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An Investigation of The Importance of Translation Activities in Solving ESP  
Vocabulary Learning Difficulties - EFL undergraduate

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ABSTRACT

The aimed of this study is to investigate the importance of translation activities as a teaching method in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) particularly, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) class, by highlighting its advantages, as revealed by recent research in the field. In this study, experimental methods will be adopted. The population of the study were 50 university students, the proposed experiment will be conducted at Omdurman Ahlia University- college of Administrative Sciences where there will be two groups of students. One group will be taught ESP vocabulary through translation activities. The experiment is expected to take nine weeks. Measuring the value of translation activities in solving ESP vocabulary. The study comes up with the following findings: There are difficulties in learning ESP vocabulary, students are taught to learn language from word-lists in isolation from context, the text chosen for translation should be authentic, and contextualized, translation activities have great role in Students learning ESP vocabulary, and translation activities can solve ESP vocabulary learning difficulties.

**Key words:** Translation activities - English for Specific Purposes. Vocabulary

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Introduction

As global communication is becoming easier and faster, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a fundamental branch in English language teaching. Professionals increasingly demand ESP programs to match the development in their own field. Researchers have conducted studies to determine effective teaching approaches and learning strategies for ESP learners. Chung T. M. & Nation P (2004) have indicated that the greatest obstacle for acquiring a second language is students' limited vocabulary size.

ESP vocabulary always presents a major linguistic obstacle to non-native English-speaking students.

Consequently, effective ESP vocabulary teaching plays a crucial role in successfully implementing ESP programs.

Nonetheless, ESP vocabulary teaching has been a neglected area in ESP research during previous decades.

Researchers (Chung T. M. & Nation P, 2004) and teachers have focused less attention on it than on syntax and phonology. Although ESP vocabulary does not receive as much attention as language specialists suggest, numerous

ESP practitioners have advocated the learning of lexical items according to semantic systems.

Kennedy, C. And Botitho, R (1984), suggested that a sound knowledge of term-formation processes improves the reading skills required for reading a foreign language for specific purposes.

Vocabulary acquisition is a long-term process, requiring much work. Although some students spend a lot of time on trying to increase their lexicon: to memorize words and collocations for the purposes of oral and written communication, and to understand the vocabulary while listening and reading - the results are still quite poor. One of the reasons is applying ineffective strategies of vocabulary learning. Kennedy, C. And Botitho, R (1984,) indicate: researchers have collected much evidence that supports explicit strategy instruction. The teaching of strategies empowers readers, particularly those who struggle, by giving them the tools they need to construct meaning from text. Instead of blaming comprehension problems on students' own innate abilities, for which they see no solution, explicit strategy instruction helps students to take control of their own learning and comprehension.

ESP Vocabulary learning is a very important part of the curricula at Omdurman Ahlia University, the students who study here need to learn English for different purposes: to deal with the foreign business partners in their jobs, to use it for their studies, to travel abroad to meet other cultures or on holiday, to read professional literature in English, etc. In this study, effective ESP vocabulary teaching and learning strategies were investigated.

Translation is an activity or a strategy naturally employed by both language teachers and learners. Accordingly, despite some possible limitations, its potential should be studied and exploited since it could help language learners gain deeper understanding of what they do when they move between the two languages and thus indicate the areas that might require improvement. Furthermore, potential limitations or pitfalls of translation exercises can be predicted and remedied by carefully designing teaching activities involving translation. For example, Carreres, Á. (2006: 6) claims that "translation misleads students into thinking that expressions in two languages correspond one-to-one". It is true that learners may have great difficulties in mastering one-to-many correspondences between L1 and L2

Translation was a significant part of EFL for a long time, and then a significant missing part for a long time also. With the arrival and then total dominance of communicative methodologies, translation was quickly consigned to the past. Along with other 'traditional' tools such as dictation, reading aloud and drills. However, it and these other abandoned activities are now a feature of many communicative classrooms and successful aids to learning, although the approach to using them has changed. Carreres, Á. (2006) points out teachers and students now use translation to learn, rather than learning translation. Modern translation activities usually moves from L1 to L2.(although the opposite direction can also be seen in the lessons with more specific aims and real cognitive depth, show high motivation levels and can produce impressive communicative results.

The history of translation in ELT methodologies as mentioned above, translation was the basis of language teaching for a very long time, and then rejected as new methodologies started to appear. It was the key element of the Grammar Translation Method, which was derived from the classical method of teaching Greek and Latin. This was not a positive learning experience for many: as well as learners memorizing huge lists of rules and vocabulary, this method involved them translating whole literary or historic texts word for word. Unsurprisingly, new methodologies tried to improve on this.

#### **Objective of the study**

- ❖ To identify the ESP vocabulary learning difficulties
- ❖ To explore the value of translation activities in solving and improving ESP vocabulary learning

#### **Questions of the study:**

This study tries to answer the following questions

- ❖ What are the ESP vocabulary learning difficulties?

- ❖ To what extent does translation activities can solve ESP vocabulary learning difficulties?

### Hypotheses of the study

This study hypothesize the following

- ❖ There are difficulties in learning ESP vocabulary.
- ❖ Translation activities solve ESP vocabulary learning difficulties

### Significance of the Study

The research investigates integrating translation activities in teaching ESP vocabulary at Omdurman Ahlia University. Khartoum State in the Sudan. Various researches granted that students have different many difficulties in ESP learning vocabulary. Therefore, the objectives are to investigate ways of teaching ESP through translation activities and it is going to find out the reasons behind university Students' learning ESP vocabulary learning difficulties. In addition, the importance of this research lies in the fact that using translation activities could assist in enhancing students' ability to improve ESP vocabulary and translation skills. Moreover, the results of this research will also be useful to guide instructor of ESP as well as students in using translation activities for their course. Furthermore, it can be helpful for syllabus designers in English language teaching in Sudan to develop their textbooks. As well as it is hoped that the proposed integrating translation activities will raise the students' motivation in learning English language.

### Problems of the study

The problem of this study could be stated on the fact that the EFL

Learners are encountering difficulties in knowing the meaning and how to deal with ESP vocabulary due to students' different backgrounds and levels, some of students are very weak in learning general English language vocabulary let alone ESP vocabulary which is more complicated than English General vocabulary beside the way of teaching ESP vocabulary where the teachers teach these vocabularies in isolated words. So this difficulty brings many problems concerned with understanding and analyzing this vocabulary in order to be used successfully. Students are also studying most of their subject-matter through English language and that most of the references are only available in English. In addition to, students are required to understand lectures, take notes, extract information from references and to write accurate definitions and terms in their final exams. For all that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is very important in specific fields.

### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this study, experimental methods will be adopted. The proposed experiment will be conducted at Omdurman Ahlia University- college of Administrative sciences where there will be two groups of students. One group will be taught ESP vocabulary through translation activities. The experiment is expected to take nine weeks. Measuring the value of translation activities in solving ESP vocabulary learning will be trying to control all variables and then measuring the improvement of respective students in using ESP vocabulary. While the other group "Control group" will be taught ESP vocabulary through usual strategies.

### Limitation of the study:

The study is prepared to be done in the fields of the ESP vocabulary for the EFL learners at: Omdurman Ahlia University- Administrative Sciences College - Khartoum State. Sudan.

### Literature Review

#### Differences between General EFL and English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

There are significant differences between general EFL and ESP as also many teachers of English would agree, although there are also similarities. The main focus in this section, however, is to discuss differences. First of all, it should be stressed that the purposes for learning English differ. In ESP courses, there is a need to learn English in order to perform specific job-related functions.

There is more emphasis, therefore, on language in context or language functions rather than grammar and language structures in general.

English is taught and integrated in the learners' subject area of interest. ESP should be thought of not as a different kind of language but a different approach to language teaching and this is why teaching instructions generally differ between ESP and general EFL. In general EFL courses, all the traditional language skills are covered, namely, Reading, Writing, Speaking and listening whereas in ESP more emphasis can be given to only one or two of them according to students' needs. ESP teachers need to perform different tasks not only as language experts but also as content specialists.

Further to these considerations, this paper argues that the use of translation in ESP classes can be a very useful and comprehensive approach to language learning in that it can include all four language skills traditionally employed to test learners' competence and performance. At the same time, it can be used to practice only one or two language skills but not necessarily all of them at once.

### **Translation as the 'Fifth' Language Skill**

Translation has been unpopular for years in foreign language classes due to the negative connotations resulting from the application of the so-called 'Grammar-Translation Method'. This approach to language was used in the past to teach Greek and Latin and eventually generalized to modern language teaching a few years later. The method was heavily criticized for the following reasons which, still to this day contributes to making translation appear an obsolete practice in foreign language courses. First, Instructions were given in the students' L1 so that there was little use of the target language. Second, vocabulary was taught through isolated word lists and so it was difficult for students to see that words may be used in different ways according to context because no context was actually provided. And third, little attention was given to pronunciation.

This paper argues that translation, both from L1 into L2 and vice versa, is a very complex activity which cannot be reduced to a merely linguistic activity in which structures from one language are transferred to structures in another language. Translation needs to be contextualized, and as such it requires attention to both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors, such as culture for example. It is surprising to see how the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages does not include translation in its testing modalities to determine proficiency levels.

Recent literature in applied linguistics, however, has shown significant signs of revival of translation in language teaching (Malmkjaer 1998: 1). Translation is more and more frequently evaluated as a positive form of interference aimed at enriching rather than harming learners' competence and performance skills. The use of translation in language classes might, of course, have some limitations but also benefits should be explored and taken into consideration. Translation should not be seen, and consequently treated, as a completely different language skill as compared to Reading, Writing, Speaking and listening because it is an activity which includes them and is, to a certain degree, dependent on them.

### **Translation as Vocabulary Builder**

ESP teachers should be aware of the importance of incorporating vocabulary teaching into their classes. Vocabulary seems to be one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of language teaching.

Most of the times, vocabulary is approached in a very unsystematic way which creates confusion for learners. When teaching vocabulary, teachers should not focus on every single word because there is no need and no time to do it. It is fundamental to help learners build their initial vocabulary by teaching them what is meant by 'learning words' and showing them how to learn the words most effectively. Specialized vocabulary may not seem to be the primary goal of

ESP language, but learners in these fields need to acquire their specialized terminology in order to better perform in their professions.

Vocabulary is a key element in any second language class because whereas grammar is important for meaning, without vocabulary no message is conveyed. There seems to be a tendency, especially in ESP courses, to provide students with word-lists and ready-made glossaries to help them acquire specialized vocabulary. Vocabulary, however, does not mean simply 'words' because words are seldom found in isolation. For any given word, indeed, there is always a wide range of other words which can occur or collate with it. These word combinations or relationships, often called collocations, are very important for learners and most of the time, serious errors occur as a result of a lack of translational equivalence between the first languages (L1) and the second language (L2).

In ESP, students have to learn high-priority lexis first, although in order to avoid lack of comprehension, low-frequency lexical items cannot be ignored either. Students should be taught to not translate word-for-word because ESP lexical items are context bound and can have a wide range of possible meanings according to the context. The problem is that in some languages courses students are taught to learn language from word-lists in isolation from context, it being claimed that this method allows students to learn faster as compared to learning in context. Referring to the pragmatic concept of 'meaning in context', ESP vocabulary should take place according to the following guidelines: First, the text chosen for translation should be authentic, and second, the text should be contextualized because learning vocabulary involves a much more complex task than simply memorizing words and phrases which have different meanings and can be used differently according to context or to collocations. In a contrastive bilingual situation, students can, thanks to translation, improve their ability to find an equivalent in L1 to match a lexical phrase in L2. Translation can teach students to learn vocabulary in two stages: students are taught to make a connection between the meaning and the form of the word, and then they must learn when to use or not use the word, its word relationships, its nuances, and so on.

Some of the most influential ESP theorists (Robinson 1991; Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998), state that, the teaching of vocabulary in the ESP class can be divided into three compartments: (1) technical vocabulary, where words are monogenic and are used exclusively in the domain in which they were created; (2) sub-technical vocabulary, where words are taken from the general language but have acquired one or several new meanings within the specialized field of application. Words, in this case, are polysomic retaining their original meaning and, at the same time, adding the meanings coming from the specialized area; and (3) general vocabulary of frequent use in a specific area, where words come from the general language and retain their meaning in the specialized field. Words are not technical terms, but they are nevertheless needed in order to gain a full understanding of the text.

One of the best vocabulary strategies to teach is to 'guess unknown words from context'. This task consists in teaching students to determine first a word's part of speech, and then they should look for clues around the word to help with the meaning. The next step is to ask them to replace that word with a synonym and see whether it makes sense. In the ESP context this could be done more easily as compared to general EFL classes because the command of English is higher and ESP students have already acquired a good knowledge of general English. Business English written language is often characterized by the extensive use of collocations and idiomatic expressions, but also by standard phrases which are typically used in business situations.

Thus, in teaching scientific English, that is ESP for science students, it is very important to match their future needs. In science, like in several other fields, English is lingua franca, as most research is published in English. Language should not be a hindrance to researchers, but a tool to convey a clear message. If students of biology, ecology or agriculture are lucky to work in the fields that they are training for, they will need: 1) to read and write in English (articles, scientific papers, presentations, posters, projects, for which they will require a clear and accurate understanding of the text, both in English and in Arabic and 2) to connect with other researchers – most likely via written correspondence, but also directly, through verbal communication. Kic-Drgas, (2014: 256-257) points out, learners' needs is stronger than in EFL. Translation may not be suited for all learners, but it is very helpful in ESP where accurate equivalence, as well as work on authentic texts are required for the learners' needs. When students graduate and work in their field of choice, such activities may prove very useful as they will have a set of common phrases specific to that domain and to which they can

always refer, as well as skills for further learning. They will be provided with a basic foundation, the tools needed to face new linguistic challenges in their future professional life. Thus, given the particular needs of these learners, many of the points made by researchers, and presented in the previous section, apply very well to ESP, a growing branch of EFL with distinct objectives. However, when translation activities are planned for the ESP class, some factors need to be considered. In order to make them into a successful technique of language acquisition, the teacher should take into account, among other aspects, the learners' level of English, the learners' level of scientific knowledge, and their motivation to learn. For elementary levels, translation can be used to consolidate grammar, for intermediate and advanced levels, translation may be used to correct errors and point out interference and negative transfer (Newark, 1991, quoted by Ross, 2000; Popovic, 2001), in other words work on nuances and improve knowledge of L2. While most researchers agree that translations are most useful at elementary levels (Atkinson, 1987: 242), even learners with intermediate or advanced knowledge of L2 can reap benefits from this type of activity, especially in ESP, where just good command of English is not enough. Thus, translation can be integrated and emerge as a fifth skill (Ross, 2000; Fernández-Guerra, 2014: 155; Kic-Drgas, 2014: 258) alongside the other four: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The second consideration mentioned above, namely the learners' scientific knowledge is specific to ESP and an important element required for the success of the translation activities. The more the students know about their domain, the easier it is for them to understand and learn specific formulations, phrases, collocations and other instances of English phraseology specific to the scientific text. However, in my experience, students' knowledge is not considerable, especially in the first year of tertiary education. The third issue, learners' motivation, is probably the most important and affects the successful implementation of any teaching activity. This is a complex topic, to which considerable research has been devoted, and which I also discussed in a previous paper: —While most of them [students] acknowledge the importance of being able to speak English, others dismiss it entirely, even though the course is designed using corpora and authentic information specific to their respective domains, and based on needs analysis and the range of possible jobs specific to the field of activity they train for. (Chirobocea, 2017: 364) claims, he ESP teacher must face hostile attitudes on the part of students who, ignorant of reality, reject the inclusion of English in their scientific education. Others do not envisage themselves practicing science or being involved in a job that requires knowledge of English. Learners' motivation is also affected by the unequal level of English proficiency among a group. Separating the learners into groups according to their level of knowledge is often an unattainable goal for many teachers, I included, and as such arrangements require space and time that are not available. Learners' motivation also fluctuates depending on the time of day the English class is scheduled, on the number of classes they had that day, and on subjective factors such as tiredness, hunger, emotional state and others which are usually disregarded when learning methods and techniques are proposed. 4. Objectives of translation activities in the ESP class various researches offer a multitude of examples of how translations can be used in class, and even entire course designs organized around translation activities (Laviosa and Cleverton, 2006: 7-11) In the researcher ESP classes, has often employed most of the types of translation activities suggested above, as he noticed the students understood better certain elements of vocabulary when compared with L1 (Arabic). His experience with this method, over the years, has been largely successful. He also found that students pay special attention to these exercises compared to other activities. The context is tertiary education, English classes for students at the Omdurman Ahlai University (Administrative Sciences College). In this context, English is taught for two years (four semesters during the first two years), with two hours per week.

In terms of their advantages in class, what he noticed from his experience was that translation activities are particularly useful in the teaching and learning of specialized vocabulary, which represents an important part of ESP. They can be helpful in the introduction of new terminology. In such cases, there are two options: either the terminology is given directly before the translations, as a list, with an explanation for each word or the L1 equivalent, or it is left to the students to look it up in dictionaries or glossaries of terms. The latter solution has advantages and disadvantages. Bilingual dictionaries of specific terminology are not widely available, nor do they even exist for certain branches of science. An alternative is the internet, which provides explanations for scientific terms, but where correct or complete equivalents in L1 are not available or reliable. The advantages in asking students to look up terms are interactivity, communication and teamwork, which

encourage learning, both of English and of science. However, such an activity is time consuming, and time is often a luxury in the ESP class.

Translations also help point other specific elements of vocabulary such as false friends, synonymy, homonymy, polysemy, positive and negative transfer related to prefixes, suffixes or specific phraseology. Translation activities can serve very well as revision at the end of a particularly terminology-rich class. Carefully targeted translations help revise and consolidate the specialized vocabulary and work as a reminder in terms of both meaning and spelling. A post-reading activity can also help introduce and understand new vocabulary, especially collocations, as well as other elements that construct meaning. For example, some phrases are taken from an English text and given in Arabic after the text.

As a post-reading activity, the students are asked to read the text and look for the English equivalent for those phrases in the text. This activity works in the other direction as well, namely, certain portions of sentences that contain specific difficulties in English are taken out of the text and the students are asked to give a translation into Arabic. This type of activity, both from L1 into L2 and from L2 into L1, is more integrated and helpful with any type of language issue. It involves a more global understanding of the text, as well as awareness of specific elements that make the difference.

A more practical approach will be the next step in this research, as the researcher proposes to design an experiment in the attempt to quantify more precisely how translation practice is specifically useful for learners in the ESP vocabulary.

### Data Analysis

#### Comparison of the Experimental and Control Groups in Pre-test

The mean scores of the two groups are compared in the pre-test; the mean of the experimental group is (18.70), while the mean of the control group is (13.02). The t-value is found to be (4.80); it is compared with the t-distribution, which is found to be (1.64) at the level of significance (0.05) and degree of freedom (44). This indicates that there is a significant difference in the pre-test of the written test between the experimental group and control group. That means that the experimental group is better than the control group

Variables Group	X <sup>-</sup>	S.D	T-test Value		Level of Significance
			Calculated	Tabulated	
Experiment	18.70	4.37	4.80	1.64	0.05
Control group	13.02	4.01			

#### Comparison of the Experimental and Control Groups in Post -test

The mean scores of the two groups are compared in the post-test; the mean of the experimental group is (20.01), while the mean of the control group is (13.32). The t-value is found to be (7.35); it is compared with the t-distribution, which is found to be (1.64) at the level of significance (0.05) and degree of freedom (44). This indicates that there is a significant difference in the pre-test of the written test between the experimental group and control group. That means that the experimental group is better than the control group.

Variable group	No of Subject	X <sup>-</sup>	S.D	T-test value		Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated	
Experiment	25	20.01	10.412	7.35	1.64	0.05
Control	25	13.32	9.312			

Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the experimental group is favour than the control group because there are highly significant differences between them in pre and post tests

The statistical analysis of the results shows that the achievement of the students in the experimental group is highly significantly in average than that of the control group in pre and post- tests. This can be interpreted to successful using of the Translation Activities solving ESP vocabulary learning. The results of the present research may be due to the following reasons:

- ❖ There are difficulties in learning ESP vocabulary.
- ❖ Students are taught to learn language from word-lists in isolation from context.
- ❖ The text chosen for translation should be authentic, and contextualized.
- ❖ Translation activities have great role in Students learning ESP vocabulary.
- ❖ Translation activities can solve ESP vocabulary learning difficulties.

### Conclusion

As many valid sources have demonstrated, with surveys and classroom-tested methods, translation used as a teaching technique in EFL classes has legitimate value and does not hinder learning, on the contrary, it helps in this process, as Radmila Popovic(2001) suggested: —if a strong case for translation in the language classroom is to be made, at least three things ought to be demonstrated: that criticisms against it are not valid, that learners need it, and that it promotes their learning. Of course, according to Dagiliene, 2012: 126) results are best when the method is used judiciously, when the activities are well planned (Dagiliene, 2012: 126) and designed with the learners' needs in mind, especially when it comes to ESP: —the success of TILT lies in its correct use as a working and learning tool, with appropriate activities that help students to contrast their native and foreign languages, to improve their language skills, and to see the usefulness of the task Fernández-Guerra, 2014: 156). Or rather, as Vivian Cook puts it with the states she offers for the success of the method, if we are going to use it, we might as well use it well (Cook, 2001: 418). The researcher's experience in the ESP class has emphasized the validity of these theories and proved that many elements specific to the scientific text such as vocabulary and specialized terminology, word order can be more easily understood and further consolidated by learners through translation, which is, undeniably, a useful tool in the ESP class. The overview of the recent research on this topic, presented in this paper, shade alight to the positive aspects of using translation in class and revisited this wrongly marginalized teaching method. It also listed a few types of translation activities and their possible uses in the ESP class, as they revealed their advantages in my classroom experience. In conclusion, given the arguments presented above and supported by the recent research on the topic, translation used as a teaching technique is useful and efficient, and should definitely be reconsidered as a valuable aid in the EFL class in general and the ESP class in particular, where the correct use of language in the accurate construction of the message have paramount importance.

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