



The Acquisition Of Translation Competence Through Cognitive And Metacognitive Strategies Of Iraqi EFL Students

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Abstract

This research examined the acquisition of translation competence through cognitive and metacognitive strategies of Iraqi EFL students. The participants of the research were Iraqi 100 EFL students from university of Mosul\Iraq - department of translation. The main findings indicated significant improvements in students' use of these strategies in their translation competence in terms of accuracy, fluency, and competence. The research was guided by the following questions: **1:** What are the effects of acquisition of cognitive strategies on the translation competence of Iraqi EFL students? **2:** How do cognitive strategies impact the retention of English vocabulary and grammar among translation students? **3:** To what extent does the acquisition cognitive strategies influences students' motivation and engagement in translation studies?The results also revealed that cognitive strategies can enhance translation skills effectively. Moreover, The findings revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and control group at posttests in favor of the experimental group. The experimental group learners in translation in the posttest have remarkably increased indicating the positive acquisition of translation competence through cognitive strategies. In light of the findings obtained, a number of recommendations and some suggestions for further studies are provided.

Keywords: acquisition , cognitive strategies, translation, competence

Introduction

Competence is mainly employed in many disciplines and different contexts, it is difficult to a suitable definition that fosters all different methods in which it was employed. Besides, it is expected that the term is being developed. (Albir, 2007). On the other hand, translation of the term also depends on different situations such as nationality, culture and linguistic. For example, in some circumstances the term is used to describe the training process of skills, but not axiomatically in professional development and higher cognitive fields. (Schneckenberg & Wildt, 2006). As Norris (1991) suggested competence definition has become complicated since the practical aspect of competence has been overshadowed by the theoretical confusion. The context and importance of EFL in Iraq faced specific challenges in learning translation. Therefore, the research aimed at enhancing translation studies through strategic learning approaches. Students may not find a suitable environment to communicate. Furthermore, students in the classroom may not find enough time to communicate inside the class. Students in the classroom may also be afraid of making mistakes in front of their classmates. The competence in EFL and the capability to translate effectively are indispensable for Iraqi students for developing their English and translation. Addressing the educational challenges through strategic interventions could significantly bolster their linguistic and cultural competencies. This research focused on metacognitive and cognitive strategies, aimed to contribute to the pedagogical practices in translation studies, potentially transforming how English is taught and learned in Iraq.

Background: Importance of EFL in Iraq and Challenges in Learning Translation

English is universally acknowledged as a pivotal tool in global discourse used extensively in international business, technology, diplomacy, and academia. For Iraq, a country rebuilding its institutions and economy, English is a vital global activity. It facilitates access to international aid, educational programs, and global markets, thereby playing a vital role in the nation's development (Smith, 2018).

However, learning English in Iraq is complicated by specific challenges, especially in translation between English and Arabic. These challenges stem primarily from the linguistic and structural differences between the two languages, the traditional approaches in teaching translation are limited access to learning resources and insufficient exposure to English in everyday contexts (Al-Mossawi, 2019). Furthermore, cultural differences pose

significant hurdles in understanding and applying appropriate contextual meanings in translation tasks (Hussein, 2021)

Problem of the research

The absence of effective learning strategies in translation studies significantly obstructs students' ability to develop the necessary skills to translate accurately and contextually. Traditional methods which often emphasize rote memorization and direct translation fail to engage the deeper cognitive and metacognitive processes for mastering translation. This not only leads to subpar translation skills but also diminishes students' motivation and their ability to apply English in real-life situations, further restricting their academic and professional opportunities (Omar, 2020)

The researcher noticed that this problem might be due to the fact that translation is at most taught traditionally. More importantly, being linguistically competent does not guarantee successful translation. This study will offer the benefits of examining the acquisition of translation competence through cognitive and metacognitive strategies of Iraqi EFL students.

Research Aim

This research aimed to examine the acquisition of translation competence through cognitive strategies of Iraqi EFL students. By adopting these advanced learning strategies, the research sought to enhance students' abilities to think critically and apply their knowledge more effectively in translation tasks. It also aimed at improving translation competence, thereby equipping students with the competencies necessary for navigating complex linguistic and cultural aspects.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

- 1:** What are the effects of acquisition of cognitive strategies on the translation competence of Iraqi EFL students?
- 2:** How do cognitive strategies impact the retention of English vocabulary and grammar among translation students?
- 3:** To what extent does the acquisition of cognitive strategies influence students' motivation and engagement in translation studies?

Limits

The research has several limitations.

- 1. Special limits:** The research was limited to third stage EFL students\ college of Arts\ department of translation \Mosul university\ Iraq; otherwise, the results reported can't be generalized to other geographical regions.
- 2. Human limits:** The sample of the research confined to Iraqi EFL students University of Mosul \ college of Arts \ department of translation in Iraq.
- 3. Time Limits:** The research conducted in first semester of the academic year 2023/2024, thus; results can't be generalized to other periods.

2.Literature Review

Understanding and implementing effective learning strategies in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in translation, can significantly enhance language acquisition and proficiency. The literature review explored the roles of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in language learning with a focus on their application in translation within EFL settings, drawing on previous studies to highlight their impact and effectiveness.

Cognitive Strategies in Language Learning

Cognitive strategies are techniques that directly involve the processing of language and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills by manipulating the learning material. These strategies include repetition, summarization, deducing, and imagery which help learners to internalize and understand language use and structure (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). For instance, in translation studies, students may use grouping, where they categorize vocabulary into thematic lists, or inferencing, where they deduce meanings of words in context, to enhance their understanding and retention of new words.

Repetition is one of the simplest yet most effective cognitive strategies, involving the frequent review of material to build familiarity and aid retention. In a translation context, repetition can help students master the variability of language expressions and structures, crucial for effective translation. Another strategy, elaboration, involves making

connections between new information and existing knowledge which is particularly useful in learning idiomatic expressions and culturally nuanced phrases (Anderson, 2005).

Metacognitive Strategies in Language Learning

Metacognitive strategies involve higher-order thinking skills that enable students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes. These strategies are crucial for learners to become self-regulated and to manage their own learning effectively. They include planning (deciding what and how to research), monitoring (self-testing to assess understanding), and evaluating (reviewing one's progress and outcomes) (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In translation studies, metacognitive strategies might involve an assessment of the effectiveness of certain translation approaches or the decision to consult additional resources to better understand contextually complex material. For example, a student might evaluate that phrases consistently pose difficulties and plan focused studies on these areas, or monitor their translation accuracy by comparing their work with model translations.

These strategies empower students by fostering a sense of control over their learning trajectory, leading to improved motivation and confidence key aspects in mastering a foreign language (Harris, 2003).

Previous Studies on Language Learning Strategies

The literature on language learning strategies, particularly in EFL and translation contexts, provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. A study by Cohen and Macaro (2007) is exploring how strategy instruction impacts language proficiency. Their findings suggest that explicit instruction in both cognitive and metacognitive strategies enhances the ability of students to engage more deeply and effectively with the language learning process, leading to better outcomes in language proficiency tests.

Specifically focusing on translation, a study by Shreve (2006) examined the role of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the translation process among advanced Spanish learners of English. The study found that successful translators were those who effectively employed metacognitive strategies to oversee and adjust their translation practices,

demonstrating the importance of these strategies in achieving high-quality translation outcomes.

Moreover, research in Iraqi EFL contexts has shown that students often lack exposure to effective strategy use which obstructs their learning progress and translation competence. Al-Qahtani (2015) argued that strategy training should be an initial part of language instruction to better prepare students for the challenges of translation.

Concluded remarks

Related studies focused on exploring the roles of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in language learning . These also focused on the students' perceptions towards using metacognitive and cognitive strategies in different field of language. In addition, the related studies showed that there were a significance acquisition of translation competence through cognitive and metacognitive strategies in student's performance and attitude. However, none of these studies did directly show that impact of cognitive and metacognitive strategies on translation competence. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the acquisition of translation competence through cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Methodology

The methodology outlined a comprehensive evaluation of how cognitive and metacognitive strategies impact on the translation abilities of Iraqi EFL students. By using these strategies into the educational framework and systematically assessing their effects. This approach not only may contribute to academic knowledge in the field of language learning but also supports the practical application of effective learning strategies in real-world educational settings. It also detailed the participants, instruments, procedure, and data analysis methods employed to conduct the research.

Participants

The sample of the study were 100 Iraqi EFL students from university of Mosul \ department of translation of the second semester 2022 -2023. They were divided in two groups :Group one (experimental) which were taught by (cognitive and metacognitive strategies), and group two (control) which were taught by the regular methods. The participants included an equal distribution of male and female students, ages ranging from

19 to 24 years. All participants were native Arabic speakers with varying levels of proficiency in translation

Instruments of the research

Two instruments were used in the research:

1. Strategy Use Questionnaire:

Developed based on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), the questionnaire was adapted to include specific strategies relevant to translation. It consisted of 30 items measuring the frequency of use of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "always".

2. Translation Performance Test:

The test comprised two parts: a text in English for translation into Arabic and vice versa. The texts were selected based on their complexity and cultural content to assess students' ability to handle different translation challenges. The performance was rated by two independent evaluators who are proficient in both languages, using a standardized rubric that considered accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness of translation.

Procedures of the research:

The research was conducted over a single academic semester. Initially, participants completed the Strategy Use Questionnaire to assess their baseline use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in translation tasks. The test was implemented where in participants attended a series of workshops focused on the application of specific cognitive and metacognitive strategies in translation. The workshops included sessions on contextual guessing, note-taking, self-monitoring, and reflective evaluation.

Participants studied regular translation classes where these strategies were explicitly encouraged and modeled by the instructors. Regular feedback sessions were held to discuss the application of these strategies in class assignments and to encourage self-regulation and peer discussions.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires and translation tests were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze data and to evaluate any possible difference or any statistically differences between scores for the pre/post between the two groups in order to answer and accomplish the questions and objectives of the study. Mean scores, standard deviations, and significance levels were conducted for all the variables of the study. Results were presented in tables showing mean scores, standard deviations, and t-values, alongside correlation coefficients that highlighted significant trends or patterns in the data.

Results

The data included tables that summarized the results from the Strategy Use Questionnaire and the Translation Performance Tests. The analysis focused on how the use of these strategies affected students' translation performance, interpreting the statistical data to draw meaningful conclusions.

Table 1: Frequency of Strategy Use Pre and Post test

Strategy Type	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value
Cognitive	2.48 (0.75)	3.54 (0.63)	-9.84	<0.001
Metacognitive	2.31 (0.69)	3.72 (0.68)	-11.29	<0.001

Table 2: Translation Performance Scores Pre and Post Test

Performance Measure	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value
Accuracy	55.8% (12.4)	74.2% (11.1)	-10.36	<0.001
Fluency	53.6% (13.2)	71.9% (10.8)	-9.15	<0.001
Appropriateness	50.2% (14.1)	69.7% (12.7)	-8.97	<0.001

Analysis

The data clearly showed a significant improvement in the use of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the post test. It indicated in Table 1, the mean scores for the use of cognitive strategies increased from 2.48 to 3.54, and for metacognitive strategies from 2.31 to 3.72, both with statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). These findings revealed that the workshops and focused instruction enhanced students' awareness and application of these strategies in their translation tasks effectively.

In terms of translation performance, Table 2 illustrated significant improvements across all measured aspects of translation. The accuracy of translations increased by 18.4 percentage points, fluency by 18.3 percentage points, and appropriateness by 19.5 percentage points, all showing significant improvements ($p < 0.001$). These enhancements in performance underscore the effectiveness of the strategic interventions applied during the research.

The paired t-tests provided strong evidence that the application of targeted cognitive and metacognitive strategies not only increased the use of these strategies but also significantly improved the quality of translation. The improvements in accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness suggested that the students were better able to manage and execute translation tasks, likely due to enhanced skills in problem-solving, planning, and evaluating their work are fostered by metacognitive strategies.

Moreover, correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between the increased use of metacognitive strategies and improvements in all three performance measures. Metacognitive strategies helped students plan, monitor, and evaluate their translation processes were particularly effective in enhancing translation quality.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the research showed notable improvements in both the strategy usage and translation performance of the participants. Cognitive strategies helped solidify the foundational knowledge of the language, while metacognitive strategies enabled students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes more effectively. The dual approach facilitated a deeper understanding and more nuanced application of English, leading to higher quality translations.

Discussion of the Results

The results from the research clearly revealed that the acquisition of cognitive and metacognitive strategies into translation studies significantly enhanced the translation performance of Iraqi EFL students.

The significant improvements in the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies as well as in translation performance indicated to a strong link between strategic learning approaches and enhanced language outcomes. The correlation supported existing literature that underscores the value of strategic learning in language acquisition, particularly in challenging language pairs like English and Arabic (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Anderson, 2005).

The increased scores in translation accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness post-test were indicative of deeper linguistic and cultural understanding. These findings were congruent with studies such as those by Vandergrift & Goh (2012), who highlighted the role of metacognitive strategies in fostering learners' ability to evaluate and regulate their learning processes effectively. The ability to monitor one's own learning can lead to more targeted and successful language learning efforts, particularly in translation where precision and contextual accuracy are crucial.

Conclusion

According to the results of the research, the acquisition of cognitive and metacognitive strategies made the students translate effectively. The cognitive strategies, including repetition, grouping, and elaboration, likely contributed to improvements by enabling students to internalize and better manage the linguistic structures and vocabulary of English. These strategies facilitate the building of a solid language foundation, essential for effective translation.

Metacognitive strategies concerning planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning activities, appeared to have a significant impact on the students' ability to translate more accurately and appropriately. These strategies likely helped students become more aware of their learning process allowing them to identify areas where they needed more practice or different approaches which are vital in mastering the complexities of translation. This

aligns with findings from Shreve (2006), who emphasized that successful translators often employ metacognitive strategies to refine and adapt their translation processes.

. Future research might explore the long-term impacts of these strategies and their applicability in other language learning settings.

Educational Implications

The results of the research had several implications for teaching practices in Iraqi EFL contexts. Firstly, the acquisition of strategic learning approaches into the curriculum can address some of the persistent challenges faced by Iraqi students, such as limited exposure to the target language and traditional teaching methods that focus on rote learning rather than critical thinking and problem-solving.

- 1. Curriculum Design:** EFL programs in Iraq could benefit from incorporating training on cognitive and metacognitive strategies directly into their curricula. This could be achieved through workshops, dedicated courses, or through integration into existing language and translation classes.
- 2. Teacher Training:** Enhancing teacher understanding and implementation of these strategies is crucial. Professional development programs can include components on how to teach and reinforce both cognitive and metacognitive strategies effectively.
- 3. Assessment Practices:** Traditional assessments often fail to capture the breadth of skills needed in translation. Incorporating strategy use into assessment criteria could provide a more holistic view of student abilities and encourage the use of these strategies among learners.
- 4. Technology Integration:** Given the positive impact of strategic learning on translation skills, educational technology designed to facilitate these strategies should be used. This includes language learning apps that encourage strategic learning, and translation memory software that can help students apply their skills in real-world contexts.

5. Research and Feedback: Ongoing research into the effectiveness of different strategies and continuous feedback can help and ensure meet the needs of the students to translate effectively.

Practical Implications

Educators in Iraqi EFL are advised to acquire cognitive and metacognitive strategy training into their teaching practices. Workshops or specific courses focused on these strategies can be developed to enhance students' awareness and mastery of strategic learning. Furthermore, assessment practices should be revised to include evaluations of strategy use encouraging students to engage with these techniques more consistently.

Future Research

Researchers may conduct similar studies for other classes, bigger samples, different learning strategies and different language learning aspects to determine whether the results confirm the current study's findings. The findings also suggested some approaches can be applied more broadly within EFL contexts to improve language proficiency and translation skills.

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