Research Areas : FRQSC

Research Area/Domain : TEFL

Research Project Title : The effects of explicit translation on second language writing skill development

Research Proposal : The main purpose of the current study is to investigate the impact of explicit translation of the mother tongue (L1) in teaching writing skill in a second language (L2). More specifically, the current research will examine whether L1 linguistic aspects (mainly vocabulary and grammar) prove to be useful in L2 writing through explicit translation. The study is original and closely linked to increasing attention on the part of L2 researchers to ‘translanguaging,’ a relatively new term associated with practices that recognize the value of using students’ L1 in the L2 classroom.

The study is significant because it tries to assess the usefulness of using translation in EFL (English as a foreign language) writing development despite the fact that L1 interference is often thought to be negative. The research is also important since it attempts to evaluate whether explicit translation allows students to recognize similarities and differences between different writing styles in the two languages. Our suggestion is that the students’ use of their first language may be a useful tool to improve their writing in the target language. The process and product approach in writing are two prominent dichotomies in transferring L1 writing styles into L2 writing. This research will examine whether manipulating an aspect of the process (translation) has effects on the product (quality of the completed writing task).

To examine this issue, students at Bethlehem University will be asked to write a paragraph on a specific topic in the target language (i.e., English), and will be asked to revise it after carrying out a translation of the paragraph into their L1 (Arabic). Having to explicitly translate into the L1 may help them recognize where their L2 writing lacks clarity or precision. In addition, EFL teachers will be asked to fill out a 20-item questionnaire about their use of Arabic in the teaching of writing in an L2 setting. The study is limited to about 50 students (2 groups, one a control group) who joined the service courses in the spring semester of 2018. The level of the students’ proficiency in English and the topic of writing will be taken into consideration. Comparisons will be made with similar groups in Quebec in which Francophone students use translation in revising their L2 (English) texts. As ongoing collaboration is necessary in order to carry out the methodology in two geographical environments and make the necessary comparisons across groups, research time in Quebec is requested.