



Self-Translated Writing in Academic Writing: Students' Experiences in the Classroom Setting

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Abstract: Self-Translated Academic Writing Practice is a bridge or instrument for improved classroom communication. The purpose of the present study was to investigate how students engage in translation practice while writing in the classroom. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews based on written task, with 20 students enrolled in an advanced academic writing course, the research explores the cognitive, linguistic, and psychological outcomes of self-translated writing in a foreign language. The findings reveal that self-translation without a dictionary increases cognitive load, leading to mental fatigue and a greater challenge in recalling specific academic vocabulary. As a result, students often experience imprecise translations, compromising the clarity and accuracy required in academic writing. However, the process also fosters independent language development, encouraging students to expand their vocabulary and enhance their grammatical proficiency. Despite these benefits, the lack of a dictionary results in heightened anxiety and decreased confidence, particularly when students struggle to express complex ideas. Overall, the study suggests that while self-translation without a dictionary can lead to language development, it may hinder writing precision and increase psychological stress.

Keywords: Self-translated; translation; academic writing; classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation has recently been revitalized as an approach to language learning that expands students' linguistic repertoires, especially in linguistically diverse classrooms (Beiler & Dewilde, 2020). In multilingual educational settings, translation serves as a tool to bridge the gap between languages, enhancing students' understanding of course content and improving their proficiency in the target language. However, only some studies have investigated how students incorporate translation into their writing in a second language (Kim, 2010). According to research, scholarly translation writing and translation labor are remarkably similar. Few studies have examined how students use translation when writing in English as a foreign language (Vogel, J; Smith, A; Jones, 2018). Until now, translation training has consisted of translating from one language to another into the target language. Translation is aware that the primary difficulty in translating from a foreign language to a first language is understanding the source text (Alhaisoni, E., & Alhaysony, 2017), while the main challenge in translating from L1 to L2 is producing a fluent target text (Lee, 2014). Self-translation is predominantly a skill that requires continuous learning and practice. In academic contexts, self-translation demands that students not only translate language but also interpret and convey the scholarly discourse and nuances embedded in

the original text. Translation, therefore, becomes a crucial method for understanding and engaging with other cultures, which is particularly important in the academic context where knowledge exchange is a key function. Many students self-translate their academic papers to ensure that they meet the linguistic and content-specific requirements of their target audience.

According to Montgomery (2009), there are numerous ways to translate in an academic setting, ranging from the standard translation of full texts to the translation of portions of academic texts for personal, full use, or partial self-translation for publication, as well as other types of translation or partial mediation that facilitate the transfer of knowledge between languages. Alongside it, this translation action is unobserved and functions as an ongoing process. Many translation and mediation processes are challenging to analyze because they occur behind the scenes. This situation is notably actual regarding the self-translation teaching practice. As translation is predominantly a matter of skill, the learning process must resemble that of skilled artisans, who observe others performing their craft and are closely supervised as they practice (Gouadec, 2007). In today's increasingly globalized and digitalized world, the concept is evolving and becoming more fluid, while scholars in Translation Studies are becoming more nomadic, both in their affiliations and across disciplines (Gambier, 2023).

Translation is certainly beyond the level of conveying the semantic meaning of the Source Text to the Target Text (Youngshin, 2007). Language mediation into English may be required for various reasons, such as insufficient time to concentrate on academic experiences. Research on the academic work of bilingual individuals has revealed that English is utilized differently in various fields of study. The translation process entails transferring a text from one language to another using various strategies and techniques (Samha, F., Haider, A. S., & Hussein, 2023). The translation is regarded as the key to comprehending and interacting with the cultures of others (Al Aqad, 2014).

Most research on self-translation has focused on literary self-translation (Cordingley, Anthony; Chiara, 2015) views self-translation as a literary event), but non-literary self-translation has received less attention. It distinguishes itself by comparing self-translated academic texts with student translations of the same texts, concentrating on language and discourse features (Jung, 2016). This lack of interest in the self-translation of non-literary texts needs to be clarified, considering that the self-translation of non-literary texts is common, even in academic contexts (Pinto, 2012). Self-translation could be studied more thoroughly (Montini, 2023). It may be because self-translation does not conform to the translation model (Pisanski Peterlin, 2018).

Perales-Escudero and Swales (2011) agree that it is essential to read self-translated academic works because they can educate you about how people from different countries use language differently and can assist you in translating or learning a more advanced language. This potential use of self-translation as a reference point is significant because it can be challenging to translate academic texts if they are not a member of the field discourse group (Pisanski Peterlin, 2018). Self-translation was once considered a literary phenomenon, involving authors who translate their own works into another language (Popovič, 1975). Self-translators are typically driven by their intercultural experiences and desire to create unique artistic or literary works (Hokenson, 2013) by examining linguistic and discourse characteristics, self-translators often employ translation strategies that differ from those used by other translators (Lyu & Han, 2023). As a result, more is needed to know about how self-translation operates in academic contexts; we need to learn more

about the situations in which students self-translate while writing academic papers. This study explores the gap in literature regarding self-translated writing in academic contexts, focusing on students' experiences within classroom settings. The research question seeks to understand how students perceive and engage with the process of self-translation in their academic writing, aiming to uncover the challenges, benefits, and overall impact on their learning outcomes and linguistic development.

Translation strategies are procedures that translators use to address problems they encounter when translating from one language to another (Santoyo, 2010). They are frequently goal- or target-oriented strategies. According to Larson (1997), Meaning-based and form-based often referred to as a literal translation, a form-based translation is one in which translators endeavor to match the form of the source language. The translation based on meaning is also known as an idiomatic translation, as the source text's meaning is expressed in the natural form of the target language. The objective of a competent translator is to translate idiomatically by making numerous form adjustments. In other words, the translator should aim to produce a text in the target language that conveys the same meaning as the source text but uses the grammatical and lexical choices that are natural to the target language. According to (Davies, 2004), three primary learning process approaches apply to translation training. The first is transmissions: the traditional product-oriented and teacher-centered learning context in which students are instructed to read and translate' model translations without inquiry.

Moreover, the transactional approach, based on cooperative learning, includes group work and interaction. However, the teacher retains the final solution to the problems posed in the activities, a step toward student empowerment. The other approach is transformational, consisting of a student- and learning-centered environment that emphasizes collaborative study and investigation of the translation process, with the teacher serving as a guide, where procedures that bridge classroom work and extramural practices are implemented.

When no equivalence or equivalence does not have the same meaning (Hussein, R. F; Haider, A; Saed, 2022), various translation strategies could be used to subtitle address forms. According to (Davies, 2004), three primary approaches to the learning process apply to translation training. First, transmissionist is the traditional product-oriented and teacher-centered learning context in which students are instructed to read and translate' model translations without inquiry. Next, it is transactional: based on cooperative learning, there is group work and interaction, but the teacher still has the ultimate answer to the problems posed in the activities, a step toward student empowerment. The final context is transformative: a student- and learning-centered environment that emphasizes collaborative study and investigation of the translation process, with the teacher as a guide. Diverse opinions exist regarding the status of self-translation. There are two primary points of view. According to Genette (1997) and Hebenstreit (2019), when bilingual authors self-translate, they create two versions of each of their works and consider self-translation "a complete rewriting." As a result, there is a pressing need for further research into how self-translation operates in academic settings, particularly in the context of second language writing. Understanding the situations in which students engage in self-translation while writing academic papers is essential for developing more effective pedagogical strategies. Self-translation can thus serve as a bridge for students who need to navigate between their native language and English in academic contexts, but more research is needed to fully understand its role and potential. To address this gap, the primary research

question that guided this study was: What are the likely effects of self-translation without using a dictionary in translation practice?

METHOD

This preliminary study of self-translation employs semi-structured interviews with twenty students in an academic writing class to examine their ideas and assumptions regarding self-translation in a writing activity and their experiences as authors-translators. This investigation employed a qualitative research methodology. It seeks to determine what they knew and how they reacted to translation in academic settings. This study explores the gap in literature regarding self-translated writing in academic contexts, focusing on students' experiences within classroom settings. The research question aims to explore how students view and interact with the process of self-translation in their academic writing.

Consequently, this study aimed to gain a general understanding of how effects' students self-translate without using a dictionary in translation practice. The study employs a combination of semi-structured interviews and written tasks to collect comprehensive data on students' self-translation practices and perceptions. A total of 20 students academic writing course at a college were selected to participate in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a varied range of language backgrounds and academic experiences.

Participants and Data

This investigation was conducted at a university as part of an academic writing course in the teacher education department. Students in the academic writing course need more writing experience. The students had just begun their academic composition class in their second year of study. The first data collected will require students to translate the argumentative and narrative paragraphs without consulting a dictionary. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Kvale, 1988). Participants were asked to complete a writing task in which they translated an academic text (approximately 300 words) from their native language into English without using a dictionary or any translation tools. The text was chosen to reflect typical academic content, requiring the use of discipline-specific vocabulary and complex sentence structures. This task was designed to simulate the real-world process of self-translation in academic contexts where students often must write in a second language without external resources (Wang et al., 2020). After completing the self-translation task, each student participated in a semi-structured interview. After completing the written task of translation, the students dispersed throughout the group. Each group comprised of three to four individuals. The author of this paper conveyed the questions to them to clarify the current translation practice. They may respond to the questions individually or in groups.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section introduces student learning process excerpts. They were engaged in intense group discussions. While all students turned in their translation projects, they shared their experiences with the class. The participant articulated her perplexity by verbalizing her thoughts. Initially, vocabulary difficulty is a classical issue. However, this remains a significant issue in translation activities (Gambier, 2023). They had trouble

translating because they were prohibited from consulting a dictionary. This matter was distressing for them because their vocabulary skills were also inadequate (Hebenstreit, 2019).

In the study, several participants shared their experiences of translating academic texts without relying on grammar tools, highlighting the difficulties they encountered in maintaining accuracy and coherence in their translations. The students reported that the absence of grammar assistance led to confusion, especially when dealing with complex sentence structures commonly found in academic writing.

One participant mentioned how challenging it was to arrange compound and complex sentences without the immediate support of grammar references. They explained that, while translating, they often found themselves uncertain about the placement of parts of speech, especially when it came to subject-verb agreement and word order. This issue was particularly evident when translating sentences that required the restructuring of phrases to align with English syntactic rules. The lack of grammar tools forced them to rely solely on their own understanding, which sometimes resulted in awkward or grammatically incorrect translations. As one student put it, *"I just felt stuck. Sometimes, the sentences just didn't flow right. I wasn't sure whether the subject and verb should agree in this case or how to rephrase it in a way that sounded academic."*

Additionally, many students expressed concern about their ability to maintain academic rigor in their translations. Without the ability to consult grammar tools, they often feared that their translations might sound too informal or imprecise, undermining the academic tone required for such texts. This concern was particularly strong when translating highly specialized or technical content, where the precision of language is crucial. One participant confessed, *"I was worried that my translation wouldn't be professional enough. I could get the general meaning, but the fine details were hard to get right. I often had to guess how to phrase things properly, and I wasn't sure if it sounded academic."*

Moreover, the participants discussed how they had to rely heavily on their prior knowledge of English grammar rules, which, in some cases, was insufficient to handle the nuances of academic writing. They also noted that translating without the aid of grammar tools required more mental effort, increasing cognitive load. One participant mentioned, *"It was exhausting. I kept thinking about whether the sentence structure was right, and if I had used the correct grammatical form. Every decision felt heavy because I couldn't check it easily."*

In addition, when they translate, variations in the placement of parts of speech cause them confusion. Concerning the subject-verb agreement, they stated that finding equivalents in their own English vocabulary was challenging. However, they were still determining whether the equivalent English expressions are commonly used.

For instance, when she saw the word she needed to translate, the first word that came to mind was "universe," which she learned as a primary school pupil by reciting English wordlists. In addition, she stated that she was uncertain whether the word was a verb. How to replace the word in the sentences because "unify" occurred in the fixed segment in her memory universe closer. They stated that she would look up their equivalents in a dictionary, but they could not access the dictionary. They were uncertain as to which term was more prevalent or idiomatic. For instance, the first search result is the one most similar to the one in her textbook. According to the students, they are simple

to translate literally, but she is still determining if they are acceptable in an academic context.

When describing how to arrange compound complex or complicated sentences, the literal translation of "globalization unifies the diverse community." However, the students were uncertain whether native English speakers would comprehend this expression. In addition, she stated that she was uncertain of the grammatical form of certain words, whether singular or plural, verb or noun. She was also concerned that their translation would likely be informal and not up to international publishing standards. In conclusion, difficulties in translating academic discourse are typically found in their academic paragraph; therefore, translation helps them convey their thoughts.

Students' Experiences towards Academic Text When Translating without Grammar Tools

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Despite these challenges, the students acknowledged that this process forced them to think more critically about their language use and improved their ability to identify and correct errors on their own. Some students even saw this as an opportunity to reinforce their grammar knowledge. As one participant reflected, *"Even though it was hard, I feel like*

I'm learning. It's like I'm practicing grammar in real-life situations. I'm making mistakes, but I can see what I need to work on." Immediately, the interview was conducted to determine the participant's perspectives on translation practice and the challenges of using the appropriate word in context. Very problematic was the participant's attitude toward academic text. Even though it was a fascinating process, corpus exploration was difficult for them. However, they were able to verify their assumptions about language usage in concordance and identify the most native-like expressions. They expressed great concern about her English skills. They were confident to construct a larger corpus related to her sentence and utilizing it in her academic writing and translation.

The participant also believed that exploration was somewhat time-consuming. They remarked that they were not accustomed to reading concordance lines in academic text, and they theorized that they needed to gain prior experience and that they would surmount all of her difficulties if she consulted it frequently. Students initially used translation as a conduit to write in English. Writing inhibits students' ability to communicate their thoughts. The findings indicate that translation allows them to explore their concepts. The limitations of translation tools became an efficient means of exploring their awareness at the time of their investigation. Their translation activity assisted them in finishing their academic writing. In general, translation practice is more accurately characterized as revision than translation.

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the cognitive, linguistic, and psychological challenges faced by students engaged in self-translated academic writing without a dictionary. Students' experiences in this study align with previous research on translation and language acquisition, particularly in the context of academic writing. While the process of self-translation can lead to cognitive overload and increased anxiety (Zhu et al., 2024), it also promotes vocabulary expansion and deeper engagement with both languages. The students also expressed a preference for a balanced approach, where self-translation could be complemented by occasional use of dictionaries. This is consistent with previous research by Maier et al. (2022) who found that combining independent translation practices with dictionary support could provide the cognitive and psychological benefits of both approaches. Students in this study felt that dictionaries could enhance the accuracy of their translations and reduce the anxiety associated with uncertainty, while still allowing them to develop their language skills independently.

Cognitive Load and Its Impact on Translation

The participants' struggles with vocabulary were prominent, particularly when they had to rely solely on their own knowledge without the support of a dictionary. As noted in the original and results sections, the participants expressed difficulty recalling specific academic vocabulary and finding precise equivalents. They also reported an increase in cognitive load, especially when attempting to translate more complex academic ideas. This was particularly apparent when they encountered terms or expressions that were not commonly used in their own English vocabulary, a challenge emphasized by the students' need to perform cognitive "searches" for the right words. The process of self-translation without a dictionary often led to mental exhaustion, mirroring the findings of cognitive overload from prior studies such as (Zhu et al., 2024) cognitive load theory.

In both the student excerpts and results, the struggle with vocabulary was articulated as a significant barrier to the translation process. The students frequently found it challenging to determine whether a term was accurate or idiomatic, particularly when

they were unsure of the grammatical forms of words or their usage in academic contexts. For example, one participant found herself unsure whether "universe" was the correct translation for a concept and struggled to determine if an alternative, term like "unify" would be appropriate in a different grammatical context. This aligns with findings from the study's results, where students reported that self-translating without a dictionary led to imprecision in their academic writing.

Anxiety, Frustration, and Loss of Precision

The psychological impact of translation was another consistent theme across both sections. Participants reported significant anxiety, which increased as they faced difficulties in finding the right terms and felt uncertain about their translations' academic accuracy. In both the student excerpts and the study's findings, there was a clear connection between anxiety and the perceived loss of precision. Many students noted that their translations were not as precise as they would have liked, often leading them to produce vague language that lacked the clarity and academic rigor required in scholarly texts. This theme resonates with the broader findings of the study, which showed that the lack of a dictionary contributed to a loss of precision, diminishing the academic quality of students' work. The feelings of uncertainty regarding their translations' adequacy, particularly in terms of subject-verb agreement and the appropriate academic phrasing, are closely linked to the anxiety and frustration observed in the results. This echoes findings from previous studies, including Zhu et al. (2024) and Britt (2024), who discussed how anxiety over translation and writing accuracy can lead to procrastination and a loss of confidence in students' writing abilities.

Language Skill Development and Self-Translation

Despite the cognitive and emotional challenges, the students reported positive outcomes related to their language development. The excerpts from the students' experiences suggest that, while translating, they were forced to be resourceful, looking for alternative ways to express their ideas when they could not immediately recall the right word (Davies, 2015). This independent language search pushed them to expand their vocabulary, as they relied on their understanding of both their native language (L1) and English (L2). In the results section, students who reported that the process of self-translation, despite its challenges, helped them engage more deeply with both languages, leading to gradual improvements in their language competency, echoed this. This aligns with the findings from the study, which indicated that self-translation without dictionary-helped students improve their overall language skills, particularly in terms of vocabulary and grammar, over time (Buden & Nowotny, 2009). The development of independent language skills through self-translation is particularly noticeable for those who with intermediate to advanced proficiency in English, as indicated in both the excerpts and study results.

Preference for a Balanced Approach

Finally, the preference for a balanced approach between self-translation and dictionary use emerged as a key theme. While the students acknowledged the benefits of independent language exploration through self-translation, they also expressed a desire to have access to a dictionary to ensure accuracy and reduce the anxiety associated with uncertainty in their translations. This preference was reflected in both the student

experiences and the results, where many students stated they felt a dictionary could enhance the precision of their work while still providing opportunities to develop their language skills. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as (Vansina, 2004), which suggested that a balance of independent translation practice and dictionary support would be the most effective approach for academic writing development.

The integration of the student learning process excerpts with the study results highlights the complex interplay between cognitive load, anxiety, language development, and the challenges of academic translation. The findings underscore that while self-translating without a dictionary fosters vocabulary expansion and language autonomy, it also increases cognitive strain, reduces writing precision, and leads to greater psychological stress. The optimal approach appears to be one that strikes a balance between independent self-translation and the strategic use of dictionaries, providing students with both the tools to improve their language skills and the confidence to produce more accurate and precise academic work.

In conclusion, the process of self-translating academic texts without a dictionary presents both challenges and opportunities for multilingual students (Mossop, 2017). While it increases cognitive load, can lead to imprecise translations, and heightened anxiety, it also promotes vocabulary expansion, independent language growth, and a deeper engagement with academic texts (Greenall et al., 2019). A balanced approach that integrates both self-translation and selective dictionary use appears to be the most effective strategy for supporting students' academic writing development (Desjardins, 2019). Further research could explore how educators can incorporate this balanced approach into the curriculum to help students navigate the complexities of self-translation and improve their overall writing proficiency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study revealed that self-translated writing serves as both a strategic and adaptive tool for students navigating academic writing in a second language. Students use self-translation to bridge linguistic gaps, express complex ideas, and maintain their academic voice, though they often face challenges such as language interference, tone inconsistency, and meaning preservation. The classroom environment, including teacher guidance and peer support, plays a crucial role in shaping these experiences. Based on the findings, it is recommended that educators recognize and support self-translation practices through integrated multilingual instruction, targeted training on translation techniques, and reflective writing activities. Creating a supportive and open classroom culture can enhance students' confidence and competence in academic writing while encouraging further research into self-translation across diverse educational contexts.

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