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## *The Usefulness of Translation in Foreign Language Learning: Students' Attitudes*

[PP: 153-170]

**Ana B. Fernández-Guerra**  
Department of English Studies  
Universitat Jaume I of Castellón  
Spain

### **Abstract**

Several scholars have argued that translation is not a useful tool when acquiring a second or foreign language; since it provides a simplistic one-to-one relationship between the native and the foreign language, it can cause interference between them, and it is an artificial exercise that has nothing to do in a communicative approach to language teaching. Recent studies, however, show that, far from being useless, translation can be a great aid to foreign language learning. The aim of the present paper is twofold: (1) to summarize and assess the arguments that encourage the use of translation in the foreign language classroom, supporting the integration of several forms of translating; and (2) to present the results of a survey that focused on students' perceptions and responses towards translation tasks and their effectiveness in foreign language acquisition. Results show that students' attitudes were surprisingly positive for several reasons: translation is one of their preferred language learning tasks, it is motivating, it facilitates a deeper understanding of the form and content of the source language text, it increases learners' awareness of the differences between both linguistic systems, it allows them to re-express their thoughts faster and easier, and it helps them acquire linguistic and cultural knowledge.

**Keywords:** Foreign language learning, Translation, TILT, Students' attitudes, Spanish EFL Learners.

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## 1. Introduction: Translation in Foreign Language Learning

Translation has long been neglected in second or foreign language (FL) classrooms because it was considered an inadequate reminder of old teaching methodologies, especially those associated with (or derived from) the grammar-translation method. This became increasingly evident mainly due to the beginning of Translation Studies as such and the birth of the direct, natural and communicative language teaching methodologies, which considered translation exercises as detrimental for the development of the new language. Nowadays, translation seems to be still largely ignored and discriminated in FL teaching contexts. In fact, several scholars and FL native teachers have argued that translation should be avoided in the language classroom, since it is not a useful tool when acquiring a FL (as opposed to its usefulness in the teaching of translation for professional purposes, in translator training courses).

The main arguments and assumptions that have been provided against the use of translation as a language teaching tool could be summarized, in line with quite a few authors (most of them actually supporting translation tasks in FL teaching), as follows:

- (1) Translation is not a communicative act and, thus, has nothing to do in a communicative approach to language teaching (Duff, 1989, p. 6).
- (2) Translation is an artificial exercise in which the main emphasis is on reading and writing and students do not practice oral skills (Zabalbeascoa, 1990, p. 76).
- (3) Translation tasks are useless and do not resemble real world practice, since translators normally operate into and not out of their mother tongue (Carreres, 2006).
- (4) Translation provides a simplistic and false belief that there is a perfect one-to-one relationship between the native language and the foreign language (Malmkjaer, 2010, p. 186).
- (5) Translation involves the use of two languages and, thus, deprives students of opportunities to receive sufficient FL input (Pan and Pan, 2012, p. 4), since “in deciding how far we are justified in using the learner’s mother tongue, we must remember that the time spent using it is time not spent using the foreign language” (Wilkins, 1974, p. 83).
- (6) Translation makes learners view the FL through their native language and this can cause interference between the two languages involved (Pan and Pan, 2012, p. 4).
- (7) Translation tasks have nothing to do with the way in which a mother language is learnt, so they do not promote natural FL learning (Sankey, 1991, p. 418).
- (8) Translating is not the aim of language learning, it is the aim of translator training and both are independent fields of study (Vermees 2010, p. 84).
- (9) Translation is a boring and non-stimulating task (Duff, 1989) and can be particularly frustrating and de-motivating for students (Carreres, 2006).
- (10) Translation is not suitable for all learners, since it can only work well with those interested in literature or with those which have already acquired a significant level of proficiency in the FL (Mogahed, 2011).

Despite these and similar claims against the use of translation in the language classroom, recent studies show that, far from being useless and counter-productive, translation in language teaching (TILT) can be a great aid to FL learning.

The issue, whether TILT can or cannot be useful, however, is still a controversial one, and it may be said to attract the attention of a good number of theorists and practitioners nowadays; and I have noticed, as well, that today’s students (at least those I have been teaching for 15 years at the Universitat Jaume I of Castellón, Spain) show special interest in the topic. Following Popovic (2001) —who said that “if a strong case for translation in the language classroom is to be made, at least three things ought to be demonstrated: that criticisms against it are not valid, that learners need it, and that it promotes their learning”—,

in this paper I will try to tackle the matter setting forth my views (based, of course, on many of the well-known specialists in the field).

I will first try to summarize the literature dealing with translation as a useful tool in language teaching and learning contexts, mentioning recent studies that support the integration of several forms of translating in various language courses. And then, I will present and assess the results of a survey that aimed at valuing students' attitudes towards translation tasks in FL classrooms. It has been carried out at the Universitat Jaume I (Castellón de la Plana, Spain) involving (a) 93 students of an 'English for Special Purposes' module (Computer Science Degree), in which translation was used as a learning tool, and (b) 62 students of a 'Translation' module, in the degree in English Studies. The study included a pre-test and a post-test on learners' language level, as well as questionnaires that focused on three main aspects, namely, (i) students' preferred language learning tasks, (ii) difficulties encountered when translating from English into Spanish and vice versa, and (iii) the usefulness of translation tasks.

## 2. The Usefulness of Translation Tasks in Foreign Language Learning

As mentioned before, a revival of translation tasks in FL classrooms seems to have been taking place over the last years. As a matter of fact, counterarguments for all of the assumptions mentioned under section 1 have also been put forward:

(1') Translation is indeed an act of communication across languages and cultures, as it is a naturally occurring activity that takes place in the real world. As Duff states "translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?" (Duff, 1989, p. 6). In addition, as a communicative act, TILT can expose FL students to various text types, registers, styles, contexts, etc. that resemble the way languages are used in real-life for communicative purposes.

(2') We should bear in mind that, on the one hand, translation includes listening and speaking due to teacher and students' interaction discussing problems related to the translation task (Leonardi, 2010, p. 24) and translation tasks, besides, could also include sight translation and interpreting practice. Not only that, if properly designed, TILT can be used to enhance the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and develop accuracy, clarity and flexibility (Duff, 1989, p. 7). As a matter of fact, translation is sometimes considered *the fifth skill*, alongside the four other skills and, therefore, it can be a valuable tool to develop and improve communicative competence (Ross, 2000). Besides, as Cook (2010, p. 20) puts it, "being able to translate is a major component of bilingual communicative competence".

(3') Translation tasks do certainly resemble real world practice, especially in today's globalized world, in which translating into both native and foreign languages is common in translators' professional life, even if it is not the ideal situation (Carreres, 2006, p. 6). Of course, inverse translation will always be more difficult than translating into one's native language, no matter how proficient one is in the FL, since translators have a more profound linguistic and cultural knowledge of their own language but, in the FL learning context, inverse translation has also proven useful in order to improve learners' communicative competence in the FL, focusing on the style, nuances and subtleties of the FL.

(4') Translation practice can raise students' awareness on the fact that, as a rule, there is not a perfect one-to-one correspondence between the languages involved. They can understand the problematic nature of translation and focus on linguistic, extralinguistic and cultural gaps between the two languages (Fernández Guerra, 2012, p. 42). In fact, most translation tasks require students to reflect on how to achieve equivalence semantically, functionally and pragmatically, so they can put their efforts in trying to look for adequacy and appropriateness for the communicative purpose defined in a specific translation assignment.

(5') The assumption that the only language that can be used during a FL class should be the FL being taught, and that students should be discouraged from using their native language is now being increasingly challenged, due to the "reassessment of the merits of relating the language being taught to students' own languages" (Hall and Cook, 2012, p. 272). According to Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009, p. 13) using the native language in the classroom is "the greatest pedagogical resource" and can enhance learners' confidence and focus on meaning.

(6') Translation always makes learners view the FL through their native language, of course. FL learners always have a natural tendency to use translation (Ali, 2012, p. 235) and will automatically compare both languages involved, either consciously or unconsciously, so it is pointless to try to avoid their internal thinking in L1 and code-switching between L1 and L2, since it is regarded as naturally developmental (Kavaliauskienė and Kaminskienė, 2007). TILT does not necessarily cause negative interference by the native language, and it does not hinder FL learning at all. On the contrary, it increases students' awareness of similarities and differences between the two languages, promoting their acquisition of difficult structures and elements in the FL and "assists students to elude the interference of the mother tongue on the first step and then further enhance their L2 learning" (Pan and Pan, 2012, p. 5).

(7') It is definitely true that when children acquire their mother tongue, they do not translate it, of course, but rather learn to understand it directly. Learning a FL in order to acquire communicative competence, however, can be said to follow a similar process to learning how to translate in order to achieve translation competence (Fernández y Fernández Guerra, 2003). Thus, translation can be used as a means to improve students' analytical skills and problem-solving strategies, and as a means to interact and practice language skills (as in any FL class) when commenting or discussing the problems encountered in translations (Leonardi, 2010, p. 29).

(8') The argument that TILT is only appropriate for training translators can certainly be questioned, since translating is not the only aim of language learning, but "should be a major aim and means of language learning" (Cook, 2010, p. xv). Likewise, "since a number of language learners end up as translators, there is no reason why the skill of translating (properly understood) should not have a place in the language learning classroom" (Malmkjaer, 2010, p.187). Besides, we cannot consider both of them (translating and language learning) as separate skills or as independent fields of study. In fact, given the large number of subjects with which translation overlaps, and since it has benefited from input from a wide range of fields of study (such as linguistics, literary studies, cultural studies, language engineering, etc.) it has gained recognition as a truly interdisciplinary one.

(9) Translation tasks do not necessarily have to be boring or de-motivating for students. Many researchers support the idea that translation is a motivating activity (Mogahed, 2011) and, at all events, the success of TILT lies in its correct use as a working and learning tool, with appropriate activities that help students to contrast their native and foreign languages, to improve their language skills, and to see the usefulness of the task. Likewise, as Carreres indicates (2006, p. 7), it can be a quite stimulating task, since "translation, by its very nature, is an activity that invites discussion and, in my experience, students are only too happy to contribute to it, often defending their version with remarkable passion and persuasiveness".

(10') Translation, as taught in the grammar translation method, was certainly not suitable for the average learner without literary knowledge; but TILT does not have to be used in such a way, nor restricted to literary texts only. And even if we do so, many scholars agree on the usefulness of literary texts in the FL classroom. Christ (1990, p. 113-133), for instance, indicated that literary texts are cultural messages that allow us to know the identity of different places, to value linguistic nuances and enhance students' creativity. We could also say that, regardless of the student's language level, TILT can also be a very successful tool

for a comparative study of both languages: beginners find it useful to use their native language as an essential process in their FL learning, and advanced learners can benefit from working with the subtleties of the relationship between both languages and from the problem-solving potential of TILT for debate and discussion (Posen, 2006, p. 197).

From what has been summarized in the previous paragraphs, there are, in my view, many arguments for the inclusion of TILT. There are also many evidence-based studies showing that there is a widespread use of translation in the FL classroom (either as simple code-switching to explain things, or as proper translation tasks on their own right). Most of them show high levels of native language use and its positive effects on classroom relationships, and conclude that translation can be a valuable skill to be mastered. Main empirical research focuses on the amount of use of the native language and the role of code switching in the classroom (Carless, 2008; Edstrom, 2006; Levine, 2011; Littlewood and Yu, 2011; Polio and Duff, 1994; Unamuno, 2008; amongst many others), on the use and effect of TILT in writing tasks (Kim, 2011; Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Lally 2000; etc.), on its convenience in vocabulary acquisition (Bruton, 2007; Celik, 2003; Hummel, 2010; Laufer and Girsai, 2008), on its applicability in ESP contexts (Tudor, 1987 and Micic, 2008, for example), or on the raising of learners' pragmatic awareness (Guzmán and Alcón, 2009).

There are also several recent studies explicitly proposing different types of TILT, such as the ones by Cook (2010, p. 125-153), who makes specific suggestions for teachers who do not share students' native languages; Carreres and Noriega Sánchez (2011), who propose some sample translation-based tasks; or Leonardi (2010, p. 85-118), who provides pedagogical activities using authentic materials.

One can see, hence, that there is a positive attitude amongst quite a few scholars on the usefulness of TILT, and many proposals to include translation tasks in the FL classroom; but one can only find a rather small number of studies dealing directly with students' opinions and perceptions on the ideas put forward by theorists and researchers. Actually, the studies of the kind we have had direct access to are really very scarce: Ashouri and Fotovatnia (2010), Brooks-Lewis (2009), Carreres (2006), Kavaliauskienė and Kaminskienė (2007), Liao (2006), and Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008).

Carreres's (2006) may perhaps be considered a pioneer in the analysis of TILT student's opinion. She conducted a questionnaire among 31 second and third year students of modern languages at the University of Cambridge. All respondents agreed in that translation should be taught in a modern language degree, and most of them believed that translation into the FL was a very useful language learning device, especially when learning vocabulary. Half of the students also considered that translation was among the most effective methods to learn a language, though not all of them found translation activities enjoyable or gratifying (p. 9-10).

Liao's study (2006) explored the role of translation in Taiwanese EFL learners in terms of their learning beliefs about using translation and their main learning strategies. Students showed a medium to high level use of translation as a learning strategy. They also reported that translation played a positive role in their English learning experiences, but more proficient learners tended to report negative beliefs about translation and less use of translation, as compared with less proficient learners.

Kavaliauskienė and Kaminskienė (2007) also carried out a survey of students' perceptions of the amount of mother tongue they needed and mental translation they used in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Their principal findings suggested that all learners seemed to rely on their mother tongue in learning ESP, and that the amount of native language needed had a lot to do with their proficiency level and linguistic situations.

Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) analysed the functions that beginner learners of French in an Australian university attributed to their native language and found that it was preferred to perform classroom management and that it had a positive affective role, since it may alleviate classroom anxiety, though they also found that translation was a de-motivating factor for learners.

Brooks-Lewis' survey (2009), on its turn, reports learners' positive attitudes towards the use of their native language in the FL classroom in Mexico. After the completion of an EFL course, participants wrote their perceptions and showed positive response to the inclusion of the L1 because it had been beneficial to their foreign language learning experience.

Finally, Ashouri and Fotovatnia (2010) analysed Iranian EFL learners' beliefs about translation and whether risk taking and tolerance of ambiguity had any effect on learners' beliefs about translation. They concluded that only risk-taking affected learners' beliefs and that learners taking risks had negative belief about translation.

The following section will describe the survey carried out to explore the issue, trying to focus on the way students perceive translation, their preferred language learning tasks, especially as regards motivation and usefulness, the main difficulties they encountered when translating and the reasons why they think translation tasks are useful.

### **3. The study: Students' Attitudes towards Translation in Foreign Language Learning**

The material used in this study has been compiled thanks to the cooperation of 155 Spanish learners of English at the Universitat Jaume I, Spain: 93 of them were first year students of a Computer Science Degree (CS) and 62 were second year students undertaking a degree in English Studies (ES). Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years of age, the average age being 19.9 years. As for gender, there was a higher percentage of female participants in ES and a higher percentage of male participants in CS.

CS students were attending a 6 credit English Language compulsory subject. The main purpose of this subject is to provide students with basic knowledge on English for Computer Science and the main activities included reading texts from authentic sources, language work concentrating on vocabulary acquisition, translating texts dealing with the fast moving world of computers and multimedia, listening activities to understand conversations about aspects of computing, online computer tasks related to computer science settings, and speaking tasks to develop oral skills through role-plays, problem-solving activities, etc.

ES informants were taking the subject 'Applied linguistics for English-Spanish translation', a 6 credit compulsory subject that aims to give the student an overview of translation, as well as an introduction to some of the major linguistic theories used to explain the task of translating, and to the main problems involved in English-Spanish translation. Translation tasks included direct and inverse translation of short texts of all types, discussion of difficulties and alternative translations, translation quality assessment, summary translations, back translations, sight translation, textual analysis, analysis of machine translation and computer-aided translation tools, etc.

The instruments used in the survey included a pre-test and a post-test on learners' language level, as well as two anonymous questionnaires on the usefulness of translation in foreign language learning (survey questions were both in English and in Spanish, in order to avoid students' trouble understanding the questions), that combined Likert Scale questions, open-ended questions and rank order questions.

The procedure followed consisted of two stages: students were first administered a level test and an initial questionnaire on the first day of class and, at the end of the semester, they had to complete the second questionnaire and another level test. Questionnaires from subjects who did not participate in both stages or who failed to complete the questions in the



questionnaires were discarded, resulting in the aforesaid total of 155 students in the final analysis.

The first questionnaire was divided into three main parts:

(1) *Personal background information*: This section included questions on students' age, gender, years of English language learning, months spent in a country where English is spoken, main aim in order to learn English (i.e. to pass the subject, to go abroad, to communicate with foreign people, etc.) and a short bilingualism test that focused on their use of Castilian, Catalan and English. However, these variables (as well as the results obtained in the level test) were not finally taken into account in the present study, since a preliminary analysis of the results did not reveal any noteworthy differences between them as regards their attitudes towards the use of translation.

(2) *How do you feel about translation?* The subjects responded to ten items on the Likert scale of 1 to 5, indicating the degree to which they agreed with statements concerning their beliefs about translation, 1 standing for 'I strongly disagree', and 5 for 'I strongly agree'.

(3) *Which are your preferred language learning activities?* This was an open-ended question in which students were asked to list their favourite activities, though no specific classroom practices and activities were provided, and no indications were given as regards number of activities to include or information on the activities to provide.

The second questionnaire consisted of four questions:

(1) *How motivating are the following activity types?* Respondents were asked to rank six activity types in order of preference, being 1 the least motivating type and 6 the most motivating one. Since identifying all of the possible activities that can be used in the FL classroom may seem unattainable, only six main categories were established for this survey: activity types focusing on reading, writing, language use, oral speaking/performing, and listening/watching (following Young *et al.*, 2011, p. 1) and translation tasks.

(2) *How useful are these activity types in developing your communicative competence?*

Students had to state how useful they thought the six activity types were when acquiring a FL, being 1 not really useful and 6 very useful.

(3) *Which are the main problems you encountered when translating from English into Spanish and vice versa?* Eight categories of translation problems were devised and students had to rank them with 1 being the most problematic and 8 being the least difficult.

(4) *Why do you think translation tasks can be useful? How can translation contribute to language acquisition?* Respondents had to rate fifteen items on the 1 to 5 scale, all of them relating to aspects that contribute to the development of translation competence. They were also encouraged to write any other relevant comments regarding the usefulness (if any) of translation.

The collected data from the questionnaires were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed and graphed in order to find percentages for each question. In the case of open-ended questions, participants were free to respond either in Catalan, Spanish or English, though all Spanish comments mentioned in the present paper have been translated into English.

#### 4. Results and discussion

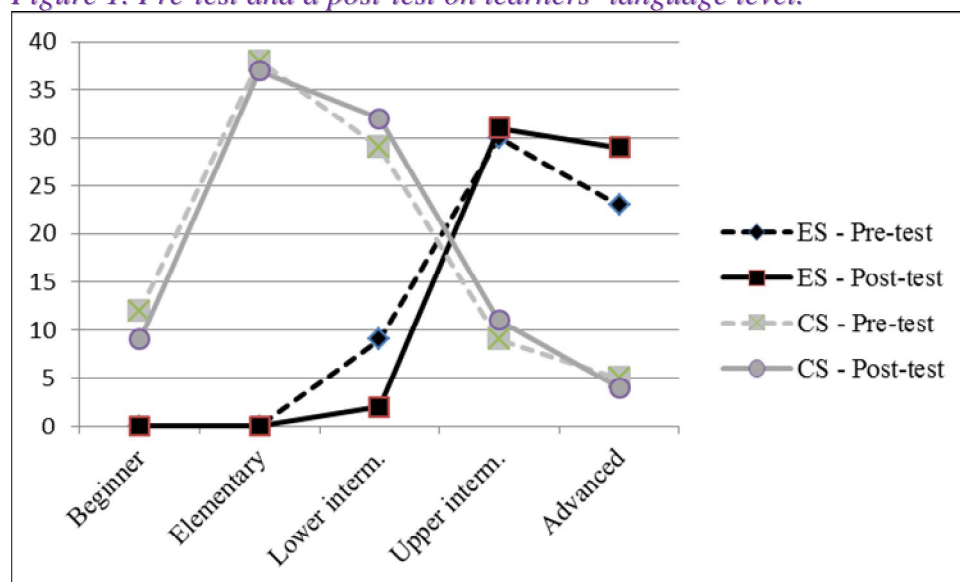
The pre-level test students completed during the first stage was version 1 of the *Quick Placement Test* set by Oxford University Press and University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (2001). According to the total number of correct questions answered in the test, students were classified according to five main levels: beginner, elementary, lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced. Almost all the students' level in the ES group was either upper intermediate (46.67%) or advanced (37.09%), whereas the majority of the students in the CS degree were mainly elementary (40.86%) or lower intermediate students

(31.18%). The post-test was version 2 of the same *Quick Placement Test*. Table 1 and Figure 1 display the results obtained by ES and CS students in both tests.

*Table 1. Pre-test and a post-test on learners' language level.*

Level	ES - Results		CS - Results	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Beginner	0	0	12 (12.90%)	8 (8.6%)
Elementary	1 (1.61%)	0	38 (40.86%)	35 (37.63%)
Lower intermediate	9 (14.51%)	1 (1.61%)	29 (31.18%)	32 (34.4%)
Upper intermediate	29 (46.67%)	32 (51.61%)	9 (9.67%)	14 (15.05%)
Advanced	23 (37.09%)	29 (46.77%)	5 (5.37%)	4 (4.3%)
Total	62	62	93	93

*Figure 1. Pre-test and a post-test on learners' language level.*



Broadly speaking, it can be said that both groups improved their English language level, though not to a large scale, as was previously expected. These results, besides, cannot be directly associated to the use of translation tasks since, in the case of ES students, their curriculum also provides them with many other English taught subjects, that is, with many other FL learning opportunities; and, for both ES and CS students, their exposure to English outside the classroom (through music, TV, Internet, etc.) was not controlled.

As regards the first questionnaire, Table 2 shows the results obtained for question 2, in which students had to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the ten statements.

*Table 2. Students' preliminary beliefs about translation.*

How do you feel about translation?	ES	CS
(1) Using the mother tongue is quite normal when learning a FL.	4.93	4.82
(2) Translation tasks facilitate FL learning and are useful to develop communicative competence in the FL.	3.26	3.76
(3) Translation is essential in FL learning courses.	3.18	4.12

(4) Translation tasks are enjoyable and entertaining.	3.46	3.02
(5) Translation is as important as knowing the FL language.	2.34	2.68
(6) Translation helps to contrast the students' native language with the FL.	4.83	4.08
(7) A good knowledge of the language systems is very important because all levels of linguistic analysis have an effect on translation.	4.12	3.27
(8) In translating, the ideal must be to account for total fidelity and total fluency.	3.67	2.92
(9) As a process of interpretation and communication, translating transcends language.	3.86	3.16
(10) Translation is a skill that demands an apprenticeship.	4.12	4.23

Almost all participants subscribed to the view that using the mother tongue is quite normal when learning a FL (the highest rated item for ES and CS students), which would confirm the results presented by some of the authors mentioned above. They also highly agreed on the fact that translation helps to contrast the students' native language with the FL, so one could affirm, in line with Widdowson (2003, p. 23), that "the activity of comparing and contrasting the L1 with the target language is a manner of promoting language awareness". Most of both the ES and CS respondents also considered that translation is a skill that demands an apprenticeship, which could be an indicator of their awareness on the problems involved in the task of translating and all the competences it involves. The fifth item, whether translation is as important as knowing the FL language, had the lowest means (2.34 and 2.68) for both groups of students, which seems to follow the belief that learners should first learn the language before attempting translation productively (Mogahed, 2011).

Students' preliminary beliefs revealed quite different perceptions between ES and CS in items 7 and 8, probably due to the fact that ES students have more background knowledge on the issue, which coincides with Liao's findings, in that "students' academic background may affect their beliefs about translation" (2006, p. 207).

Preferred language learning activities in the initial questionnaire also produced interesting results. Though not all students answered this question in the same way, nor wrote the same amount of activities, the five tasks that were mentioned more often by each of the two groups were the following ones: analysing movies, translating interesting texts, self-access centres, cooperative tasks, and acting out dialogues (in the case of ES students), and watching videos, chatting online, playing games, cultural activities, and answering questions about songs (in the responses provided by CS students).

This choice of activities is significant in that some of these were activities that are not commonly done in the classroom. This gives the impression that students clearly tend to display favourable attitudes towards activities they find motivating, even if these are not carried out in the classroom. It is also worth noting that none of them mentioned in an explicit way any activities related to pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar; though, obviously, these three aspects are normally included within the tasks they referred to. One could also perceive, out of the type of activities they mentioned, that ES students were a bit more language concerned than CS students, who seemed more interested in activities that they thought could help them understand and use English in the way they liked more. And it was likewise quite worthy of note that translation was mentioned by several ES students (19 occurrences).

The second questionnaire also included questions on their preferred language learning activities, but they were now asked to focus particularly on motivation and usefulness to improve their FL knowledge. Besides, they were also given a set of activities from which to choose:

(1) Reading activities (descriptive analysis of texts, answering text-related questions, etc.).

- (2) Writing activities (précis, compositions, note taking, etc.)
- (3) Language focused activity types (sentence analysis, error analysis, grammar activities, vocabulary development activities like word matching, crossword puzzles, semantic maps, etc.).
- (4) Speaking activities (role-plays, debates, presentations, etc.).
- (5) Listening/watching activities (listening comprehension, language awareness, etc.).
- (6) Translation tasks (direct and inverse translation, sight translation, back-translation, analysis of translations, etc.).

The vast amount of exercises that can be included in each of these categories may overlap sometimes, of course, since a specific task could include different activities at the same time; but students are familiar with all of these main groups, which can be useful to classify different task aims and also to help students mark their general preferences. Table 3 illustrates their preferences as regards the activities they found most motivating, showing the total number of responses for each activity type and for each order of preference.

*Table 3. Preference for types of activities according to motivation.*

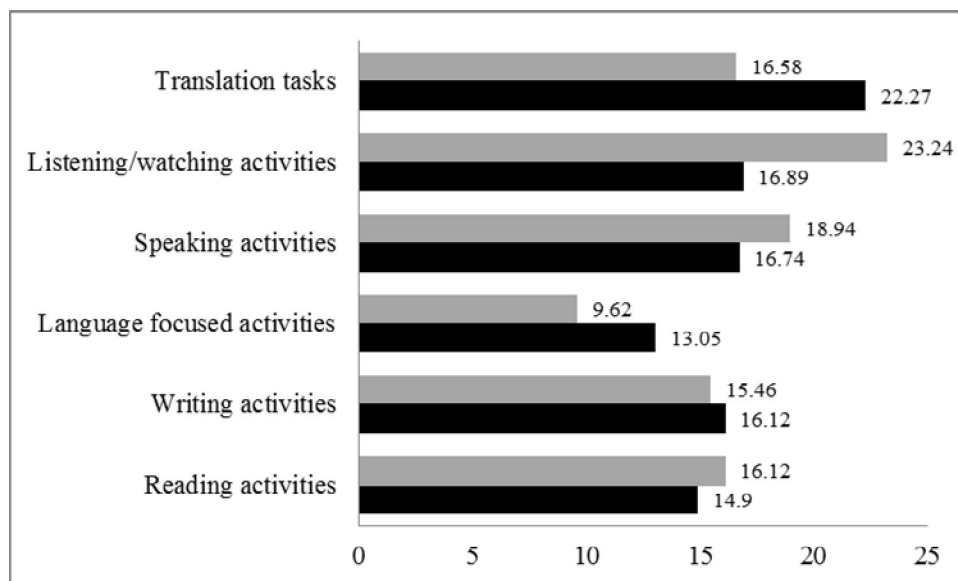
Activity types	1 <sup>st</sup> pref.		2 <sup>nd</sup> pref.		3 <sup>rd</sup> pref.		4 <sup>th</sup> pref.		5 <sup>th</sup> pref.		6 <sup>th</sup> pref.	
	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS
<b>MOTIVATION</b>												
Reading activities	0	14	0	14	11	15	48	17	3	17	0	16
Writing activities	9	11	0	14	18	7	14	29	21	19	0	13
Language focused activities	0	1	18	9	12	3	0	11	0	23	32	46
Speaking activities	21	23	0	20	14	18	0	7	9	14	18	11
Listening/watching activities	0	32	35	25	0	29	0	7	18	0	9	0
Translation tasks	32	12	9	11	7	21	0	22	11	20	3	7
<b>Responses</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>93</b>

The top three items (number of counts for activity types appearing with ranks 1, 2 and 3) for ES participants were translation tasks (accounting for 25.80% in a three top item count), listening and/or watching activities and speaking activities (18.81% for each of the types). In the case of CS, these were also the most motivating ones, listening or watching representing 30.82% of the top three responses, speaking 21.86% and translating 15.77%. Such a high rate for translation tasks was not expected in the responses made by CS students, so one of the reasons could be the selection of texts to translate, that were selected because they could add to their knowledge and interests (latest developments in computer science, latest gadgets, etc.).

The fact that translation tasks are now highly rated in the two degrees contrasts with students' response in the first questionnaire, in which they rated item 4 (translation tasks are enjoyable and entertaining) with 3.46 and 3.02 in the five point scale. This seems to imply that, before taking these subjects, they were indifferent towards translation or, in some cases in which the item was given a 1 or a 2, that it could even be perceived as to be 'the boring bit' of a language course.

In order to compare their results in a more visual way, a Borda count (where a rank 1 preference is allocated 6 points, rank 2 is allocated 5 points, etc. and multiplied by the number of preferences) was used to measure students' preferences, and yielded the results presented in Figure 2, expressed as percentages. The black columns indicate the preferences provided by ES students and the values specified in the shadowed columns correspond to CS students.

*Figure 2. Most motivating activity types.*



Even though motivation is a direct determinant of FL achievement, this survey also intended to see if students' perceptions were the same when evaluating tasks they thought were motivating and those that they considered more useful for FL improvement. Table 4 shows their order of preference for activities according to their usefulness in FL acquisition, and Figure 3 shows the percentages obtained with the Borda count. Again, black columns refer to ES students' preferences and the shadowed ones refer to CS students.

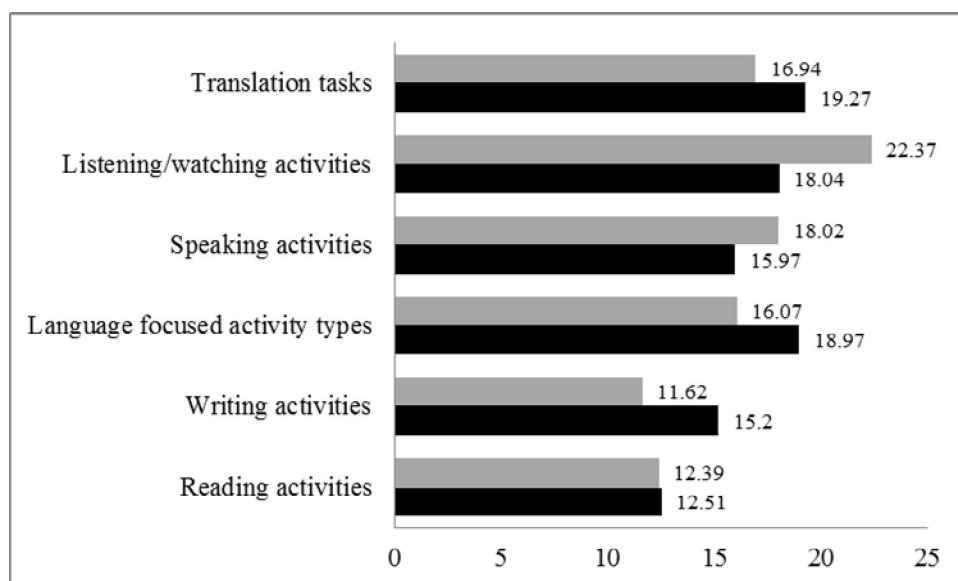
*Table 4. Preference for types of activities according to usefulness in FL acquisition.*

Activity types	1 <sup>st</sup> pref.		2 <sup>nd</sup> pref.		3 <sup>rd</sup> pref.		4 <sup>th</sup> pref.		5 <sup>th</sup> pref.		6 <sup>th</sup> pref.	
	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS
USEFULNESS												
Reading activities	6	9	5	7	4	5	11	19	17	23	19	30
Writing activities	5	6	8	15	14	11	15	20	7	21	13	20
Language focused activities	16	7	12	16	17	22	1	18	4	20	12	10
Speaking activities	4	19	11	17	15	20	12	12	13	12	7	13
Listening/watching activities	15	38	14	22	1	15	13	8	13	5	6	5
Translation tasks	16	14	12	16	11	20	10	16	8	12	5	15
Responses	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93

For CS students, listening, speaking and translating activities were, once more and in the same order, the three most rated items. Translation tasks were ranked as number one by most ES students<sup>1</sup>, followed by language focused activities and listening and/or watching activities. It is thought-provoking to observe how activities focusing explicitly on language issues (such as grammar or vocabulary) have obtained a considerable higher ranking (from 13.05% and 9.62 to 18.97% and 16.07%, respectively) when students are asked about activities that help them improve their English. It appears that students, in a way, still have the idea that focusing on language knowledge is more helpful than communicative learning focusing on language use.

*Figure 3. Most useful activity types.*

<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is impossible to determine to what extent participants were influenced by the fact that it was a translation subject and the questionnaires were completed during a regular class.



When asked about the main difficulties encountered when translating from English into Spanish and vice versa, students had to indicate the degree to which they considered that the issues specified resembled the translation problems they had over the semester. Beliefs and attitudes about difficulty in translation are certainly prone to subjective judgement (Hale and Campbell, 2002, p. 14); therefore, I tried to simplify the items in this list to the following 8 categories of translation problems:

- (1) Problems due to differences between both linguistic systems.
- (2) Text type problems: specific function of the text, subject-matter, etc.
- (3) Register problems: formal language, colloquial language, dialects, sociolects, and any other deviation from standard language.
- (4) Cultural problems: culture-specific terms, differences between cultures, etc.
- (5) Stylistic problems: translating poetry, puns, humour, metaphors, etc.
- (6) Historical-temporal problems: historical issues, texts that are temporally distant, etc.
- (7) Lack of resources: dictionaries, encyclopaedias, style books, etc.
- (8) Time available: not enough time to carry out the task.

Students had to rank these types of problems ranking them from 1, as the most problematic, to 8, as being the least difficult. Table 5 contains the results achieved in this question. The main translation problems for ES students were stylistic issue, then linguistic problems and, in third place, cultural differences; whereas for CS students the major concern had to do with language, followed by lack of resources and lack of time in order to successfully complete the task.

The problems ES subjects identified as less problematic were the ones derived from text typology, lack of resources and lack of time (which were precisely the most problematic ones in the other degree), followed very closely by historical-temporal problems. And CS results as less problematic issues were historical, stylistic and cultural problems, the 3 of them being quite close.

These results show huge divergences as regards to the difficulties both groups encountered. Needless to say, these differences are due (i) to learners English language level (since ES subjects were more proficient than CS subjects), and (ii) to the type of texts they were given to translate: the subject in ES included a great amount of texts (all of them selected because of the difficulties they presented), while CS students only had to translate a total of 8 texts and these were related to the CS field, with which they were supposed to be

familiar), however, they also imply a rather different perception on the task of translating and all it involves.

*Table 5. Most problematic aspects of translation.*

Translation problems	1 <sup>st</sup> pref.		2 <sup>nd</sup> pref.		3 <sup>rd</sup> pref.		4 <sup>th</sup> pref.		5 <sup>th</sup> pref.		6 <sup>th</sup> pref.		7 <sup>th</sup> pref.		8 <sup>th</sup> pref.	
	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS	ES	CS
Linguistic problems	15	46	18	23	10	15	4	6	7	3	5	0	3	0	0	0
Text type problems	1	5	3	9	5	12	2	23	6	22	5	7	22	10	18	5
Register problems	15	3	5	12	7	13	8	19	14	11	10	16	1	15	2	4
Cultural problems	16	4	9	7	17	9	15	6	3	12	2	18	0	16	0	21
Stylistic problems	14	1	16	2	15	8	9	15	5	10	3	23	0	15	0	19
Historical problems	0	1	3	3	2	7	7	4	12	14	16	11	9	20	13	33
Lack of resources	0	21	2	18	1	12	9	9	8	7	10	11	12	7	20	8
Lack of time	1	12	6	19	5	17	8	11	7	14	11	7	15	10	9	3
Responses	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93	62	93

Finally, Table 6 presents students' responses on the 15 items related to the usefulness of translation tasks. Again, they had to rate them in a 5 point scale, in which 1 was 'I strongly disagree', and 5 was 'I strongly agree'. These items could all be encompassed within PACTE's translation competence model (2003, p. 58-59), so they have been ordered following the sub-competencies they propose: items 1 to 9 are part of the bilingual sub-competence (which is made up of pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge in the two languages); items 10 and 11 are included within extra-linguistic sub-competence, item 12 represents the knowledge about translation sub-competence, item 13 belongs to the instrumental sub-competence, item 14 is the procedural knowledge of the strategic sub-competence, and the last item refers to the psycho-physiological components

*Table 6. Usefulness of translation tasks.*

Why do you think translation tasks can be useful? How can translation contribute to language acquisition?	ES	CS
(1) To improve lexical knowledge.	4.24	4.4
(2) To improve grammatical knowledge	4.03	3.92
(3) To improve knowledge of language registers and dialects.	4.51	2.84
(4) To improve knowledge of pragmatic conventions.	4.12	3.06
(5) To improve textual knowledge (coherence, cohesion and different genres).	3.86	3.13
(6) To acquire more fluency and fastness in re-expression.	4.22	4.05
(7) To raise awareness of the differences between both linguistic systems.	4.09	3.98
(8) To avoid making mistakes derived from the transfer of their mother tongue.	3.27	3.48

(9) To develop a deeper understanding of the relationships between form and content.	4.27	3.7
(10) To acquire knowledge about the source and target cultures.	4.56	3.85
(11) To acquire knowledge about specific areas (subject knowledge).	2.68	3.24
(12) To learn about translation and the translation profession.	2.93	2.76
(13) To improve the use of computer-aided translation tools (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, style books, parallel texts, etc.).	3.86	4.02
(14) To identify translation problems and apply procedures to solve them.	3.95	2.43
(15) To develop critical spirit, creativity, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis, etc.	3.15	2.97

Eight items ended up with a very high score in ES responses, obtaining more than 4 points in the Likert scale (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 and 10), most of them related to the first sub-competence consisting of knowledge in the two languages. Items 11 (to acquire knowledge about specific subject domains) and 12 (to learn about translation and the translation profession) received the lowest means (2.68 and 2.93) in ES questionnaires, which may be an indicator of ES students apparent lack of interest in the profession or, if not, a greater focus on their degree (as opposed to the degree in Translation Studies).

As for CS students, the highest rated items were number 13 (to improve the use of computer-aided translation tools), 6 (to acquire more fluency and fastness in re-expression) and 1 (to improve lexical knowledge), all above four points in the scale. The importance given to vocabulary acquisition by both groups could perhaps be said to reinforce the research carried out by Hummel (2010, p. 61) and Laufer and Girsai (2008), who report on the influence of the native language on the acquisition of new vocabulary and suggest that translation could be a useful cognitive strategy in FL vocabulary learning. The lowest rated items in the case of CS students were 3, 12, 14 and 15, most probably due to the fact that these are not considered aims in their academic degree, or due to a lack of awareness on the part of the subjects as regards all that translation activities may comprise.

As pointed out when describing the procedure followed in the survey, this question also included a section in which students could include additional aims or reasons why they thought translation tasks could be useful, as well as any other comments on the usefulness of translation. Among the main reasons they added<sup>2</sup> were to discuss translation problems, to improve speaking ability and to better explain how the FL functions (stated by ES students), and to improve text comprehension (mentioned both by CS and ES participants). Albeit students were encouraged to provide their personal opinion, there were almost no comments on how translation could contribute to FL acquisition, but some of the few comments offered are worth mentioning: (1) "Translation has also improved my mother tongue, which was really necessary, because I normally just write in English", (2) "I like working on the difficulties involved and work out good solutions", (3) "Translation will be useful for my future", and (4) "Translation tasks are more complete because they involve many of the other activities". The first two remarks quoted seem appealing because they show the importance of raising students' awareness of the need to express themselves in their native language with correctness and appropriateness, "becoming critical users of their own native tongue [...] critically analyse and succinctly express the nature of specific translation problems" (Fernández Polo and Cal Varela, 2011, p. 45), and the last one subscribes the argument that TILT can be a useful tool to develop the four skills of reading, writing, listening and

<sup>2</sup> Many more items were suggested by students in both groups, but most of them could clearly be fitted within the 15 categories appearing in this part of the questionnaire.



speaking. On the whole, one can say that participants show a very positive attitude towards translation and its potential, so one can claim, in line with Ashouri and Fotovatnia (2010, p. 228), that “learners very often have a positive belief about translation to comprehend, remember, and produce a foreign language”.

## 5. Conclusion

Growing numbers of researchers are supporting the potential of TILT in order to enhance second and foreign language acquisition processes but, still, the use of the native language and translation tasks keeps being restricted in FL educational contexts. The present paper has reviewed the most significant arguments for and against the incorporation of translation in the FL classroom and has referred to the main recent research that supports the use of the mother tongue and several translation tasks in FL courses. Very little attention, however, has been explicitly given to students’ attitudes and perspectives on the role that translation plays in the FL classroom.

This paper has also shown the results of an empirical study, which was conducted precisely to try to shed more light on the matter. The study involved a total of 62 Spanish learners of English undertaking a degree in English Studies, and 93 students of a degree in Computer Science, with a lower proficiency level and different course objectives.

The major findings confirm previous studies as regards the use of the mother tongue when learning a FL and seem to imply that students tend to display favourable attitudes towards activities they find motivating. When asked for their opinion on several activity types that normally take place in the classroom, students ranked translation tasks as the most motivating activities and the ones they believed that could be more effective in FL acquisition, alongside listening and/or watching activities and speaking activities.

Main translation problems encountered were also taken into consideration. Results revealed a somewhat contradictory feeling towards translation difficulties between students of both degrees, the main translation problems for ES students being stylistic, linguistic and cultural problems, whereas CS students found that differences between both linguistic systems were the most problematic area when translating, followed by lack of resources (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, style books, etc.) and lack of time.

Students’ final point of view on the overall usefulness of translation tasks indicated that ES students’ attitudes towards TILT were extremely positive because translation could help them acquire knowledge about the source and target cultures, improve knowledge of language registers and dialects, improve lexical knowledge, acquire more fluency and fastness in re-expression, improve their knowledge of pragmatic conventions, raise awareness of the differences between both linguistic systems, and improve grammatical knowledge. In the case of CS students, translation tasks were considered useful as a means to improve the use of computer-aided translation tools, acquire more fluency and fastness in re-expression and improve lexical knowledge.

The findings obtained here cannot be extrapolated, of course, since results would probably have been different with a larger number of students, a greater variety of questionnaires, comparing students’ attitudes to teachers’ beliefs and other scholars’ results, etc. What seems clear is that there is enough empirical evidence to suggest that TILT has an important role to play in FL teaching, since it offers many beneficial issues to learners and, if properly designed, translation can be a very complete and useful task to carry out in the FL class. And, certainly, more studies—both of a theoretical and above all of an empirical kind—should be carried out, along the lines of many of the authors that have been quoted in the preceding pages. I am pretty convinced that this would contribute to this new ‘revival’ of translation in FL educational contexts and would certainly benefit scholars, teachers, students, and all those who are interested in our field.

### About the Author:

**Ana Fernández Guerra** holds a B.A. Honours degree in Modern Languages (University of Coventry), a degree in English Studies (Universitat de València), a degree in Hispanic Studies (Universitat de València) and a Ph.D. in Translation Studies (Universitat de València). She is Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies, Universitat Jaume I of Castellón, Spain, since 1999, where she teaches 'English-Spanish translation', both in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Her research focuses on Translation Studies, Contrastive analysis, and Second language acquisition; areas in which she has published 10 books and more than 50 articles and chapters of books. She has also served in several management positions at the Universitat Jaume I; as head of international relations, for example (2006 to 2011).

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