

## Voices from the Field: Empowering EFL Students in Translation Classes

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### Teaching Context

Training in translation skills is offered as part of our four-year bachelor's program for EFL students. Initially, sophomores are introduced to the theories of translation and interpretation before enrolling in three successive translation practice courses ranging from basic to advanced in their junior and senior years.

### Problem

For me, teaching translation skills has never been easy because of the limited activities available for students and the growing passivity among them as the semester proceeds. Three recurring activities observed in translation classes include:

(a) *Timed translation*. For each chunk of text, students should do the translation individually in class, including looking up new words and doing some background research under time pressure.

(b) *Sight translation*, i.e., a drill more popularly associated with interpreting in which the students “translate a source text aloud while reading it” (Yamada, 2020, p. 344). With the general topic of the text provided in advance, students are expected to do background research and come up with a list of related vocabulary before class. Then, they have to translate a text that belongs to the same general topic in class with no more time to prepare.

(c) *Peer feedback on translation homework*. Students are assigned a text to translate individually at home at their own pace. In class, they swap the translation with a partner and give feedback on their peer's performance. The lecturer will tell students what aspects of the translation to focus on.

All three activities involve source texts prepared by the lecturers and are followed by the lecturer eliciting students' feedback before suggesting his/her own version. As such, it has always been the teachers who are the sole ‘depositors of knowledge’ and the only ones in control of class activities. While this approach keeps the class in order and ensures the timing of activities, it also makes a number of students (even stronger ones) refrain from voicing their opinion and passively wait for the teachers' suggested translation. As the semester progresses, lecturers see a gradual decrease in student motivation and engagement.

## Solution

Two important issues have been: (1) What other activities can be used for translation skills training? and (2) How to give students more power in the translation classrooms to take the lead in their own learning? Addressing them calls for adaptations of current activities, and below are some that have been proved fruitful in my translation classes:

(a) **A variation of feedback on translation homework:** Students are divided into small groups of 3-4, each having to produce the best translation of a text assigned by the lecturer. One group is appointed ‘the lead.’ Throughout the semester, groups can take turns being ‘the lead.’

At least one day before class, the ‘lead group’ is responsible for collecting translated versions from the other groups (via email or Google Drive) and preparing a handout (Figure 1) in the following format for each student:

Figure 1

*Suggested Format for Handout Prepared by the ‘Lead Group’*

No.	Source text	Target text
1	<i>(Paste the 1<sup>st</sup> chunk of the source text here)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>(Group 1’s translation of chunk 1)</i></li><li>• <i>(Group 2’s translation of chunk 1)</i></li></ul>
2	<i>(Paste the 2<sup>nd</sup> chunk of the source text here)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>(Group 3’s translation of chunk 2)</i></li><li>• <i>(Group 4’s translation of chunk 2)</i></li></ul>
3	...	• ...

The ‘lead group’ then manages the feedback session by inviting their peers to comment on or improve the translated versions of each chunk. Since translators are kept anonymous, students feel more secure when they voice their opinions (even on their own group’s translation). In this activity, the lecturer acts as a facilitator, jumping in only where necessary to sustain the discussion.

(b) **A variation of timed translation:** Instead of working with source texts prepared by the lecturer, students are encouraged to develop their own learning materials based on guidelines regarding topics/text types, length, and level of difficulty of the source texts. Students submit the source and target texts to the lecturer for feedback. Some of the best works will be used as alternatives in multiple sessions, and the students whose texts are selected are given a chance to manage the session. Again, the lecturer will be the facilitator only.

From my observation, activities in which students are empowered often produce positive results. Some students are very good at eliciting feedback from their peers, and more suggestions for a given chunk are recorded. Also, the learning materials they submit are far more diverse and interesting than I expected, and most students showed excitement for working with source texts that they prepared themselves.

## Conclusion

As students are exposed to a wider range of activities, the chances of gaining more positive learning experiences increase, resulting in enhanced engagement and motivation. This also necessitates the empowerment of students so that they can be “depositors” from time to time rather than “all-time-depositories of knowledge” in the translation classroom.

## References

Yamada, H. (2020). Efficacy of sight translation in English-Japanese consecutive interpreting training in a university course. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(4), 343-352.  
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### About the author

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