



Suggesting some Techniques for Teaching Pronunciation to Improve Translation Students' Performance in Interpretation

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Abstract

The study aimed to find out the types of pronunciation problems faced by translation students in their performance on interpretation, and to suggest some techniques of teaching pronunciation that can help to improve translation students' performance of interpretation. The study followed the experimental method. The study sample consisted of (10) M.A students in the translation and Languages Centre, Batch (4), University of Gezira, it used two tools for collecting data. The results of the two tests were displayed in tables and analyzed manually through the percentage. Extent of semantic agreement between the interrelated speech and the source speech. Extent to which the main ideas of the source speech are included in the interrelated speech. The study also found out that more than half the translation students (53%) have better performance on interpretation after being subjected to a treatment programme using listening comprehension, group discussion and dictation as techniques for teaching perceptual pronunciation. The study recommends that translation programmes should give a sharp focus on teaching production as well as perceptual phonology of the source language, and that translator training should be based on the techniques of listening comprehension, group discussion and long text dictation. The study suggests that other researchers may explore the interpretation problems caused by speech rhythm.

Keywords: Translation, Interpretation, Performance, Pronunciation, Techniques

Introduction:

To improve translation students' performance in interpretation ,a lot of techniques are used .These techniques include dialogues, storytelling, picture description, discussions, loud reading (for small group).But when the number is very large, the teacher can use other techniques like dictation, shadowing, sound discrimination, phonetic transcription and listening comprehension in the language laboratory. Interpretation is the intellectual activity that consists of facilitating oral or sign language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between two or among three or more speakers who are not speaking, or signing the same language. Here, the speaker resorts to the interpreter to ensure that the audience understands what he says .It is however, important that both the speaker and the interpreter be acquainted before working together starts and the interpreter should be aware of the topic addressed before the beginning of the work and should know what the demographics of the audience are in order to ease his mission.

Statement of the problem

The researcher as a university teacher has observed that most of translation students have improper performance when interpreting. The problem manifests itself most in wrong placement of stress, wrong pronunciation of weak forms and short forms, wrong pronunciation of syllabic consonants and consonant clusters, and incorrect production of the past-tense morpheme. The problem results in very poor performance of the translation students in listening comprehension as well as speaking. When listening to English pronounced accurately they find much difficulty in understanding it. So it is not likely that they benefit so much from the different forms of mass media like radio and TV. In the same way, when the students are speaking English, it could be very difficult for the listener to get all what they mean because they speak it with improper pronunciation. So the researcher tries to suggest some techniques of teaching pronunciation to improve translation student's performance in interpretation.

Objective of the study: The study aims to achieve the following objective:

To suggest some techniques of teaching pronunciation to improve translation student's performance in interpretation.



Question of the study: The study aims to answer the following question:

What are the teaching techniques that can improve the translation students' performance in interpretation?

Hypothesis of the study: The study raised the following hypotheses:

Dialogues, discussion, loud reading,(for small groups) and dictation, sound discrimination, phonetic transcription, shadowing and listening comprehension(for large groups) have strong and positive impact on improving translation students' performance in interpretation.

Significance of the study

The researcher hopes that this study will be beneficial to interpreters and students of translation besides EFL teachers who can select suitable teaching materials and strategies for teaching English pronunciation. Also it will be of great benefit to translation students at universities. Syllabus designers will also benefit from this study.

Methodology of the study: The experimental method will be used for conducting this study. The study sample will be composed of all the (10) MA translation students batch (4) in the translation and languages centre ,University of Gezira.

The Students will sit for pre-test and post-test on interpretation with an intervention period between the two tests. During that the researcher will hold four teaching sessions using some techniques for teaching pronunciation. The purpose of the post –test will be to measure the effect of teaching sessions on the students' performance on interpretation. The data collected by means of the two tests will be analyzed manually through the percentage.

Limits of the study

The topic for this study will be limited to Suggesting some Techniques for Teaching Pronunciation to Improve Translation Students' Performance in Interpretation. The study will be carried out at the translation and languages centre, Faculty of Education (Hantoub), University of Gezira in (2018-2023)

Background to Interpretation

There is a lack of evidence as to the actual beginning of formal interpretation in the world. The reason may be that unlike written translation, interpretation leaves behind no written proof. However, informal interpretation must have begun ever since human beings began to spread across the earth and have different languages. They must have met later and communicated with the help of an interpreter. Venuti (1995:5) maintains that few hundreds years before Christ, the Greek and Roman conquerors compelled prisoners to learn foreign languages so as to work as interpreters for the noble. In the middle ages up to the 17th century, Latin was the major lingua franca in Europe, and eventually every European country had to have some citizens who could speak Latin and carry on diplomatic relations. Since that period, a number of factors have contributed to the wide spread of interpretation in the world. The most important of these factors have been religion and explorations. In the 18th century, for instance, Islam began to spread widely in West Africa through the medium of Arabic. This consequently necessitated the presence of interpreters who had good knowledge of local languages besides Arabic. In the age of explorations, on the other hand, people were bound to encounter others who spoke a different language and with whom communication needed an interpreter. In the 20th century, the job of interpretation witnessed its greatest progress. Conference interpretation was used for the first time in Geneva, Switzerland in 1927. In 1947, the United Nations established interpretation as a permanent service for the organization.

Process of Interpretation

In the process of interpretation, as indicated by Baker (2001:44), the interpreter is generally concerned with two main phases: the perception phase and the production phase. In the perception phase, he listens, analyses, and manages information. In the production phase, he reformulates the speech into the target language, remembers it, and produces it. Especially during the listening phase, the interpreter may face certain difficulties like tempo or speed of speech, unusual grammar, noisy physical environment, inadequate acoustic equipment, and length of sentence. Effective techniques for dealing with such difficulties, according to this author, include the following:

1. The interpreter should have sufficient knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the two working languages.



2. He should be well-trained in speech perception and speech production.
3. He should increase his language processing capacity.

Common Techniques for Teaching Pronunciation

The following common techniques for teaching pronunciation are suggested by Kenworthy (1990:20):

Exposure to native pronunciation: By repeatedly listening to native English voices, EFL learners will become familiar with them, and this will help them to better understand native speech. It is quite natural that when somebody listens to another person for the first time, he may find much difficulty in understanding his speech, but in very little time, he will have no difficulty at all in understanding his speech.

Reading aloud:

This technique is suitable for small groups because each learner will have a chance to read aloud. Learners are given short time to glance through the text before being asked to read it aloud. This will help to increase reading fluency. However, in this technique, learners can make more pronunciation errors than when speaking spontaneously because the written form of words may induce spelling pronunciation. If this happens, many errors of pronunciation are supposed to occur because generally there is only little agreement between English word spelling and English word pronunciation. But even this can be useful because it calls the teacher's attention to an important type of pronunciation problems.

Dictation:

This technique is also called *write-what-you-hear*

It is a kind of perception exercise which is based on the assumption that if the learner has a deviant pronunciation of a word, he will not identify it when it is read with correct pronunciation. When dictation is given through a tape recording, the chunks of speech should be controlled for length because there is a limit to what a listener can remember. The average length should be ten words a chunk. The topic for dictation should be familiar to all learners so that they may find some contextual clues to help them. However, it may be useful to include one unusual topic that is not common knowledge to learners to check if they can understand the speaker in situations where there are no or only few contextual clues to help them. Kenworthy (1990:116) adds the following common techniques for teaching pronunciation to EFL learners:

Shadowing:

In this technique, students are given the written form of a recorded text where there is focus on a specific phonological feature like weak forms. The tape is played as many times as necessary. Students shadow or mark the words they hear as weak forms. Using the same text, students can be asked to listen again to shadow another important phonological feature like speech rhythm or sentence intonation. Different colored pens can be used, each for one feature. Students can also be set the task of first reading the transcript before they hear the recording, and predicting the occurrence of weak forms and speech rhythm change, and then listening to the material to check if they guessed correctly.

Pronunciation clinic:

The teacher allocates ten minutes daily for students to discuss their pronunciation with him. Breakfast interval and end of the lecture may be good timing for this kind of activity.

Describing task:

Students orally describe a place, person, picture, or personal experience. This naturally involves spontaneous speech. The teacher listens to detect pronunciation errors and correct them.

Speculation task:

Students are given a photograph that has been torn in half. They must speculate about what might be in the missing half. Actually, they need to be speaking the foreign language throughout the speculation process. Another speculation task is that students are told short story where somebody is having a difficult problem. They must say how they would solve it if they were in his place.

State your opinion:



This is a kind of group discussion. Students are provided with a written statement on an important topic. They react by agreeing and disagreeing and give reasons.

Sound discrimination:

This is used when learners have some problem with a particular phoneme or phonological feature. In such a case, learners are presented with a pair of words or sounds which are distinguished from each other by only one feature, for example *pin* and *bin*. Examples like this are known as *minimal pairs*. They are used to measure students' ability to discriminate between two similar sounds or phonological features. Minimal pairs are more used to help students overcome problems with vowel sounds. This is due to the fact that vowel sounds are more likely to be confused by EFL students. Each of the following pairs of words consists of vowel sounds with which many EFL students may have problems of articulation: *pen/ pin, put/pot, coal/ call, gale/ girl, hear/ hair*.

Listening comprehension:

This technique is suitable for large groups because all learners in the class can listen to the same recording at the same time. Listening to the teacher and listening to peers is included in this technique, but exposure to recorded native pronunciation will have special importance for learners. It will help them to get accustomed to the type of fluency and naturalness with which native speakers speak their language.

Group discussion:

This is similar to the technique of spontaneous speech explained above. The teacher raises a controversial issue to encourage students to participate in a group discussion. He watches mainly for errors of pronunciation and does the correction with the help of the students themselves.

Dialogue:

This can take two forms: loud reading of a written dialogue acted by two students or spontaneous conversation between two students on a specific issue. Both the two forms can help the teacher to evaluate students' pronunciation and enable him to interfere for offering help.

Phonetic transcription:

This is also called *notation*, the teacher chooses one of the common ways of indicating word stress in writing. He may capitalize all the letters in the stressed syllable, or write them in bold, or underline them, or use the stress mark {¹} immediately before and above the stressed syllable. In the following example words, the stressed syllable are written in bold: **crocodile, philosophy, comprehend**.

Previous Studies:

The researcher surveyed the post-graduate libraries in a number of Sudanese universities looking for previous studies that are related to the one in hand. For the same purpose, she surveyed a good deal of online research materials provided by people from different parts of the world. In this section, the researcher reviews the related previous studies which she has come across.

The first study was a PhD thesis conducted by (Satti ,A, 2006) at Faculty of Education (Hantoub), University of Gezira in (2006) under the title *the Impact of translation on English Language Learners' Communicative competence at University Level*. The sample for the study consisted of (40) EFL university students who are first subjected to a pre-test on communication, then received a course of translation, and finally sat for a post-test on communication to evaluate the effect of the translation course on their performance. The sample also included all the teachers at the Department of English who responded to a questionnaire on the topic of the study. The main objectives of the study were to investigate the role of translation in developing communicative skills in EFL learners, to find out appropriate methods for teaching translation to university students, and to come up with remedy for the problems encountering students in studying translation. The main findings of the study were that if taught effectively translation will be a good means for upgrading EFL students' communicative competence, that doing translation tasks in groups encourages students to communicate freely and effectively. The best method of teaching translation is that the teacher points out and discusses the specific translation feature then students translate and discuss the example in groups under the teacher's supervision. Translation is not fully utilized to enhance language learning at university level.

It is difficult to teach translation in large classes, and that teaching culture and stylistics is essential for teaching translation, the study recommends that more times should be devoted to the teaching of translation at university level. Translation should be taught by qualified rather than certified teachers. Translation teachers should present differences between Sudanese and English culture, and that EFL teachers should use interpretation activities on their classes to help develop speaking and listening skills in their students. The study suggests that other researchers may study the impact of translation on the native language, the role of translation in teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers, and interpretation as a means for developing aural and oral skills in students.

Both, this previous study and the current study imply a close relationship between ability to translate and ability to communicate in the foreign language. However, this study deals in depth with only one aspect of communication competence, which is pronunciation.

Table (1): Extent of semantic agreement between the interrelated speech and the source speech

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	2	20%
Poor	8	80%
Total	10	100%

As displayed in this table, only very few translation students (20%) had semantic agreement between their interpretation and the source speech. Most of the students (80%) did not have such an agreement in their performance.

Table (2): Extent to which the main ideas of the source speech are included in the interrelated speech

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	3	30%
Poor	7	70%
Total	10	100%

According to this table, only a few translation students (30%) had the main ideas of the source speech included in their interpretation. The remaining majority (70%) their interpretation lack many of the main ideas of the source speech.

Table (3): Extent of utilizing such interpretation strategies as summary, paraphrase. And substitution.

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	4	40%
Poor	6	60%
Total	10	100%

It is clear from the table that more than half the translation students who participated in the study (60%) were not able to utilize such interpretation strategies as summary, paraphrase, and substitution. The remaining minority (40%) had clear signs of such strategies in their performance.

Table (4): Extent to which the interpreter has imitated the intonation of the source- language speaker to exactly express the intended meaning

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	1	10%
Poor	9	90%
Total	10	100%

By considering this table, it becomes evident that almost all the participants (90%) could not imitate intonation of the source-language speaker to exactly express the intended meaning. Only a single participant (10%) was able to do so in his interpretation.

Table (5): Extent to which the interpreter has coped with the speech rhythm of the source-language speaker

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	0	0%
Poor	10	100%
Total	10	100%

This table indicates that no participant (0%) could ever cope with the speech rhythm of the source-language speaker. All the subjects (100%) had difficulty of varying levels in trying to do so.

Results of the Post-test

The same criteria stated in section (1) above were used in scoring the post-test. The purpose was to measure the effect of the intervention which was made between the pre-test and post-test.

Table (1): Extent of semantic agreement between the interrelated speech and the source speech

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	5	50%
Poor	5	50%
Total	10	100%

This table reveals that half the translation students (50%) had semantic agreement between their interpretation and the source speech. The other half (50%) did not have such agreement in their performance. This result reflects a remarkable improvement in students' performance on this criterion of good interpretation compared with their result in the pre-test shown in Table (1) above.

Table (2): Extent to which the main ideas of the source speech are included in the interrelated speech

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	5	50%
Poor	5	50%
Total	10	100%

As illustrated in this table, one half of the participants (50%) had the main ideas of the source speech included in their interpretation. The other half (50%) their interpretation lack many of the main ideas of the source speech. Compared with the students' result in the same criterion in the pre-test, this result also signals a considerable improvement (See Table 2 above).

Table (3): Extent of utilizing such interpretation strategies as summary, paraphrase, and substitution

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	8	80%
Poor	2	20%
Total	10	100%

As shown in this table, most of the participants (80%) utilized such interpretation strategies as summary, paraphrase, and substitution. Only two of them (20%) had problems in using the strategies. This result also proves that the students benefited so much from the teaching sessions which they had received in the period between the pre-test and post-test (see Table 3 for comparison)

Table (4): Extent to which the interpreter has imitated the intonation of the source-language speaker to exactly express the intended meaning

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	3	30%
Poor	7	70%
Total	10	100%

This table demonstrates that the majority of subjects (70%) could not imitate the intonation of the source-language speaker, whereas a few of them (30%) were able to do so. In the pre-test, however, only one subject (10%) was able to imitate the intonation of the source-language speaker (Table 4 above). The result also indicates that there was an improvement in the students' performance.

Table (5): Extent to which the interpreter has coped with the speech rhythm of the source-language speaker

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptable	0	0%
Poor	10	100%
Total	10	100%

According to this table, all the participants (100%) had difficulty in trying to cope with the speech rhythm of the source-language speaker. The same result was obtained in the pre-test (Table 5), which means that no improvement was made by the participants in dealing with speech rhythm.

Discussion:

Dialogues, group discussion, loud reading, dictation, shadowing, sound *discrimination*, *phonetic transcription*, and *listening comprehension* have strongly positive impact on improving translation students' performance on interpretation.

This hypothesis is verified by the good results which translation students obtained in the post-test after having been taught through the techniques cited in the hypothesis during the intervention period between the pre-test and post-test. Table (1) reveals that half the students (50%) had semantic agreement between their interpretation and the source speech. In the pre-test, however, only (20%) of the students had such an agreement in their performance (see table1). This result reflects a considerable



improvement in the students' performance after the treatment sessions which were held in between the two tests. Table (2) conveys that (50%) of the students had the main ideas of the source speech included in their interpretation.

Compared with the students' result in the same criterion in the pre-test, this result also signals a considerable improvement (see table 2 above). Table (3) indicates that most of the students (80%) utilized such interpretation strategies as summary, paraphrase, and substitution. This result also proves that the students benefited so much from the teaching sessions which they had received in the period between the pre-test and post-test (see table 3 for comparison). Table (4) displays that (30%) of the students were able to imitate the intonation of the source-language speaker to exactly express the intended meaning. In the pre-test, however, only (10%) of the students were able to do so (Table 4 above). The result also indicates that there was an improvement in the students' performance. Hypothesis Three is also validated by the teachers' responses to the last six statements of the questionnaire which revolved around effective techniques for teaching pronunciation. According to Tables (6), an average of (50%) of the teachers agreed that listening comprehension, dictation, dialogues, group discussion, phonetic transcription, and at-sight translation are among the most effective techniques for training translation students to become successful interpreters.

Recommendations

In the light of the above stated findings, the study raise up the following recommendations:

1. Translation programmes should give a sharp focus on production as well as perceptual phonology of the source language.
2. Pronunciation training for translators should give a special focus on intonation and speech rhythm.
3. Translation students should have an opportunity and plenty of time to listen to native speakers.
4. Translator training should be based on the techniques of listening comprehension, group discussion, at-sight translation, and dictation.

References

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