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The Role and Place of Translation in The French Department: The Case of 3rd Year Students At University of Oran 2

Benmokhtari Hicham
University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed- Algeria
benmokhtari.hicham@univ-oran2.dz
Laboratory of Translation and Methodology-TRANSMED

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Corresponding author : Hicham Benmokhtari

Keywords

French language; Learning; Pedagogical translation; Reading; Teaching; Writing

Abstract

Pedagogical translation is a type of translation employed in language education to improve the student's literacy. The current paper attempts to evaluate the efficiency of introducing pedagogical translation in the French official syllabus of the 3rd-year Licence degree (L3). The researcher adopts the mixed method approach (case study research) to answer the research question. He used a student questionnaire, a teacher's interview, and an observation in the data collection procedure to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The data that confirmed the hypothesis were obtained from 3rd year students at the University of Oran 2 (Algeria). The result showed that the didactic translation significantly improved the student's reading comprehension and written expression, namely, grammatical, syntactic, and semantic levels. It also developed a set of strategies to help future French teachers mitigate the challenges and limitations in their careers. An insertion of the translation as a fundamental module at all academic levels was suggested to ensure thorough mastery of the language.

Mots clés

Apprentissage ; Compréhension de l'écrit ; Enseignement ; Langue française ; Production écrite ; Traduction pédagogique

Résumé

La traduction pédagogique est une méthode employée dans l'enseignement des langues pour renforcer les compétences des étudiants. Cette étude vise à évaluer l'efficacité de l'intégration de la traduction pédagogique dans le programme officiel de français de la troisième année de licence (L3). Pour répondre à cette question de recherche, le chercheur utilise une approche mixte, incluant une étude de cas, et recourt à plusieurs outils de collecte de données : un questionnaire adressé aux étudiants, un entretien avec l'enseignant, et une observation directe. Les données collectées, qui ont validé l'hypothèse initiale, proviennent d'étudiants de la troisième année à l'université d'Oran 2 (Algérie). Les résultats indiquent que la traduction didactique a significativement amélioré la compréhension de l'écrit ainsi que l'expression écrite des étudiants, notamment sur les plans grammatical, syntaxique et sémantique. De plus, elle a contribué au développement de stratégies permettant aux futurs enseignants de français de mieux gérer les défis et de réussir dans leur carrière. L'étude suggère également l'inclusion de la traduction comme module fondamental à tous les niveaux académiques pour garantir une maîtrise approfondie de la langue.

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الكلمات المفتاحية

اللغة الفرنسية؛
الترجمة التعليمية؛
فهم النص؛
التحرير ؛تعليمية؛
تعلُّم

الملخص

تعتبر لترجمة التعليمية من الطرق المستعملة في تعليم اللغة بغية تطوير مهارات فهم النص و التحرير لدى الطالب. يروم هذا البحث الى تقييم مدى نجاعة ادراج الترجمة التعليمية في المنهج الرسمي البرنامج اللغة الفرنسية لطلبة السنة الثالثة ليسانس. ويعتمد الباحث على دراسة حالة كعينة للإجابة على اشكالية هذه الدراسة. واستعان الباحث باستبيان موجها للطلبة، ومقابلة مع الاساتذة، و تحليل لإجابات الطلبة على اختبارات كتابية ، وهي إجراءات استغلها في جمع البيانات للتأكيد على موثوقية وصحة النتائج. تم الحصول على البيانات التي تؤكد الفرضية من عينة من طلبة السنة الثالثة -لغة فرنسية- بجامعة وهران 2 (الجزائر). وأظهرت النتائج أن الترجمة التعليمية حسنت بشكل كبير مهارات فهم النص والتحرير لدى الطالب على المستويات النحوية والمفرداتية والدلالية. كما طورت مجموعة من الاستراتيجيات لمساعدة معلمي اللغة الفرنسية في المستقبل على تذليل الصعوبات وتوفير الحلول الملائمة. وقد تم اقتراح إدراج الترجمة كوحدة أساسية في جميع المستويات الأكاديمية لضمان إتقان اللغة بشكل كامل.

1. Introduction

The task of learning and teaching languages is taken seriously. It requires consistency, commitment, and the appropriate methods to meet students' needs and objectives. Accordingly, scholars and educators have worked restlessly to establish suitable and relevant theories and approaches to understand the learning process and set the rules for effective learning.

Translation use in language classes, for instance, is undoubtedly a natural process, yet it has been a topic of concern and controversy. The negative fame of translation in the educational landscape for decades is due to the failure of the grammar-translation method in the 20th century, assuming that the method was entirely divorced from communicative aspects. However, translation recently regained popularity after reassessing the traditional methodologies.

In Algeria, the objective behind teaching translation in academia is twofold: either professional aiming to prepare translators for the workplace or pedagogic seeking to train future language teachers to implement translation as a teaching aid in language classes. Translation is essential in the pre-service training process of French language students in the second and third years.

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It is thus the objective of the current paper to investigate the teacher's and student's perceptions of the use of translation in the French department and the extent to which the subject matter being presented fits into the purposeful preparation of the French language students about the pedagogic requirements of the official program. This study tries to answer the following research question:

- To what extent does the translation module contribute linguistically (to consolidate the language skills) and pedagogically (to acquire the necessary techniques to teach French in the different educational stages) to form French language students?

The researcher hypothesises that translation as a unit may prepare French language students to overcome the challenges they face if the participants in the teaching-learning process realise the objective implications of such a module and the intended requirements at the end of the program.

3rd-year students at the Department of the French Language are chosen as a case study to collect the primary data for the graduates, who will be directed to the workplace as teachers in the different educational stages: primary, middle, and secondary schools. A mixed method approach was employed in the data collection process, particularly in case study research, where a questionnaire, an interview, and program evaluation were used as research instruments.

2. Translation in Language Education

Compared to other teaching methods, the pedagogic value of translation needs to be clearly defined, for it is difficult for teachers to view translation as an independent language learning method. It is generally used as a check-on activity to assess what has been learned or to explore the significant differences between the language systems summarized in the humble attempts to translate individual sentences. (Pym et al., 2013)

2.1. A Historical Background

2.1.1. Translation as a Teaching Tool

In the early nineteenth century, translation was used as a teaching tool in language classes to teach classical languages. The teacher designed grammar and translation activities to enable the learners to read and write the target language. The translation was then helpful in studying Latin or Greek with the intent of translating religious or literary texts to exemplify grammar points. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) also emerged to help learn modern languages. However, translation activities were resumed to transfer decontextualized sentences or fragments of sentences to ensure further understanding of the written language while speaking takes a back seat. (Malmkjaer, 1998) .

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The mother tongue is used to enhance the target language learning. The assumption is that the more the mother tongue is improved, the better the target language is reinforced. Learners can easily express themselves in a foreign language if their ideas are well constructed in their first language. Teaching grammar relies on comparing and contrasting activities to the mother tongue, and fixed grammar habits will interfere with consolidating language education. The learners' language is also used to explain words in the target language.

Translation, therefore, is used to ensure bilingualism in the language classes to objectively improve knowledge, vocabulary, and grammar to read and understand complex texts. Translation renders a given linguistic baggage into another language. It is a difficult comprehension activity if learners translate from the target language to the mother tongue. It is challenging to determine if the passages are transferred from the native language into the target language. (Sankaravelayuthan et al, 2020)

The reform movement in the late nineteenth century criticized the GTM for being less valuable, mainly because it needed to achieve the primary objective behind language education, i.e., communication. The GTM proved to be a failure, leading to the adoption of new teaching principles under the new teaching methods, namely, the direct, the Natural, and the Communicative Methods, which excluded translation from language classes. (Malmkjaer, 1998)

2.1.2. The revival of translation as the Fifth Skill in Language Classes

Recently, many researchers doubted the exclusion of translation from language classes, believing that the way translation is used was objected to, giving much concern to the use of translation as a pedagogic tool (Howatt, 1984; Harmer, 2007). If the translation is condemned in the classroom, it can never be excluded from the learners' brains and lives. Using translation as an efficient tool in foreign language classes creates opportunities for contrastive analysis on different levels, including different languages' systemic and functional aspects. *Translation* is a skill that fulfills the communicative objective and helps find solutions to linguistic gaps (Naimushin, 2002).

Artar (2017) argues that translation should be implemented in language classes mainly for the following reasons:

- Humanistic reasons (reducing the restrictions using the L1 decreases the levels of anxiety and creates a relaxed atmosphere),
- Practical reasons (Translation, code-switching, is a time-saving technique),
- Technical reasons (technology invasion imposes the use of online machine translation),
- Political reasons (globalization brings forth the role of translation in many political and social domains),

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- Cognitive reasons (teachers can never exclude translation from the learner's brains) reasons.

2.2. Pedagogical Translation vs Professional Translation

Translation in university is taught in two different ways namely, pedagogic translation or traditional translation that basically uses translation activities from the foreign language to the mother tongue (version) and vise versa (theme) distined to translation students (Gile, 2005). It is considered as an independent specialty in the translation institutes and its departments or an integrated module in the training of the foreign languages students. And, professional translation that handeled by professional translators and interpreters in economic and commercial contexts in a translation market governed by the law of supply and demand.

What concerns the researcher in the current study is the pedagogic translation which objective is to analyze of the translation process where the teacher and the students the compare and contrast the target text to the source text (Perrin, 2007). This type of translation is practiced in the foreign languages departments where languages acquisition is the heart of the students' preparation. The role of translation is then to improve and develop the linguistic skills. Delisle (2005) identifies this type of translation as didactic translation to confirm that it is an inteliguistic transfer intended to improve language.

While the objective of professional translation is to satisfy the client without supervising or comparing the target product to the source text for it is distined to a special audience (Delisle, 1980). Pedagogic translation is merely pedagogic aiming to learn a language through the development of the linguistic competences in lexis, grammar and sytax (Ahmadi, 2019).

Didactic translation is practiced in foreign languages departments between tow participants who receive the final product. Translation is rather a tool than an objective performed out of the economic context, which restricts the translator and limits his creativity. The translation process becomes an interesting activity intended to improve their linguistic performance. Translation, thus, is an evaluation procedure to assess the students' mastery of the target language and the mother tongue in a given learning process (Lavault, 1998). Translation aims to evaluate and consolidate grammar and lexis through comparative linguistics to remediate the equivalence problems (Medhat-lecocq.et al, 2016).

2.2.1. The Characteristics of Pedagogic Translatio

Pedagogical translation is distinguished by a set of characteristics including the following:

- It assesses the students' work for it identifies the mistake and corrects it. It is a linguistic treatment rather than a cognitive management of the translated product. This process is student-centred where the translation is evaluated according to the

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degree of linguistic equivalence to both texts, the source and the target, and not to the cognitive content.

- Translation focuses primarily on the terminological level. The difficulty of the activities graduates from the easy to the difficult, starting by word level to short text level.
- In language departments, students use translation as an instrument to enrich vocabulary storage. Pedagogical Translation adheres to contemporary translation theories, particularly the interpretive theory. (Gile, 2005)
- Most often, didactic translation ignores documentary research, for it relies on bilingual dictionaries and terminological databases.
- Pedagogical Translation applies the contemporary translation theories, namely the interpretive theory. (Gile, 2005)
- The Translation is explanatory, where the teacher's role is to explain or comment on the L1. (Lavault, 1998)

2.3. Pedagogical Translation in the French Department at an Algerian University

Translation within the French department is introduced as a unit for third-year license degree students. The languages used are French and Arabic. The governing methodology consists of the translation of different types of texts (The Ministery of Higher Education, 2022)

2.3.1. Types of Didactic Translation in the French Department

Perrin (2007) states that didactic translation uses three forms of exercise, including:

- *Imitation or Free Translation:* the teacher employs texts that consist of words that have been learned and are challenging to the students.
- *Grammatical Translation:* The teacher constructs texts in the mother tongue that the learners translate to French (theme) to demonstrate their grammar mastery.
- *Theme/version exercise:* Students translate authentic texts from Arabic to French and vice versa. The teacher evaluates the students, considering specific criteria, including terminology, grammar, style, and others.

3. Methodology

The current study was conducted to reveal the significance of the translation module in the French language department at the University of Oran 2. The researcher tried to investigate the usefulness of translation in teaching the French Language and the student's preparation for their future career as French language teachers in two different educational stages (primary and middle education).

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The researcher chose the French language department's students and teachers as a sample in the data collection procedure, for they are the center of the teaching-learning situation. The department of French department was newly founded (in 2014) at the University of Oran 2. It can be traced back to the foreign language institute. The investigation occurred in the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023.

The study uses a mixed method approach where quantitative and qualitative data were collected to establish a clear perception of the topic. It covered the problem systematically and treated it from a multifaceted objective, scientific, and practical point of view.

3.1 Research Design

The case study research was implemented to purposefully collect the primary data from enquiring the chosen sample. The latter was represented in eighty (80) 3rd year French language students and four (4) translation teachers. In their third year, from 2022, the students are introduced to translation, according to the ministerial decision (Arreté 1116, 2022), and would be directed to work primarily as language teachers.

3.2 Research Instrument(s)

The researcher used three instruments to collect more reliable and objective data: a student questionnaire, a teacher's interview, and a semi-structured observation. The questions are organized and distributed to collect the primary data according to the course development and the research objectives.

3.2.1. The Student's Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a crucial research tool in case studies. It consists of a set of questions designed logically to be distributed among the informants. The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed mathematically. This questionnaire contains three major sections, namely:

- *Part one:* The Student's Level in the French Language
  This part was determined to collect general information about the student's level in the French Language, whether they knew about the international scoring used to evaluate language learners, and what level they achieved according to it.
- *Part two:* the Status of Translation in the French Department
  It was administered to assess their consciousness and interest in translation as a module in French language education.
- *Part three:* Translation as a Pedagogical Tool in the French Department
  It was concerned with finding out the notion of pedagogical translation according to the informants and their distinction among the main characteristics of each type of translation. Besides, what were their impressions, and to what extent did it help them to achieve their learning objectives?

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3.2.2. The Teacher's Interview

The interview is essential in case studies to collect qualitative data. It consists of a set of questions designed for four (4) translation teachers in the department. Their contributions will be analyzed thematically. It contains ten (10) questions designed according to three major themes to find out why translation was inserted as a module in the French language department, whether the time allotted to such a module was enough to fulfill the teaching objectives and the effectiveness of translation as a pedagogic tool in French language improvement.

3.2.3. The Semi-structured Observation

Third-year students (in semesters five and six) study translation as a module titled "Translation: Mother tongue L1 (Arabic)/ French language L2" under the discovery teaching unit with 2 for credits and 2 for coefficient. As for the timing, they study sixteen (16) weeks a year divided into two sessions, three (3) hours per week (one session for lecture and the other for practice). The final mark is 40% continuous evaluation and 60% summative evaluation at the end of each semester.

The first-semester program deals with theoretical items, including definitions, translation theories, translation techniques, translation, and foreign language learning. At the same time, the second semester is devoted to practical exercises (theme/version) to translate different types of texts.

The observation protocol was designed according to the study's context and objective. The researcher dedicated the second semester of the academic year to January to May 2023. He used the diagnostic test performed at the beginning of the year and the continuous tests performed in the second semester.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The Students Questionnaire

This section analyses and discusses the quantitative data in detail.

4.1.1 The Students' Proficiency Level in French

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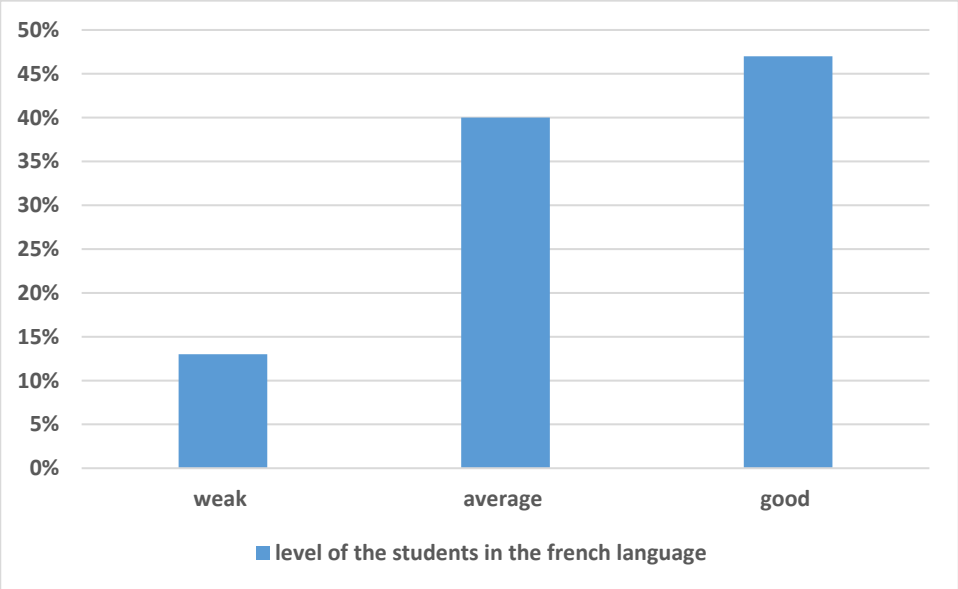

Figure 1. The Students' Proficiency Level in French

According to the diagram, 47% of students reported their proficiency as good, while 40% considered themselves average, and the remaining 13% rated their proficiency as weak. It is important to note that these self-assessments may not accurately reflect the students' actual proficiency levels, as they were not based on rigorous, scientifically validated assessments. This discrepancy is further highlighted by their performance in the diagnostic test, which indicated that a majority of students fell within the average proficiency range. Moving forward, it is crucial to explore methods for students to better gauge their proficiency levels in the language based on their responses to subsequent questions.

- *The Students' Knowledge of the International Language Scoring Scale*

Initially, 60% of the informants were ignorant of the existence of the international measurement to gauge the level of the French Language known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Cadre Européen Commun de references pour les Langues CEFR). After introducing the Scale, they became aware of their level and worked to improve their language skills accordingly.

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Figure 2. Students' knowledge of the International Scoring Scale

- *The Students' Proficiency level Regarding their familiarity with the international scale*

40% (32 studenst) of the respondents declared that they know about such a scale, 68% among them had a superficial idea while only 32% answered correctly. This explained the student's answers to the first question.

- *The Status of Translation in the French Department*

- *The Students' punctuality*

The majority of the students (90%), observed during the academic year , confirmed their punctuality, a sign which reflected their interest in the subject. The remaining 10% who attended occasionally showed less improvement.

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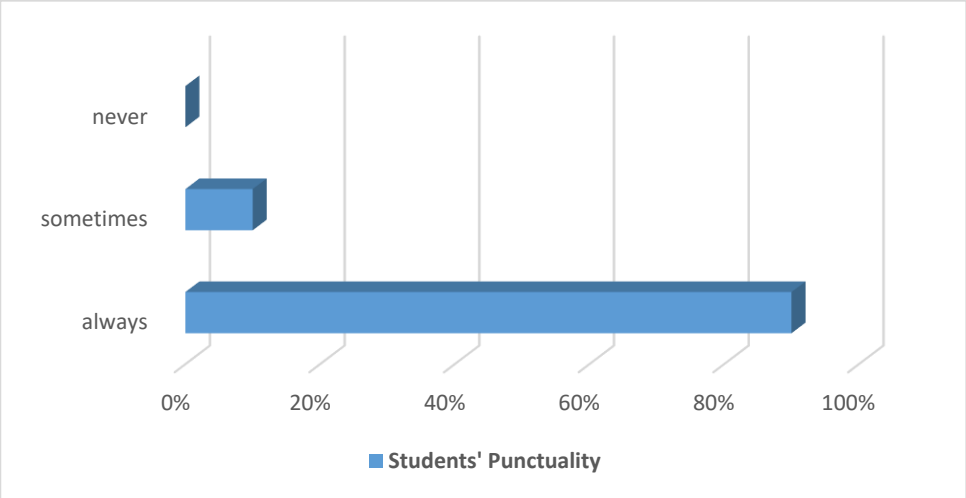

Figure 3. The Students' punctuality

○ *The Importance of Translation as a Unit*

When asked about the importance of translation at the start of the academic year, 45% agreed that it is imperative in language learning, and the number increased to 92% by the end of the academic year. This increase is mainly due to their fruitful experience.

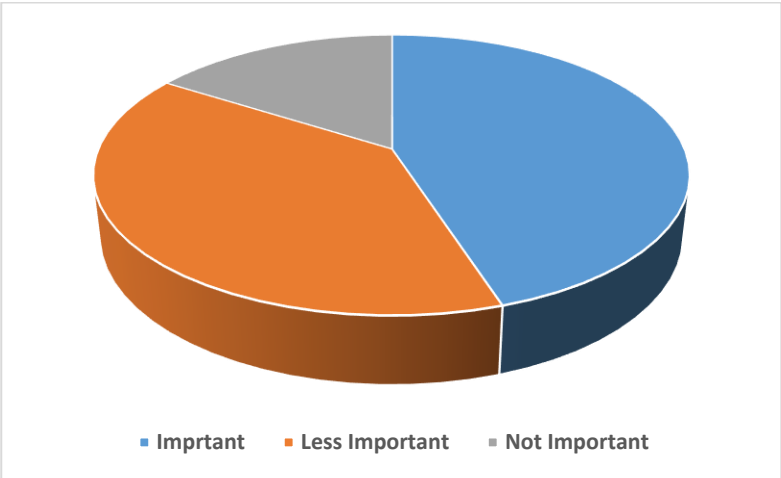

Figure 4. The Importance of Translation as a Module

- *The Students' Perceptions of the Translation Program*

Eighty-seven (87%) stated that the translation course positively impacted their terminological, semantic, and grammatical competencies.

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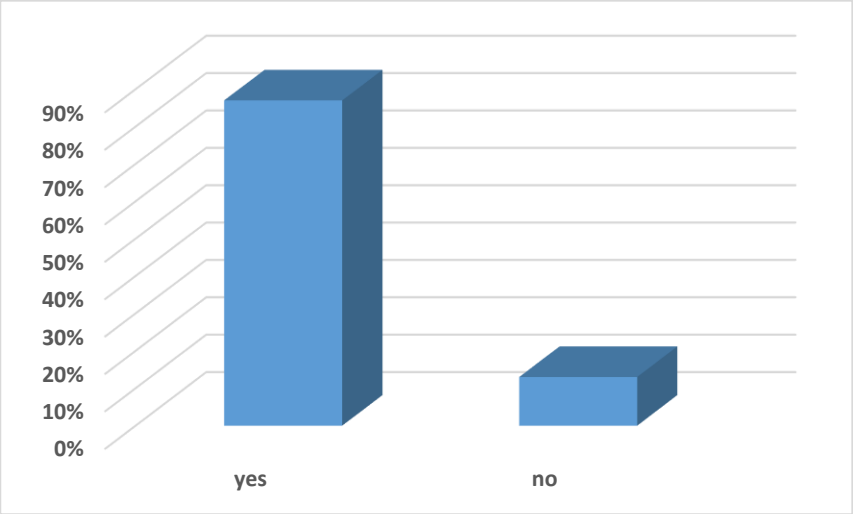

Figure 5. Students' Perceptions of the Translation Program

- *The Students' Perception of Translation Inclusion in The French Department*

The total number of informants reckoned that the time allotted to translation needed to be increased to acquire the necessary strategies to help them improve. 85% stated that translation is a new and essential tool for improving their language skills. In comparison, 76% declared that translation would be a significant technique in French classes. Furthermore, 86% suggested that translation should be introduced in the first year, owing to its importance.

- *Translation as a Pedagogical Tool in the French Language Department*

- *The Difference Between Pedagogical Translation and Professional Translation*

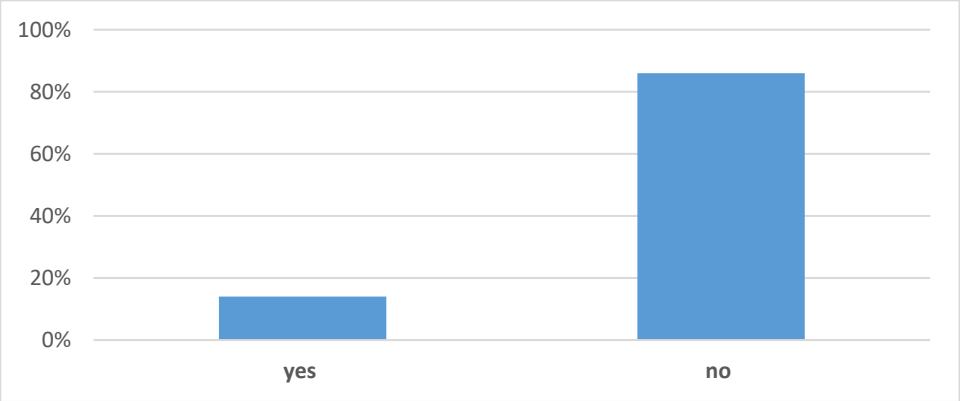

Figure 6. The Difference Between Pedagogical Translation and Professional Translation

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Most respondents (86%) needed to recognize the difference between pedagogical and professional translation, which is a logical answer at the beginning; by the end, about 96% of the students understood the nature of the subject and its objectives.

- *The Students Explanation of the Difference Between Pedagogical and Professional Translation*

The responses revealed that even those who answered yes needed to learn the difference between both types. cation on the differences between both types.

- *The Role of Pedagogical Translation in Enhancing Students' Performance*

The diagram shows that pedagogical translation was helpful in the French department due to its progressive improvement, especially in developing reading and writing skills.

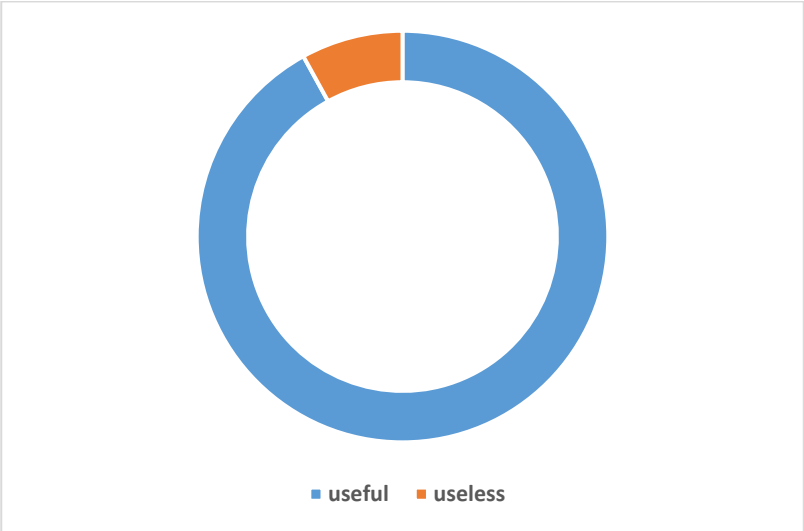

Figure 7. The Role of Pedagogic Translation in the Development of the Student's Performance

- *The Impact Impact of Translation on Students' Performance*

63% of the respondants who stated that translation was useful stated that translation improved their literary skills. 25% agreed that it helped them develop in reading, and nearly all said that translation improved their grammar and vocabulary. 87% appreciated how translation developed their self-correction and proofreading abilities.

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- *The Strategies and Activities Used in Translation Class*

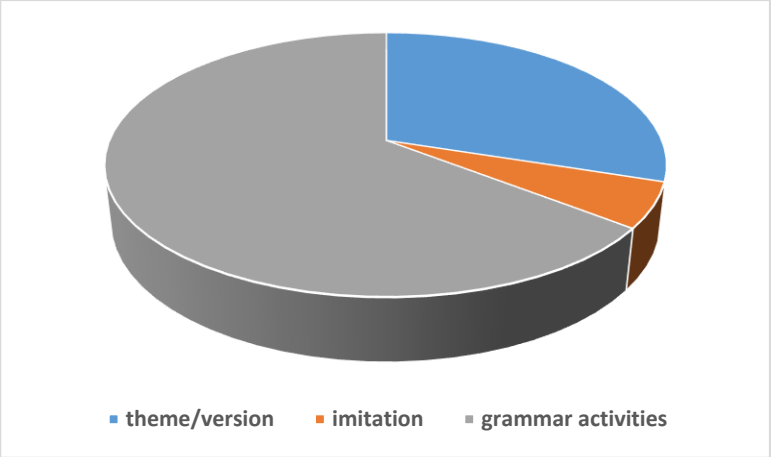

Figure 8. The Strategies and Activities Used in Translation Class

Sixty-five percent (65%) of the respondents confirmed that they learned more through Theme/ version activities, which is true because they could treat all linguistic levels through such an activity.

4.2 The Teachers' Interview

The teacher started the academic year with a diagnostic evaluation of the students using a theme/version translation to a literary text to measure their linguistic qualification in comprehension (version) and writing (theme) abilities. He used a a version to testify that the reading comprehension for the starting text was in the French language (the first step in the translation activity considered the French language text) to gauge the students' understanding in three major levelslevels: grammar, lexis, and semantics. The researcher used four texts to practice theme translation. As for the written expression, the researcher employed theme translation (two Arabic texts), where the target text was the French language. Therefore, the final product required a set of French language skills.

According to the result (theme translation), the researcher classified the percentage of translation errors as follows:

- Diagnostic test: The grammatical errors represented 47%, the lexical errors were 45%, and the semantic errors identified were 20%.
- Text 1: The grammatical errors represented 43%, the lexical errors were 40%, and the semantic errors identified were 20%.
- Text 2: The grammatical errors represented 38%, the lexical errors were 31%, and the semantic errors identified were 17%.

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- Text 3: the grammatical errors represented 31%, the lexical errors were 27%, and the semantic errors identified were 14%.
- Text 4: the grammatical errors represented 22%, the lexical errors were 19%, and the semantic errors identified were 10%.

The researcher observed decreasing errors to 25% for grammar, 26% for lexis, and 10% for semantic. The overall result revealed an improvement in written expression skill into 17%, which is encouraging compared to the practical period. This confirmed the participant's (teachers and students) consent to the efficiency of this activity to improve their writing ability.

Version translation activity unveiled the following findings:

- Diagnostic test: The grammatical errors represented 36%, the lexical errors were 19%, and the semantic errors identified were 25%.
- Text 1: The grammatical errors represented 33%, the lexical errors were 18%, and the semantic errors identified were 23%.
- Text 2: The grammatical errors represented 24%, the lexical errors were 12%, and the semantic errors identified were 8%.

The result revealed that the percentage of errors committed was reduced to 12% for grammar mistakes, 7% for lexis, and 5% for semantics. The quality of the reading comprehension improved (8%), which was accepted compared to the number of translated texts.

5. Conclusion

The investigation revealed the importance of intruding translation modules in the French department to confirm the pre-established hypothesis. After analyzing the primary data, the researcher proved that pedagogical translation improved linguistic skills in the French language, especially reading comprehension and written expression. Didactic translation helped reduce linguistic errors, namely, grammatical errors. Learners likewise develop contrastive equivalence between two linguistic systems. They use pedagogical translation enriched vocabulary storage (lexis) for French language learners. Briefly, translation represents an efficient area where learners develop a set of strategies that enable them to overcome the possible challenges of their future careers. Accordingly, the researcher recommends the inclusion of translation as a module in all the academic levels (from L1 to M2). Besides, more time should be allotted to pedagogical translation in the official program.

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Appendices

Appendix (I): The Students' Questionnaire

The student's level in the French language

1. What do you think of your level in the French language?

Weak
Average
Good

2. Do you know about the international languages scoring scale?

Yes
No

3. If yes, which level you think you have achieved

……

The status of translation in the French department

1. Do you attend your translation classes?

Always
Sometimes
Never

2. How can you rate translation as a module

Important
Less important
Not important

3. What do you think of the translation module program? Does it help achieve the learning objectives?

Yes
No

4. What do you think of translation inclusion as a module in the French department?

……..

Translation as a pedagogic tool in the French language department

1. Do you know the difference between pedagogic translation and professional translation?

Yes
No

2. If yes, can you explain

……

3. Can you determine the role of pedagogic translation in your development?

Useful
Useless

4. Based on your experience, to what extent does it help improve your linguistic level?

……

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5. What strategies and activities do your teacher use to help you improve?

Theme/version
Imitation
Grammar activities

6. Which skills are best-improved using pedagogic translation?

Writing
Comprehension
Both

Appendix (II): The Teachers' Interview

1. General information
   a. Scientific degree
   b. Grade
   c. Position
   d. Experience
2. What do you think about integrating translation as a separate module in language departments?
3. What do you think of the official program administered by the ministry destined for French language students?
4. Does it help to improve pedagogical or professional translation?
5. If used as a pedagogical tool, does it help to improve the student's level of proficiency in the French language?
6. What do you think of the time allotted to translation in the French department?
7. Is it enough to help learners acquire the necessary strategies to improve their linguistic competencies?
8. Have you noticed an improvement in the student's linguistic level?
9. After implementing translation as a pedagogic tool to help them develop comprehension and writing skills?
10. Does the translation course enable them to use pedagogical translation in their future career as teachers of the French language in the different educational stages?

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Author Biodata
Dr. Hicham Benmokhtari had got his doctorate degree in translation studies 2014-2018 from the University of Tlemcen. Algeria. He is now a lecturer at Oran 2 university. He teaches a wide variety of courses including introduction to translation studies and specialized translation.

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