

# ROLE OF PEDAGOGICAL TRANSLATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN BENIN

**Rissikatou MOUSTAPHA épouse BABALOLA**

*Université d'Abomey-Calavi*

*rissikatouba@gmail.com*

**Bienvenu KOMAKLO**

*Université d'Abomey-Calavi*

*komakbienbeni@gmail.com*

## Résumé

*Du fait de la globalisation et du multilinguisme, la traduction joue un rôle de plus en plus important. Elle peut aussi contribuer à améliorer l'enseignement et l'apprentissage des langues étrangères. Dans les universités béninoises, les étudiants des départements d'anglais, d'allemand et d'espagnol sont formés aux exercices de traduction communément appelés thème et version. Cette étude montre comment ces exercices influencent l'acquisition de l'anglais par les étudiants. Cent cinquante étudiants de Licence 2 et Licence 3 constituent la population cible de cette étude. Pour montrer comment l'usage de la traduction en situation de classe peut aider à renforcer et à améliorer les compétences de lecture, d'écriture, d'expression orale et d'écoute, une méthode de recherche mixte rassemblant la théorie sur l'utilisation de la traduction dans l'enseignement d'une nouvelle langue et l'impact réel sur les étudiants a été utilisée. La recherche révèle que même si les différents exercices de traduction aident les étudiants à améliorer les différentes compétences, les méthodes utilisées par les enseignants doivent être revues.*

**Mots-clés :** *traduction pédagogique, thème, version.*

## Abstract

*In an increasingly globalized and multilingual world, translation plays an important role. It can help improve foreign language teaching and learning. In Beninese universities, the students of the departments of English, Germany and Spanish are trained in translation exercises commonly known as theme and version. This study shows how these exercises influence the acquisition of a foreign language, namely English by the students. 150 students of L2 and L3 are the target population of this study. In an attempt to show how the use of translation in foreign language classes can help enhance and further improve reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, a mixed research method putting together the theory about the use of translation in teaching a new language and the impact it really has on students have been used. The research reveals that even if the different translation exercises help students improve the different skills, the methods used by the lecturers need to be revisited.*

**Keywords:** *pedagogical translation, theme, version.*

## **Introduction**

In the past, innovative research methodologies have been used in order to shed light on the translation process in EFL classrooms. To achieve a satisfactory result in any learning field today, the use and the mastery of foreign languages especially English, have become a must. Hence, despite the efforts that have been made for the promotion of English language learning in Benin, the results remain unsatisfactory, especially when we look at students' oral performance level. Yet, it is generally acknowledged that the aim of learning any language is communication. Thus, apart from being an act of communication, translation is a complex activity which involves linguistic, cultural, communicative and cognitive factors. It can be used in various ways to simplify and hasten language learning. Therefore, although teachers are unanimous over the issue of using or not using translation in the EFL classroom, it remains a helpful tool if used appropriately and purposefully. So, this paper sheds light on what pedagogical translation is, and its importance in EFL teaching/learning. Thereafter, some solutions have been suggested to school stakeholders, especially learners.

### **1. Problem statement and purpose of the study**

EFL learning in Beninese schools especially at university is far from meeting the expectation. After learning English for many years at secondary school (seven at least), students are unable to use it not only to communicate in real-life situations; but also to translate sentences (also known as Theme and Version) as required from a source language into the target one or conversely. Thus, despite the efforts, methods and strategies that are applied by lecturers in translating sentences, the results are still not encouraging. Therefore, this paper seeks for alternatives to reverse this matter of facts by exploring the role of translation in EFL classes.

In fact, translation has long been regarded as one of the methods on EFL and ESL teaching for many years (Cook, 2010: 125). At times, the failure of the Grammar-Translation method used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the ardent Reform Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have influenced scholars and teachers to shun the method from their pedagogical sphere (Vermees *et al.*, 2010). Still, the world is witnessing a

technological revolution which has changed and will continue to change everything around us. According to (Garcia, 2005: 8), the position of translation training/learning in the global society is affected by the new technology roles, given that these roles can be seen as challenges and necessary objectives of second/foreign language pedagogy.

Certain teaching methods such as the direct method ban the use of translation or students' native language in foreign language teaching and learning. That is why paper attempts to explore the views of a sample of EFL students in the departments of English, Germany and Spanish at University of Abomey-Calavi on how often they use translation and the situations where it may be used in language learning.

## **2. Pedagogical translation**

Translation is an important tool in teaching/learning a foreign language that been associated with the grammar translation method and considered as a mechanic approach to foreign language learning. Many scholars consider translation as irrelevant in the context of foreign language learning. More than a decade after Lavault's publication, (Hurtado Albir, 1999: 11) introduced "pedagogical translation" as an applied branch within a conceptual map of translation studies as a discipline. Though her focus was on the pedagogy of professional translation, the publication also became an important landmark in second language acquisition in as much as she reformulated Holmes's 1972 well-known proposal for classifying the different areas that integrate translation studies. She further created a space within the new philosophies for translation pedagogies that was specifically devoted to translation in the language classroom in a way that recognized the demands of communicative language teaching, referring to it as "pedagogical translation."

Pedagogical factors refer to what the teacher is and/or does toward his/her learners as (Fawzia; 2002) cited in (Tuan & Nhu, 2010: 38) declares: "The lecturer, the course and the topic are all related to pedagogical factors." According to (Munday, 2012: 08), the term translation, first used in 1340 by Richard Role in the preface of his Psalter (*Oxford English Dictionary, online*), is a derivation product from either the Old French (translation) or from the Latin (translation –

‘transporting’). Nowadays, this term has different meanings. He further stated that translation is a process between two languages, which implies the modification of the original text or source text (ST) in the original language or source language (SL) into a new text or the target text (TT) in a new language the target language (TL). Hence, as stated by (Snell-Hornby, 1988: 81):

“Translation is a complex act of communication in which the SL-author, the reader as translator and translator as TL-author and the TL-reader interact. The translator starts from a present frame (the text and its linguistic components); this was produced by an author who drew from his own repertoire of partly prototypical scenes. Based on the frame of the text, the translator-reader builds up his own scenes depending on his own level of experience and his internalized knowledge of the material concerned.” (Snell-Hornby, 1988: 81)

According to (Leonardi, 2011: 17–28), translation as a pedagogical tool can be successfully employed at any level of proficiency, at school or university, as a valuable and creative teaching aid to support, integrate and further strengthen the four traditional language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. As for (Ridha, 2014) cited in (Wiratno, 2003:12), “translation is a process of transferring a message from Source Language (SL) into Target Language (TL). SL is an original language that is translated, while TL is a final language used to express the result of translation”. On their part, (Bhooth et al., 2014) see translation as an activity that has a function to facilitate the communication process by interpreting the information received in one language (L1) into another language (Foreign Language).

In contrast to Munday, translation does not only involve two different languages. According to (Jakobson, 2004: 232-239), translation is divided into three different categories: (i) intralingual translation, (ii) interlingual translation, and (iii) intersemiotic translation. For its part, pedagogical translation belongs to the second category (interlingual translation) because this category of translation is somehow a reported speech where the translator recodes and transmits a message received from another source.

Based on both (Lavault’s, 1985) and (Hurtado Albir’s, 1987: 77) conceptualizations, (de Arriba García, 1996) proposes accepting

translation in the language classroom under the label of 'pedagogical translation'. According to her, this label allows the inclusion of translation foreign language teaching as a skill, one that entails the rehabilitation of the first language (L1) in the foreign language classroom. She further distinguishes three different phenomena under 'pedagogical translation'. First, translation in the FL classroom may refer to translating texts where students work on reading and writing skills as well as comparing grammar structures and other aspects between the two different languages. Then, she refers to 'interior translation' through which the student translates an utterance produced in the foreign language into his/her L1 in order to access its meaning. This phenomenon is mostly prominent in the early stages of learning a foreign language. Finally, she talks about 'explicative' or 'explanatory translation' typically used as a resource by the teacher as a way of explaining certain words and/or grammar content, to identify and avoid false friends, to enable students to understand certain utterances straightaway, or to check whether they have understood specific explanations. In all three instances, there is clearly space for the L1 in its various forms in the FL classroom which is symbiotic to restoring pedagogical translation in the FL classroom; (De Arriba García, 1996: 277-278).

According to (Popovic, 2001: 3-8), translation has been a frequent object of ridicule by those eager to demonstrate their allegiance to modern ways and times. For (Ellis, 1992 and Ur, 1996), translation is a legitimate instrument for language pedagogy. Since translation studies rely on a concept of meaning, different approaches in these studies refer to different types of meaning: while some researchers study lexical patterns in source texts and their translations (Malahat, 2010), other scholars put emphasis on how the text utterances function within their immediate contexts (Nord, 1997). Others, however, examine the effect of the text as a whole on its audience or society (Venuti, 1998), while other researchers consider philosophy of language as a means to look at meaning in translation (Malmkjær, 1993: 63-64).

Despite the advantages of translation as a means of communication using the foreign language (Cook, 2010), it is, however, considered as a poor learning strategy when it comes to the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, where the best way for learners to gain aptitude in the target language is to think, particularly, in that language,

an act that can increase proficiency in the target language (Husain, 1995). Many studies, however, showed that the extent to which the students are fluent in the target language (L2) and are able to prevent possible interference from the native language (L1) is largely influenced by the strategy use of translation to learn the target foreign language (Chamot, 1987; Omura, 1996). How can translation be useful in EFL classes?

### **3. Role of translation in EFL classes**

In classroom context, translation means to develop the English language skills of the learners. These learners are taught translation for developing English language skills. As a method of language teaching and learning, translation is still an issue under research and one debated topic between linguists. The teaching of Foreign Language has been marked by what many authors call “baby and bathwater syndrome” (Sanchez Iglesias: 2009: 3), which has particularly affected pedagogical translation. The objections to the use of translation in foreign language teaching are all based on “a limited view of translation” (Vermeer: 2010: 91) caused by the badly use of the Grammar-Translation method in the past. According to (Leonardi, 2010: 21), translation allows people to be in contact with the rest of the world and it is commonly said that without translation, there is a high likelihood that communities would be “condemned to cultural isolation”.

(Ross; 2000) cited in (Dagilene, 2012: 21), claims that translation is recognized as a “fifth skill” alongside and complementary with reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is an important (if not the most important according to Ross) social skill because it promotes communication and comprehension. Translation is related to a real life communicative purpose. As (Duff, 1989: 06) points out, “translation happens everywhere, all the time, so why not in the classroom?” According to (Santoro, 2011: 152),

“A distorted view of communicative approach spread the idea that aspects of real life are just those relating to current and utilitarian communication situations and, even today, in the light of what has been propagated, this conviction dominates. However, our real life does not consist only in such situations and are not rare occasions in which our language needs go far beyond the formulas

or fixed structures through which we can, for example, ask for something or speak of what we do for the day". (Santoro, 2011: 152)

Nowadays, the importance of translation in foreign language classes is known worldwide. For instance, the acquisition of a second/foreign language at school level is also done by the act of translation purposely designed and under the monitoring of a translator teacher. In this regard, many studies suggested a positive and facilitative role of translation (Omura, 1996: 67-81). For example, (Shiyab and Abdullateef, 2001) consider translation extremely important for L2 teaching simply as it allows conscious learning and control of the target language in an explicit manner, and therefore, it would reduce language interference. Thus, using translation can make learning meaningful, as the learner is an active participant in the process. Likewise, there are others studies which also point out that greater awareness of the own-language helps in the more effective communicative and productive use of any L2.

(Owen, 2003: 1) thinks that translation should be taken as a path of fine-tuning the target language to be used in various situations, as in the translation process both L1 and L2 must be accessed. In other words, translation is a suitable manner to include explicit language teaching in the L2 class. (Liao, 2006: 191-215) puts some positive aspects of the use of translation in L2 teaching as follow:

- it might help students to comprehend the L2;
- it might help students to evaluate whether their comprehension is correct;
- it eases memory barriers in learning new items, idioms, syntactic structure and grammar in general;
- it may help students to develop and express ideas in the L2; it can reduce learning anxiety and improve motivation to learn L2.

In addition, (Schaffner, 1998: 117-133) also points out that the translation and related exercises could be beneficial to L2 learning as it tends to: improve verbal agility; expand students' vocabulary in L2; develop their style, improve their understanding of how languages work; to consolidate L2 structures for active use; monitor and to improve the comprehension of L2.

According to (Tang, 2002: 36-43), the use of the own-language by both teacher and learners can be beneficial in the process and, sometimes, may even be needed for an increased understanding and acceptance of the L2 by the learners. Still, the author states that the use of the learners' own-language is for clarifying purposes and must not be the primary means of communication in the L2 educational settings.

The importance of translation is noticed in many domains of human activities such as: languages development and national literatures, dissemination of knowledge, scientific breakthroughs, development and spreading of religions (Delisle and Woodsworth, 1995). For (Shiyab and Abdullateef, 2001: 7), "translation can be like medicine, which when administered in the right dose and way, has a curative effect, and otherwise, when used injudiciously, it can also prove harmful". In other words, translation should not be overused and should be integrated into language teaching at the right time, and with the right students. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, learning a foreign language consisted in doing so through the Grammar-Translation method that focused on learning the grammatical rules of the target language and carrying out a literal translation.

For (Kartinisari, 2018) cited in (Zhao, 2015: 38-51), translating the meaning of the target language into the native language is good ways to help the learners better understand the target language and help the learners grasp the knowledge of the target language easily. Similarly, (Kartinisari et al., 2018) found that translation give many benefits to the EFL learners. It can then said that translation is a vital tool which helps students acquire and develop their mental. The next parts deal with the process of data collection and analysis employed in this study.

#### **4. Research methodology**

The present study, unlike most studies on English language learning, is both qualitative and quantitative. Thus, it is generally known that EFL teaching/learning in Beninese schools, especially at universities, raises enormous problems leading to unsatisfactory results. Indeed, the choice and the decision to work on this topic stemmed from a mere observation deriving from the researchers' teaching experience and the learners' performance appreciation and analysis. Still, after many years of learning and translating sentences from a source language into the target one, it is noticeable that there are some factors that prevent

Beninese universities students learning foreign languages from succeeding in translating and in expressing themselves. Surprisingly, their good performance of the first year of learning starts decreasing every passing school year despite the fact that students are teenagers, which means that they are susceptible to learn more easily a language than adults.

To collect the data, a questionnaire has been given to 150 students of L2 and L3 randomly selected from the departments of English, Germany and Spanish of Abomey-Calavi University. It was ensured that respondents studied English. It took them 10 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The return rate was 93.33% (i.e. 140 completed questionnaire were returned).

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions based on scales including statements, and the students were to choose the number that best corresponded to their feelings.

## **5. Findings and discussion of the results**

This part displays the different data or results collected from the questionnaire sheets and research conducted for the attainment of the objectives of this paper.

### ***5.1. Findings of the study***

The research involves 150 students. As a result, 140 questionnaire sheets have been returned at a rate of 93.33%.

## *students' views about translation*

*table 1: students' views about translation*

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
- Explain sentences from one language into another.	25	17.85
- A way to learn and better understand other language.	62	44.28
- Turning sentences from a language into another.	12	8.57
- A way to learn another language.	24	17.14
- Explaining words from a language into another.	10	7.14
- A way of rendering words from a source language into a target one.	12	8.57
- A way of grasping unknown words.	5	3.57

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

The results from table 1 show how respondent students define translation. 44.28% of them see translation as a way to learn and better understand another language, followed by 17.85% who think that translation consist in explaining sentences from one language onto another. According to 17.14% of them, translation is a way to learn another language. It can then be concluded that the majority of the respondents see translation as a tool to learn other language.

### ▪ **students' perception about translation activities**

*table 2: students' perception about translation activities*

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<b>YES</b>	135	96.42
<b>NO</b>	5	3.57

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Table 2 shows that almost all the respondent students (96.42%) enjoy translation activities. This shows how students are involved in translation activities. It can then be concluded that Students' opinions and attitudes are key elements in second language acquisition.

- *usefulness of translation*

**table 3: usefulness of translation**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
- <i>useful</i>	132	94.28
- <i>Questionable</i>	00	00
- <i>Not useful</i>	00	00
- <i>Have no opinion</i>	08	5.71

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents (94.28%) see translation as useful activity. This shows that learners are really aware of the role of translation in language learning.

- *students' opinions about translation courses*

**table 4: students' opinions about translation courses**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Yes</i>	44	31.42
<i>No</i>	96	68.57

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Table 4 shows that translation courses cannot help students to become professional translators as stated by 68.57% of them.

- *students' opinions about teachers*

**table 5: students' opinions about teachers**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Yes</i>	102	72.85
<i>No</i>	38	27.14

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Through this table, it can be concluded that teachers guide learners into the translation exercises. This is shown with 72.85% of the respondent learners.

- *ways teachers help students in translation exercises*

**table 6: ways teachers help students in translation exercises**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
- <i>Giving instructions</i>	112	80
- <i>Clarifying new words and phrases</i>	06	4.28
- <i>Explaining classroom activities</i>	12	8.57
- <i>Explaining reading passages</i>	02	1.42
- <i>Explaining grammatical issues</i>	08	5.71

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Table 6 shows that teachers (80%) often give instructions to their students as far as translation is concerned. This strategy is followed by classroom activities at a rate of 8.57%. This shows that explanation and instructions are given by teachers.

- *the use of translation in language teaching and learning*

**table 7: the use of translation in language teaching and learning**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Yes</i>	136	97.14
<i>No</i>	04	2.85

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

It results from table 7 that the majority of students (97.14%) sees translation as a useful tool in language teaching and learning against (2.85%) who do not share the same view.

- *language skills*

**table 8: language skills**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
- <i>reading and vocabulary</i>	134	95.71
- <i>grammar</i>	102	72.85
- <i>speaking</i>	139	99.28
- <i>writing</i>	88	62.85
- <i>listening</i>	140	100

**Source:** survey data, April 2023

Table 8 shows that all the language skills listening (100%), speaking (99.28%), reading and vocabulary (95.71%), and writing (62.85%) are important in translation.

### **5.2 Discussion of the findings**

The results reveal that there are different views about the meaning of translation and its role in English language learning. It results from the study that almost all the respondent students (96.42%) enjoy translation activities. According to 44.28% of them, translation is a way to not only learn but also better understand a new language. In addition, 94.28% of them see translation as useful device which shows that it plays a crucial role and really helps students in foreign language learning. The results also show that almost all the respondents see the different skills as important in translation activities. In this sense, Liao (2006: 210) lists down some benefits of translation for EFL learners. According to him, translation enables EFL learners to understand the second language, helps them to examine their understanding; facilitates their intellectual limits in gaining more vocabulary, language rules; helps students improve and express thoughts in another language; and finally lessens their worry about the target language and motivates them to study the second language. From this development, it can be concluded that translation is necessary, real and communicative. Translation consists then in finding equivalent significance of a text into another language. Nevertheless, learning other languages may be possible without translation. This may depends on the needs, learning environment and conditions available.

## Conclusion

This paper intended to sort out the role of pedagogical translation in English language learning. To reach this objective, both qualitative and quantitative data were used and analyzed. From the data collected, it emerged that a large number of students were more interested in translation activities. Through this study, it can be sum up that translation is a communication medium through which one learns and better understand other realities and cultures.

These findings could help both teachers and learners to realize that translation is a complex activity that requires much effort. In short, it can be concluded that translation is part of our daily experience which plays a crucial role and can contribute to both language learning and teaching. Further research is then needed to examine variables that affect lifelong learners' motivation in translation activities.

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