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*La Revue Africaine des
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**TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING TOOL IN ESP CLASSES: M.A STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS AT THE *FACULTE DES SCIENCES ADMINISTRATIVES ET
POLITIQUES IN BAMAKO (MALI)***

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Résumé

Cette étude se propose d'explorer l'utilisation de la traduction dans l'apprentissage de l'Anglais de Spécialité (ASP). Pour ce faire, elle présente ici le résultat d'une enquête menée au sein des étudiants en Master, qui se spécialisent en Ingénierie Électorale à la Faculté des Sciences Administratives et Politiques (FSAP), à Bamako. L'enquête s'est déroulée entre fin Mai et début Juin 2023. Ce travail est une étude de cas et se focalise sur l'utilité de la traduction dans l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère, dans le contexte Malien. Vingt et un (21) questionnaires de cinq (5) questions ont permis aux étudiants en Master Ingénierie Électorale de s'exprimer sur l'épineuse question du recours au français comme méthode de facilitation dans l'apprentissage de l'Anglais de Spécialité. Après une brève introduction des opinions de certains intellectuels sur cette question de la traduction dans l'enseignement de la langue qui divise les spécialistes de l'éducation, la question du recours au Français dans l'apprentissage de l' ASP a aussi été abordée. Les résultats quantitatifs obtenus de l'enquête ont été présentés en graphiques. Ils ont montré que les étudiants en Master Ingénierie Electorale considèrent la traduction comme un instrument pédagogique important dans le milieu d'apprentissage de l'Anglais de spécialité.

Mots clés : *Anglais général, Anglais de spécialité, apprentissage de langue, ingénierie électorale, traduction.*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the use of translation in the learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It highlights the outcome of a survey carried out on M.A Students who are specializing in Electoral Engineering at the *Faculté des Sciences Administratives et Politiques* – Bamako from late May to early June 2023. The survey hinges on the usefulness of translation in the context of English for Specific Purposes, and consists of a five questions questionnaire put to twenty-one (21) students in the first Semester. The Students were requested to express their opinions about the incorporation of French as a method in the ESP class. After briefly introducing some scholarly opinions about translation as a pedagogical tool in teaching EFL, the concept of French in ESP class has also been reviewed. The quantitative results have been presented in bar graphs, showing that M.A Electoral Engineering students consider translation as a useful pedagogical instrument in their English learning setting.

Key words : *English for general purposes, English for specific purposes, Electoral Engineering, language learning, Translation.*

Introduction

Translation in foreign language class remains one of the most debatable issues in the scholastic settings. Charnot (1987, p.77, cited in Ying et al. 2018) maintains: « translation in language teaching is using the first language as a base for understanding or reproducing the second language». In the same line, Liao (2006) points out, « translation is using one language as a basic for understanding, remembering, or reproducing another language, both at the lexical level and syntactic level, and also in either direction from the target or source language into the other language».

For centuries, translation has been applied in foreign language classes. This applicability of translation, also referred to as the use of students' L1 can be traced back to the historical Grammar Translation Method. However this method has been questionable since the emergence of new methods such as: Direct Method, Communicative Method, Task-based Language teaching etc...

There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of translation in foreign language class (Cook 2010, Machida 2011, Kic-Drgras 2014, Carapic 2022, Agouzoum and Hamadou 2023), but the question is still controversial and continues to divide educators, linguists and methodologists. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of translation, more particularly the resort to French in English for specific purposes class in the Malian context. By examining the views and perceptions of the respondents, the research aims to shed light on the usefulness of French in the ESP class at the Masters' degree level.

This research seeks to answer two main questions: 1- What is the role of translation in ESP class?

2- What are ESP students' perceptions on the use French of in class? And the following hypotheses were formulated:

1-Translation activities help ESP students in class,

2-Students appreciate the use of L1 in ESP class

The use of translation, also known as students' first language use dates back to the historical Grammar Translation Method, which was used for teaching and learning classical languages, Greek and Latin in the 19th century. However, this method was criticized by the proponents of the Audio-lingual and Communicative methods.

Previous literature shows that opinions are divergent over the question of translation in EFL class. Some scholars prohibit any form of L1 in L2 class and turn down the fact it can be a pedagogical resource. For example Sorhus (1975, cited in B. T. Ying et al. 2018) asserts : « translation is a cause of interference in second language class ». MacDonald (1993, cited in B. T. Ying et al. 2018) argues : « the use of the target language in the classroom can motivate the students and they will feel more encouraged when they are able to understand and use the target language. He believes that over-reliance on the L1 (French) will actually demotivate the students.

There are also arguments that translation in foreign language class causes interference between L1 and L2 (Duff 1991, Malmkjaer, 1998, Kerr 2015).

The arguments against the use of translation in learning a foreign language are summarized by Kerr (2015) as follows:

- Translation is less important than the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and, in anyway is not a useful skill for most learners to acquire.
- Time spent using own language is time lost using English.
- Learners need to learn to think in English and own-language use discourages them from doing so.
- Own language use encourages the false belief that there is a word-for-word equivalence between languages, and therefore leads to language interference problems.

Similarly, Malmkjaer (1998, cited in Mehrabi 2014) notes: «Translation is independent and unnatural, therefore it does not favour the learners. Pan and Pan (2012) assume that, «translation involves the use of two languages and, thus, deprives students of opportunities to receive sufficient FL input (cited in Fernandez-Guerra, 2014) ».

In contrast to Sorhus 1975, Malmkjaer 1998, Pan and Pan 2012 and Kerr 2015; Nation (2003) believes that translation into students' L1 is a good pedagogical resource that should be exploited. He maintains:

there are many reasons behind the use of L1 in the teaching environment such as: First, it is more natural to use L1 with others who have the same L1. Secondly, it is easier and more communicatively effective to use the L1, and thirdly, using exclusively the L2 can be a source of embarrassment particularly for shy learners and those who feel they are not very proficient in the L2.

Additionally, Cook (2010, p. 52), Liao (2006) put emphasis on the necessity and the facilitating role of the learners' mother tongue in the development of learning. Chirobocea (2018) agrees that «translation has proven to serve as an essential educational tool, a teaching/learning method at least as a supplement, especially in the context of ESP».

Another important use of translation in foreign language class is related to the sociocultural context. «Translation promotes cultural understanding, develops ESP learners' analytic skills, and engages them in cross-linguistic comparisons, while focusing on accuracy as an important aspect of ESP (Chirobocea 2018) ». Leonardi's study (2009) focuses on translation in teaching business English and maintains that «Translation is a mediating activity that always takes culture-bound terms and concepts into account to be successful in its transposition of a text from one language to another». Business and financial texts are characterized by many culture-bound terms and references which students should know to boost their comprehension of texts. Further, he points out that translation, therefore, «becomes a form of cultural mediation which is needed in order to carry out communication across cultures (ibid 2009) ». Through translation, students can learn more about problem-solving strategies, improve their analytic skills and strengthen their grammatical and lexical competence and performance. Carreres (2006) conducted an investigation at the University of Cambridge on students' attitudes towards using translation in learning a language. The findings of his study suggested that «translation is one of the best ways for learning».

Discussing the issue of translation in specific language learning context, Kic-Drgas (2014) agrees: «translation exercises can enrich ESP class and broaden students' horizons given

they are properly prepared for the task, which can be achieved by implementing of pre-translation exercises and supplemented by necessary comments on equivalence, differences and similarities between the two languages». It is recommended to start with translation of sentences referring to the certain context, repeating well-known ESP-phrases and terms. This kind of exercise according to Kic-Drgas «helps students assimilate new vocabulary and use it in the proper context». The next kind of exercises is translating definitions of certain specific terms into mother tongue, which on one hand helps memorize new terms and on the other hand helps understand their meaning (ibid). «The translation of longer texts can also be implemented as a part of ESP class and should serve acquiring new knowledge connected with the specific domain, however, I feel that simplified texts should only be used if the students really have a lot of difficulties with authentic material (Witte 2009, p. 176, cited in Kic-Drgas 2014)». The requirement of authenticity mentioned by Witte seems to be necessary, especially in reference to the focusing on the features of the special discourse.

It is reasonable to work on parallel texts, which provides a more complex insight into the variety of lexical structures in both languages.

Furthermore, a research conducted by Coulibaly (2022) on Malian students' perception on the use of translation in the university and the secondary school shows that translation activities are a useful pedagogical tool when they are introduced purposefully and imaginatively into language learning programme. The study also shows that translation can be a suitable language practice method for many students making the conveyance of the message easier for the teachers. The study concluded that translation activities (translation exercises, the use of the students' first language) helps students develop and improve reading, speaking, writing skills, grammar and vocabulary in the two languages and therefore should be integrated into language classroom.

The present study structured in three (4) parts. First it starts with an introduction, followed by the methodological approach, and the findings have been discussed in the final part of the research.

1. Methodology

The present study employs the quantitative research design to investigate the use of translation in English for specific purposes class in the Malian context. Quantitative method is one of the practical ways of collecting data based on the measurement of quantity. This paper which employs the quantitative approach investigated the respondents through questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who took them away and the responses were returned after four days.

The respondents were told about the objective of the investigation, and the questions were asked in French to allow them to understand and provide efficient responses. Clarifications were given to respondents who did not fathom some of the questions. The participants of the study consist of M.A students at University, who are specializing in Electoral Engineering. They are learning English for specific purposes, that's to say for their professional career in the management of electoral process. In all, 21 students completed the questionnaire. The data were analysed through the quantitative data analysis and presented in graphs with Microsoft Word.

2. Results

In the first question, students were asked to air their views about the use of French in the English class. They had to say whether the use of French in the ESP class is good or not. So, they had to tick one of the responses: a- not at all; b-just a little; c-sometimes; d-a lot

Do you think French should be used in class?

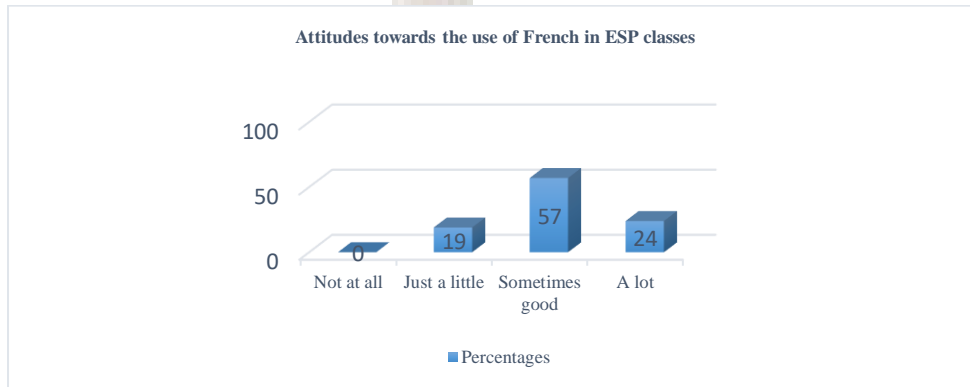


Figure 1: Attitudes about the use French in ESP classes

In the first question, the highest percentage is dominated by students who believe that the occasional use of French is a good strategy. Of the 21 respondents, 57% believe that French should be sometimes used in ESP class, 24% a lot, 19% just a little, while 0% of them not at all.

The second question investigates the purpose for the use of French in the ESP class. This question allowed the respondents to say what they think French should be used for. *In which context should French be used?*

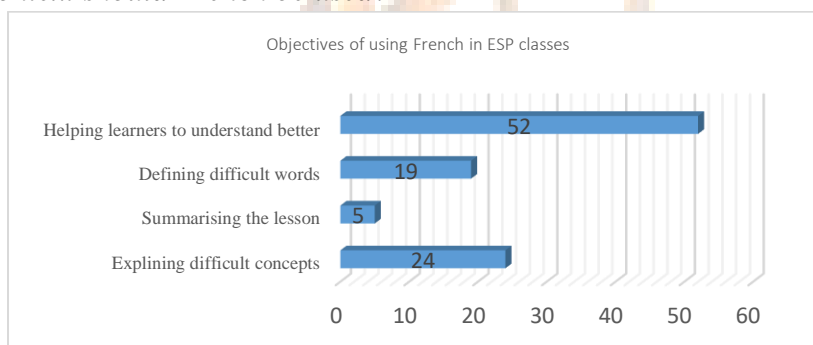


Figure 2: Purpose of translating in ESP classes

Data from figure 2 corroborate that translating into L1 in ESP classes can be justified for some reasons. As depicted in the figure, 52% of the respondents believe that French is used to help students understand better, 24% to explain difficult concepts, 5% to summarize the lesson, 19% to define difficult words.

In question 3, the investigation aimed to have respondents' thoughts on whether translation can improve the language skills.

Which learning skill do you think translation can improve?

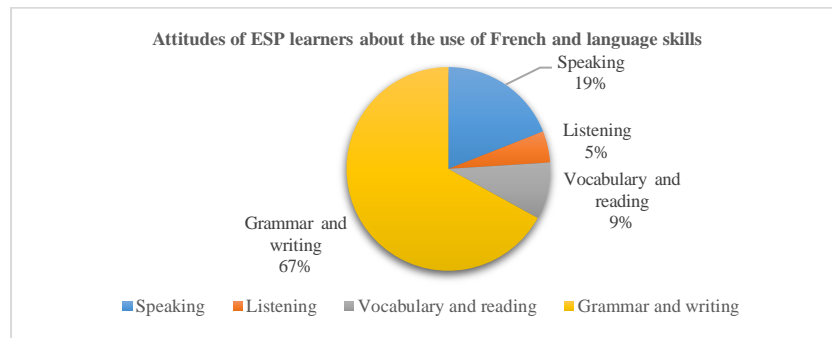


Figure 3: Beliefs towards translation and learning skills

Data obtained from this question have shown that translation could help improve the learners' learning skills. Of the 21 respondents, the overwhelming majority (67%) indicated that translation can improve grammar and writing, 19% pointed out that it can improve their speaking, 9% vocabulary and reading, while 5% believe that it can improve their listening skills.

Question 4 investigated the use of translation in ESP class to comprehend and learn easily English.

Does translation help students comprehend better and learn easily English?

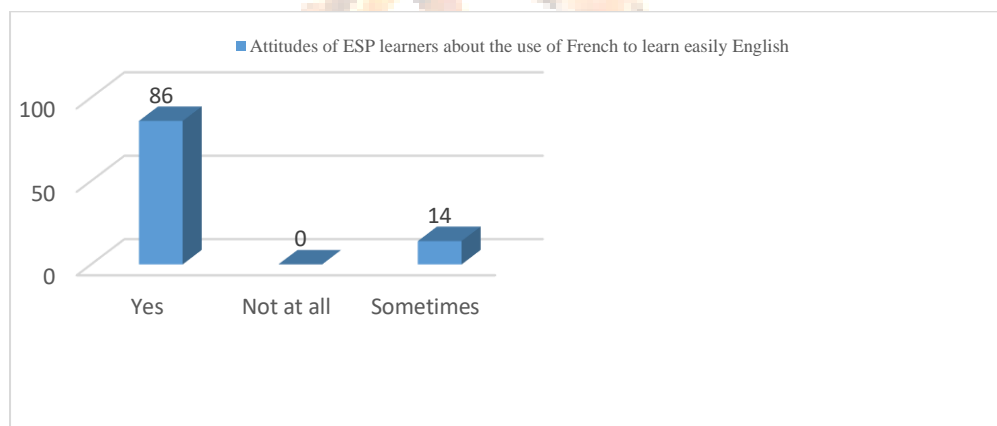


Figure 4: Attitudes towards the use of French for comprehension

From the data, option *a. yes* was favoured over option *b-* and *c-*. The majority of the respondents picked yes (86%) showing that translation helps them comprehend better L2, 14 % believe that it sometimes helps them learn easily, while option *not at all* was not picked, showing that all of them believe that translation helps comprehend and learn easily in foreign language class.

The findings are in line with a research conducted by Coulibaly (2022) at the University and the secondary school, where the majority of learners appreciate and prefer the occasional use of French (L1) in the L2 class for better understanding.

In question 5, students had to choose from different options. In this study, it was important to know the learners' perceptions about the resort to French during the class. To do so, they were

asked to pick among the options regarding the incorporation of French: *a- good, b- very good, c- sometimes good, d- not good at all.*

What is your perception about the use of French in English class?

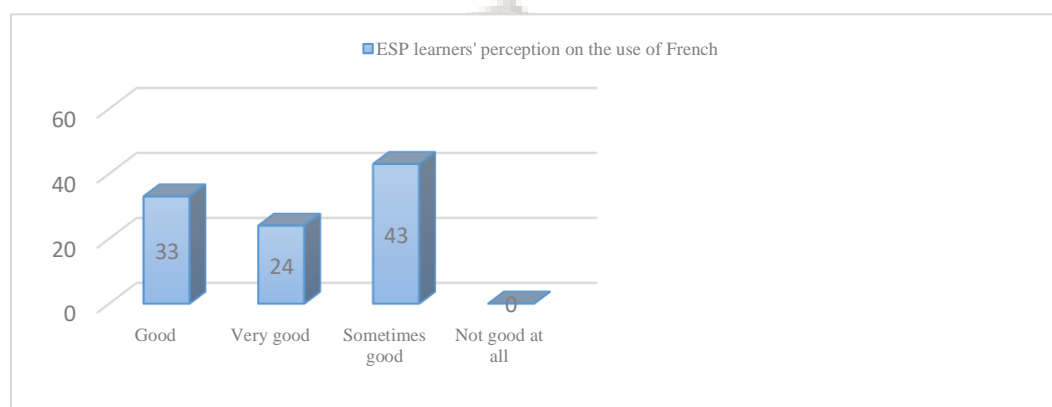


Figure 5: Perception about the use of French

In a survey of 21 respondents, as depicted in figure 5 the students have positive perceptions when it comes to the use of French in ESP class. As observed, 43% of students pointed out that the incorporation of French in their class is sometimes good, 33% good, 24% very good, while 0% indicated that it is not good at all. This means that all of the respondents agree that the incorporation of French is useful and can help the learners acquire L2, even though it should be limited.

3. Discussion

The findings of this study showed that students in ESP class have positive attitude towards translation in ESP class. This is corroborated by the responses obtained from the questionnaires completed by them.

First, in question 1 the respondents concur that the use of French is a strategy which can help them during the learning process. The students' attitude vis-à-vis this question aligns with Kulusakli et al. 2018, who found that many students rely on the use of translation activities in Turkiye during EFL learning. The findings also show that students prefer the use of translation for various reasons. For example, the majority of them indicated that should translation be used to explain difficult concepts, to summarize the lesson. Siregar (2019) highlights that students may resort to translation in their first language to develop their understanding of the words to understand the lessons and for learning collaboratively with their peers. Moreover, the respondents in this study believe that translation into French in the ESP class could improve their learning and make learning easier for them. These learning skills relate to: speaking, listening, vocabulary and reading, grammar and writing. A study conducted by Dagiliene (2012) on the use of translation in classroom activities came up with similar results that translation is a useful instrument that can be used to develop learners' language skills such as writing, speaking, vocabulary, grammar and reading. In contrast to the views that translation into the first language is bound to mislead the learner (Bloomfield 1933, cited in Vermer 2010), the majority of respondents in this study indicated that translation into French helps them understand L2 easily. The present study corroborates a research conducted by Tze Ying et al. (2018) which concluded that the German language students have positive perceptions on the use

of translation in foreign language class and consider it a supporting method that can be used as learning strategy. The findings of the study also align with Agouzoum and Hamadou's study (2023). Agouzoum and Hamadou's study revealed the importance of national language during the teaching/learning of Arabic in Mali. Their study also highlights the importance of Arabic/Touareg translation as strategy used by teachers for better understanding L2 (Arabic) in the Malian context.

This study raises awareness on the fact that foreign language can be learned with the incorporation of students' first language. In other words, it is a response to the public opinion that foreign language can be learned better, only through the foreign language.

The data collected from this research concern the M.A students specializing in the handling of electoral process and do not consider the attitudes of students in other domains; therefore, the researcher suggests future work to be conducted for further findings about the problem.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of translation in ESP classes. To reach the objectives, the study focused on M.A students who are specializing in Electoral Engineering (EI) at the university in Mali. The results displayed that most of the learners support the use of French in the ESP class. High percentages resulted from questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, where students appreciate the use of translation activities, declaring that these types of activities involving L1 help them very much and make learning easier. The study indicated also that translation can be a useful tool to develop the four skills of language, that is speaking, writing, listening and reading. In a nutshell, the findings of this study corroborate sufficiently that translation can enhance understanding in L2 class. It could be obviously stated that despite the common belief that using translation in the language class is outdated and old-fashioned, should be reconsidered.

This study, however, is limited only to an M.A class specializing in election management at the faculty of Politics and Administration. Therefore, further investigation is required, involving a larger sample of participants or using different instruments. In other words, for future research, similar studies about the use of translation in ESP class are recommended with different subjects and different variables.

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