B-school were grouped separately for the purpose of the study.

Group A was given translation exercises 3 times a week. They were instructed to translate essays written in Hindi to English, English to Hindi and rephrase essays from English to English. This exercise continued for 3 months. At the end of three months students from Group A finished working on 36 essays. Group B on the other hand was only given the exercise of rephrasing essays from English to English once a week. Students in this Group worked on a total of 9 essays.

Students from both the Groups were then tested on their rephrasing skills.

Results

The essays of both Groups were assessed on the following rubrics.

Word Choice

- a. The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words seems accurate, natural, and not forced. (5 marks awarded)
- b. The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and/or seems overdone. (4 marks awarded)
- c. The author uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety. (3 marks awarded)
- d. The writer uses a limited vocabulary. Jargon or clichés may be present and detract from the meaning. (2 marks awarded)

Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling

- a. All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling. (5 marks awarded)
- b. Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, but they do not interfere with understanding. (4 marks awarded)

- c. Most sentences are well constructed, but they have a similar structure and/or length. The author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding. (3 marks awarded)
- d. Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. The author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding. (2 marks awarded)

Word Choice

Marks	5	4	3	2	Total No. of Students
Group A No. of students	36	25	8	1	60
Group B No of students	26	14	17	3	60

Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling

Marks	5	4	3	2	Total No. of Students
Group A No. of students	36	19	3	2	60
Group B No of students	20	14	15	8	60

Discussion

The test results clearly show a difference in the grades obtained by both the groups. Group A has outscored Group B in almost all aspects. 36 students of Group A who were trained for 3 months scored 5 marks in both 'word choice' and Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling, as compared to group B where a total of 20 and 26 students fared well.

The results suggest that Group A generally performed better than Group B in both "Word Count" and "Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling" attributes. Specifically:

1. **Word Count:** Group A scored higher (4.33) compared to Group B (4.05) on average. This could indicate that individuals in Group A tend to use a more appropriate and varied range of vocabulary or are better at expressing themselves using a sufficient number of words.
2. **Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling:** Group A again outperformed Group B with a higher average score (4.45 vs. 3.87). This suggests that Group A likely demonstrates more robust proficiency in constructing grammatically correct sentences, maintaining proper punctuation, and spelling accurately compared to Group B.

In summary, the results indicate that the training program has had a more significant positive impact on the communication skills of individuals in Group A compared to Group B, particularly in terms of word usage and language mechanics.

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