

ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING GOOGLE TRANSLATE IN WRITING ASSIGNMENTS AT DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

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Received: 01/08/2023

Revised: 19/02/2024

Accepted: 27/02/2024

DOI:

Abstract: *The education system has witnessed continuous developments in recent decades, driven by the Internet and computers. These advancements have greatly benefited learners, particularly in the realm of English language acquisition. Google Translate has emerged as an essential tool for English learners in today's education. Google Translate (GT) is revolutionizing the way students do their English writing practice. More precisely, they are exploiting the enhanced precision provided by GT to economize on time and effort when finishing written tasks. Nevertheless, students' ever-increasing reliance on these technologies might yield unfavorable consequences on their writing proficiency. This study examined the use of GT by students at Dong Nai Technology University (DNTU) and students' perspectives regarding the employment of GT in their writing tasks. The objective was to determine the influence of GT on students' writing abilities and understand students' perceptions toward the GT employment. This study utilized a mixed methodology, with participants are sophomores and juniors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Data was collected by sending out online questionnaire to 120 students and interviewing 40 students. The findings suggested that students extensively used GT, despite expressing worries about the accuracy of the tool.*

Keywords: *Google translate; machine translation; students' perceptions; writing skills.*

I. Introduction

There is an increasing controversy on the extent to which GT facilitate or impede English acquisition. An increasing number of students is being attracted to GT as a tool of conserving time and effort when finishing writing tasks. However, it is necessary to elucidate the connection between this utilization and the process of acquiring the English language.

In addition to the numerous advantages that GT offers users, such as enhanced engagement in the learning process, time and effort savings, and improved writing quality, it is an excessive dependence on the tool that is often overlooked by many individuals. This might

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result in the fact that the development of language proficiency is not adequately prioritized. Many inexperienced learners frequently rely on this translation tool to complete their tasks without verifying the accuracy of the translation. For the above ideas, the study “English-major students’ perceptions of using Google Translate in writing assignments at Dong Nai Technology University” is necessary. It helps point out the students’ tendencies in learning to write and find out whether the method can truly improve the students’ writing skills. There are two questions raised: How do students use Google Translate in their writing tasks? What are students’ perceptions toward the use of Google Translate?

The use of Google Translate in language learning has sparked debate. The translation tool's output has been extensively examined by numerous scholars, for instance, Ghasemi and Hashemian (2016) conducted an error analysis of translations from English to Persian and Persian to English. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of talks regarding the impact of this on students' writing abilities. In this study, the researcher aims to further discuss students’ use of Google Translate in their writing assignments, specifically in Reading-Writing 3 and Reading-Writing 5 classes at DNTU.

Students are asked to engage in a range of requirements of writing, including individual assignments, collaborative tasks, at home or in the classroom. In order to meet the subject's requirements, students must possess the knowledge of essay organization including introduction, bodies, and conclusion; and genres of essays such as opinion essay, comparison essay. Students’ writing assignments will be graded according to the criteria including task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource and grammatical accuracy.

II. Literature review:

2.1. Students’ writing skills

According to Belkhir and Benyelles (2017), writing is regarded as a challenge for students to master among the four main skills in English. The origin of this problem stems from the fact that writing proficiency encompasses various elements that students must acquire in order to enhance their writing abilities, such as grammatical accuracy, lexical resource, and diction. Consequently, English learners, as noted by Ahmed (2010), encounter difficulties in writing, particularly in essay writing. The presence of GT seems to have a crucial impact in assisting students during the essay writing process.

2.2. Translation in language learning

The role of translation itself in language learning has been a subject of ongoing discussion. On the one hand, the grammar-translation method, which involves learners memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules to translate phrases or sentences without context, is widely criticized and typically rejected due to its pedagogical limitations. On the other hand, the utilization of translation in the language classroom has demonstrated a capacity to alleviate anxiety and cognitive burden among language learners (Kelly & Bruen 2017). Therefore, translation continues to maintain its popularity due to its ability to disseminate information worldwide without limitations by effectively converting one language into another.

Machine translation is generated by automated processes that convert text from one language to one or more different languages, without any involvement of humans in the translation process. In a study conducted in 2013, Clifford et al. examined the application of machine translation in the process of acquiring language skills. The researchers noted that participants derived advantages from machine translation which has the potential to enhance their academic performance, and proficiency in the target language.

2.3. Introduction to Google Translate

The machine translation system created by Google is referred to as "Google Translate". It has the ability to translate not only individual words or phrases, but also entire sentences, sections of text, and even entire web pages. GT is currently of the title of being the most globally utilized automated translation tool. Medvedev (2016) expressed his perspective on the benefits of GT. It offers unrestricted access without charge. Users simply need to access the website in a browser to utilize its functionality. Additionally, the translation result can be obtained instantly with a simple click. Language learners, particularly those lacking proficiency in English, might utilize GT as an auxiliary tool to aid in comprehending English in their original language, or vice versa.

The matter of GT's quality remains a subject of intense debate, prompting information technology businesses worldwide to constantly seek methods to enhance the efficacy of the tool. Clifford et al (2013) also discovered that language learners were cognizant of the discrepancies and mistakes in the machine translations they utilized.

2.4. Use of Google Translate in Writing Assignments

During the writing process, students may occasionally require assistance in translating words from one language to another. GT offers several functionalities to students in writing tasks. According to Lee (2020), GT was found to enhance the English writing skills of students by improving their vocabulary, grammar, and phrases.

Although GT has gained significant popularity among language learners in academic settings in recent years, a study conducted by Sheppard (2011) investigated the reasons behind the widespread use of GT. It claimed that employing GT had inherent risks, despite the fact that its outputs have undergone enhancements. The learners' increased proficiency in the target language through GT use resulted in their ability to produce more written content. However, this also led to a decrease in their motivation and effort to truly learn.

The quality of GT has consistently been a matter of concern that garners significant attention from linguists. The proficiency of translation technologies are perpetually under scrutiny and enhancement, but numerous unresolved issues persist. For instance, Ghasemi and Hashermian (2016) conducted an error analysis of translations between English and Persian. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of discourse regarding online translation and writing.

This study aims to further explore the students' utilization of GT in the process of essay composition. The objective is to determine the specific writing purposes that students seek guidance for using GT, and to examine the impact of GT on writing fluency, as well as on the complexity and accuracy of grammar and vocabulary.

III. Research methods

3.1. Design

The current study employed a mixed-method research approach. To gather quantitative data, 120 participants were instructed to fill out online surveys using Google Forms. The online questionnaire consisted of 10 items categorised into two areas. The initial segment was devised to gather demographic data. The subsequent portion focused on the perspectives of students regarding the efficacy of GT use. Afterward, an interview was employed to gain a deeper understanding of 40 students' utilization of GT. The present study utilized an in-depth interview since it was deemed appropriate for the current investigation due to its capacity to facilitate a thorough exploration of real-life experiences and specific perspectives on the subject at hand (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

3.2. Participants

This study conducted a case analysis of 120 second-year and third-year majored students to investigate the implementation of GT in their essay writing. The respondents were deliberately selected based on their possible utilization of GT in their writing task, specifically in Reading-Writing 3 and Reading-Writing 5 classes at DNTU during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The participants were instructed to compose an opinion essay, and their writing process was done as homework.

3.3. Data analysis

In order to assess the data, the initial step involved sending out online questionnaires and holding interview sessions whose data was systematically arranged into charts and figures based on the related questions.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. GT' contribution to the completion of the writing task

Throughout the writing process, all students independently performed the task without any teacher's supervision. Based on the data, the researcher discovered that the majority of them (35/40 students) lacked the ability to confidently generate statements without consulting GT. In order to meet the deadline, 87 % of students, particularly those with lower proficiency, depended heavily on GT. This can demonstrate that students' linguistic proficiency is restricted or that they lack dedication to learning. Almost all the participants in the study opted to utilize GT during the writing process, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below:

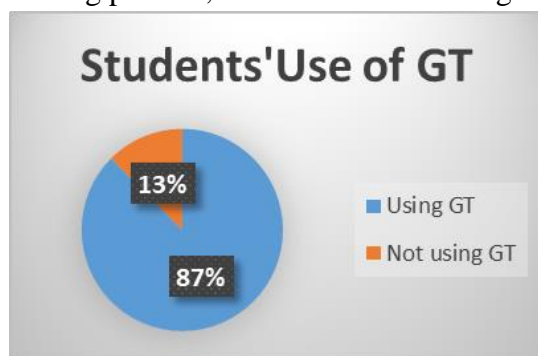


Figure 1: GT' contribution to the completion of the writing task

4.2 Reasons for using GT

It is not challenging to understand why students are familiar with the widespread use of GT in writing practice. The primary factor, as indicated by the interview's data, is the time and effort efficiency of GT which brings out significant time and energy savings.



Figure 2: Students' reasons for using GT

Evidence demonstrates that in the present day, students are exhibiting a decreased level of commitment towards their writing endeavors, or to be more specific, they are displaying a lack of diligence in their writing exercises. When faced with an unfamiliar phrase or idiom while discussing a subject, 20 individuals experience frustration and feel compelled to promptly ascertain its meaning by consulting a dictionary on their phone or online. This inclination prevents them from thoroughly reading and attempting to deduce the meaning on their own. Regarding the topic, there is a collection of unfamiliar terms used within a certain context. Alternatively, instead of engaging in the process of brainstorming for ideas, students can simply compose their text in Vietnamese and submit it to promptly obtain a piece of writing in English. This learning method hinders students' ability to develop and amass linguistic proficiency, as well as impairs their capacity to effectively and accurately interpret language due to their lack of error detection skills in translation. This expedited approach to work also poses a risk since it inadvertently fosters pupils' ability to adapt and handle challenges. Given the availability of these tools, 20 students no longer need to worry about completing their tasks within the allotted time. Out of the total number of students, specifically 8 out of 35, indicated their preference for using automatic translation due to its efficiency. Assessing the efficacy of automated translation tools or systems is a challenging matter, as learners, particularly those with little language skills, are unlikely to possess the ability to evaluate this matter. Furthermore, out of a total of 35 students, 7 indicated a lack of proficiency in writing and so opted for automatic translation as a means of enhancing their writing skills.

4.3. How students use GT in their writing task

Students were found to use GT for looking up vocabulary in dictionary. These vocabulary items are categorized into four distinct levels: word level, phrase level, sentence level, and paragraph level. The objective is to determine which level is most frequently utilized by students. The comprehensive results are displayed in Figure 3.

The total of the data collected through the interview from the respondents' is 35. Figure 3 shows that there are 15 students' attempts for sentence level, followed by paragraph level, which

has 8 attempts. Phrases level has 7 attempts, while word level has only 5 attempts. These findings validate the research conducted by Clifford et al. (2013), which utilized a survey to determine that students primarily utilized Machine Translation (MT) for vocabulary items, such as individual words, short phrases, whole sentences, and short paragraphs.

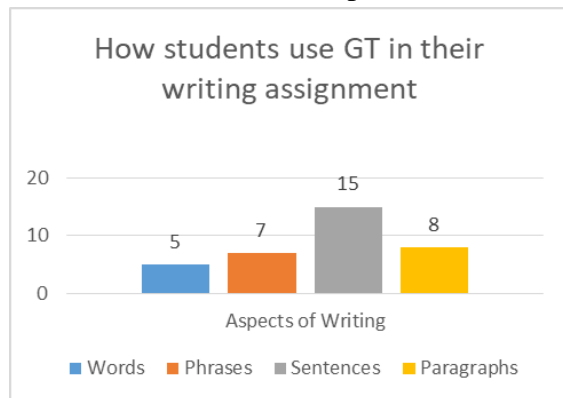


Figure 3: How students use GT in writing

4.4. Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of GT

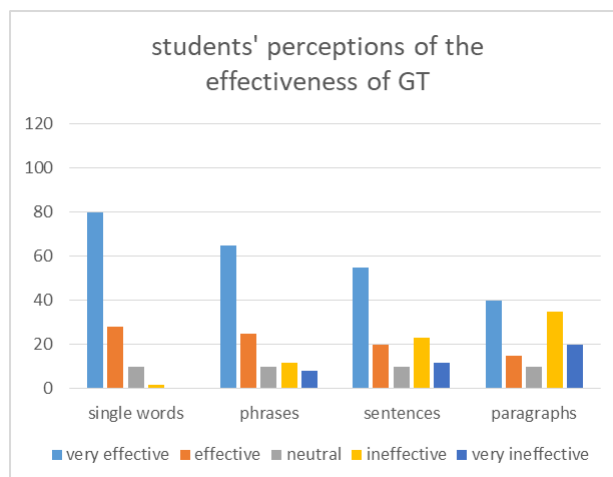


Figure 4: students' perceptions of the effectiveness of GT

Based on the questionnaire's data gathered from 120 participants regarding their perceptions of the efficacy of GT, 90 percent of the participants (108 students) deemed GT to be effective or highly effective when utilized as a reference for the definition of an unfamiliar word. Regarding perceived effectiveness, GT was rated at 75% for phrases, 62.5% for sentence translations, and 45.8% for paragraphs. These findings were noteworthy, since they demonstrated the progressive decline in students' beliefs of the efficacy of GT.

4.5. Students' Negative Views on GT Use in Writing

Despite several favorable aspects identified by the students about the usage of GT in English writing, the findings indicated that 30 out of 35 students encountered disadvantages, such as accuracy concerns, increasing dependency, academic dishonesty, and hindered learning ability. Firstly, most of the students held the opinion that the generated outputs of rendering

idioms and phrases in the GT were incorrect and unreliable. The unprocessed results of lengthier phrases and paragraphs were likewise deemed grammatically wrong and incapable of accurately conveying their messages. This result was quite matched with the questionnaire's data above when it comes to the effectiveness or accuracy of GT. Another disadvantage of utilizing GT in English composition was the diminished motivation of students to enhance their skills, acquire knowledge, and independently complete projects. This corroborated the conclusions of Garcia and Pena's (2011) study. This was attributed to the convenience, simplicity, and speed of GT. Hence, the study revealed that 25 participants saw a decline in motivation and productivity when utilizing GT for writing tasks. Moreover, a total of 5 students reported that they did not acquire any knowledge or skills through the use of GT. Last but not least, five students regarded GT as cheating, thus opting not to utilize it in their writing.

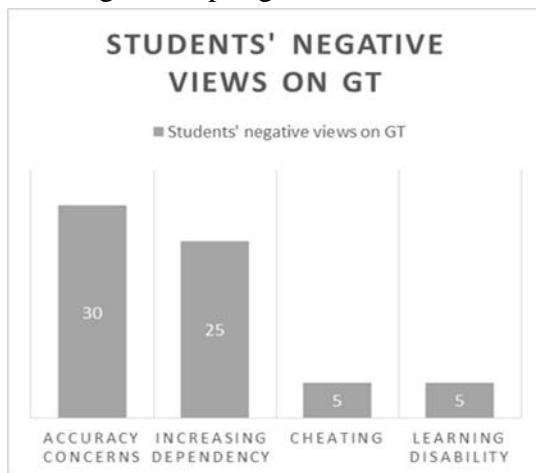


Figure 5: Students' negative views on GT

While GT may have certain limitations, it does not necessarily have a detrimental effect on students. It does not enhance writing performance nor yield inferior results. According to Clifford et al. (2013), MT is regarded as a beneficial method for locating vocabulary. The majority of participants concur that GT is advantageous in the process of composing essays, so 87% express their intention to utilize GT in future writing assignments.

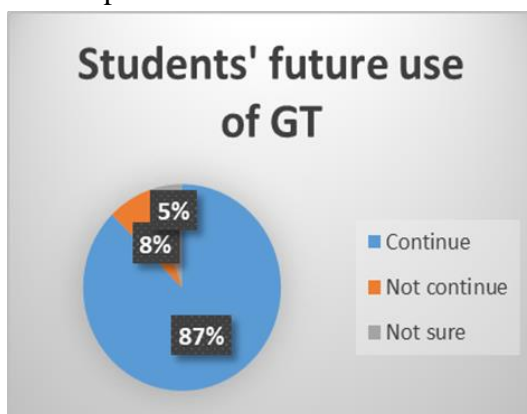


Figure 6: Students' future use of GT

V. Conclusion

The research objectives have essentially been accomplished. Students extensively employ GT in English writing, reiterating the impact of Machine Translation on foreign language acquisition as a whole, or specifically on students' writing abilities. They depend on GT to convert words, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs from Vietnamese into English. Nevertheless, there are apprehensions over the precision of GT's translations and the findings indicate that students have a significant reliance on automated translation systems. Certain students have a higher level of confidence in GT compared to their own skills and rely on its results without making any changes. This subject requires further study as no research has yet definitively addressed the matter and provided recommendations regarding the detrimental impact of automatic translation on students' writing abilities. In general, students exhibit favorable dispositions towards GT and perceive it as beneficial for enhancing their writing assignments, yet employing it with awareness and restraint poses a challenging dilemma.

From the researchers' viewpoints, it is evident that over reliance on this instrument might hinder the development of learners' writing abilities, leading to various issues. The utilization patterns of GT lead to a decrease in students' patience when it comes to learning. They prioritize immediacy and speed over the efficacy of genuine learning.

The objective of this study was to gain a deeper comprehension of the practice of utilizing automated translation to compose papers among students. Additionally, I aim to provide temporary recommendations that help mitigate the adverse consequences of automated translation for language learners. Firstly, teachers must warn students about the repercussions that may arise from excessive reliance on and abuse of automated translation programs. This is crucial because most students are oblivious to the adverse aspects of the issue. Secondly, presenting a selection of reliable web sites for dictionary lookups is necessary because it is vital to utilize the appropriate term in its proper context, as it is not a straightforward task. Reputable dictionaries frequently offer learners many examples showcasing the employment of words in various specific sentences.

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CẢM NHẬN CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN ANH VỀ VIỆC SỬ DỤNG GOOGLE TRANSLATE TRONG CÁC BÀI VIẾT TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ ĐỒNG NAI

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Tóm Tắt: Trong những thập kỷ gần đây, Internet và máy tính không ngừng tạo ra những đổi mới trong giáo dục, hỗ trợ người học rất nhiều trong việc học tiếng Anh và Google Dịch là một trong những công cụ không thể thiếu đối với người học tiếng Anh ngày nay. Google Dịch đang cách mạng hóa cách học tiếng Anh. Cụ thể là sinh viên đang khai thác độ chính xác ngày càng cao của nó để tiết kiệm thời gian và công sức khi hoàn thành các bài tập viết tiếng Anh. Tuy nhiên, việc sinh viên ngày càng phụ thuộc vào các công nghệ dịch tự động này có thể mang lại những hậu quả bất lợi đến khả năng viết của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát việc sinh viên Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai sử dụng Google Dịch và ý kiến của sinh viên về việc sử dụng Google Dịch. Mục tiêu là để xác định ảnh hưởng của việc sử dụng Google Dịch lên khả năng viết của sinh viên và quan điểm của sinh viên về vấn đề liên quan. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng phương pháp kết hợp định tính và định lượng với đối tượng tham gia là sinh viên năm hai và năm ba Khoa Ngoại ngữ. Dữ liệu được thu thập qua việc khảo sát 120 sinh viên và phỏng vấn 40 sinh viên. Các phát hiện cho thấy sinh viên sử dụng rộng rãi Google Dịch, mặc dù bày tỏ lo lắng về tính chính xác của công cụ này.

Từ Khóa: Google dịch; dịch tự động; quan điểm sinh viên; kỹ năng viết.

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