

## **Translation as a Foreign Language Teaching Tool: Results of an Experiment with University Level Students in Spain**

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**Abstract :** Since the proclamation of monolingual foreign-language learning methods (the Berlitz Method in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the like), the dilemma has been to allow or not to allow learners' mother tongue in the foreign-language learning process. The reason for not allowing learners' mother tongue is reported to create a situation of immersion where students will only use the target language. It could be argued that this artificial monolingual situation is defective, mainly because there are very few real monolingual situations in the society. This is mainly due to the fact that societies are nowadays increasingly multilingual as plurilingual speakers are the norm rather than an exception. More recently, the use of learners' mother tongue and translation has been put under the spotlight as valid foreign-language teaching tools. The logic dictates that if learners were permitted to use their mother tongue in the foreign-language learning process, that would not only be natural, but also would give them additional means of participation in class, which could eventually lead to learning. For example, when learners' metalinguistic skills are poor in the target language, a question they might have could be asked in their mother tongue. Otherwise, that question might be left unasked. Attempts at empirically testing the role of translation as a didactic tool in foreign-language teaching are still very scant. In order to fill this void, this study looks into the interaction patterns between students in two kinds of English-learning classes: one with translation and the other in English only (immersion). The experiment was carried out with 61 students enrolled in a second-year university subject in English grammar in Spain. All the students underwent the two treatments, classes with translation and in English only, in order to see how they interacted under the different conditions. The analysis centered on four categories of interaction: teacher talk, teacher-initiated student interaction, student-initiated student-to-teacher interaction, and student-to-student interaction. Also, pre-experiment and post-experiment questionnaires and individual interviews gathered information about the students' attitudes to translation. The findings show that translation elicited more student-initiated interaction than did the English-only classes, while the difference in teacher-initiated interactional turns was not statistically significant. Also, student-initiated participation was higher in comprehension-based activities (into L1) as opposed to production-based activities (into L2). As evidenced by the questionnaires, the students' attitudes to translation were initially positive and mainly did not vary as a result of the experiment.

**Keywords :** foreign language, learning, mother tongue, translation

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