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IMPROVING THE PROCESS OF LEARNING A SECOND
LANGUAGE THROUGH TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

One salient characteristic of the global age is immigration from one country to another, a movement that continues to grow. Israel has absorbed immigration on a large scale, coping, among others, with challenges faced by immigrant-students while acquiring the target language within the school framework. Until recent decades, the approach prevalent in the world regarding institutional language teaching, rejected the use of students' mother tongue and of translation in the process of second language learning. However, since the end of the 20th century, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the importance of translation as part of the natural process of acquiring another language. This entailed an extended directed use of translation in institutional teaching of languages. Conversely, in Israel, the educational-linguistic policy enforces using only Hebrew in classes, without active use of the students' mother language. This theoretical paper relates to immigration of children and youths and to their acquisition of the target language. Moreover, it surveys previous worldwide studies and programs in the field of inculcating a second language and practicing it through translation activities. This paper presents a new intervention program, developed by the researcher. The program engages in the inculcation of writing skills by translating texts from the learners' mother tongue. It aims to enhance the immigrant-students' writing skills as well as their motivation to learn the target language. Thus, Israel will be incorporated in the global trend that considers the mother tongue as an active partner to the process of acquiring the target language.

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses second language teaching to immigrant-students through translation activities designed to improve the process of acquiring the target language. The process of absorbing immigrants in a new society is always long and difficult and, frequently, exhausting and frustrating. For immigrant-students, immigration is a complex and particularly hard step (Coin, 2017; Levin, Shohamy, Spolasky, Levi-Keren, & Shemesh, 2003). Knowing the language is a key parameter in immigrants' integration into the absorbing country (Chiswick, 2002), since language plays a central role in structuring an awareness of identity, sense of belonging and community (David & Tolchinsky, 2002). Moreover, for students, not knowing the language constitutes an obstacle in the full exhaustion of their ability to learn and succeed in their studies (Kahane-Stravechinsky, Levi, & Konstantinov, 2010). Hence, great importance is attributed to the language acquisition in the students' absorption and their integration in school and society (Ministry of Education, 2011). In immigration-absorbing countries, there are learning performance gaps between immigrant-students versus non-immigrant students, despite their identical potential. Consequently, the educational policy embraced by the country has an important role in neutralizing these gaps (Coin, 2017). Today, openness to the immigrant-students' culture as well as the attitude towards the use of their mother tongue and towards translation in the school environment and in the classrooms, depend on the educational-linguistic policy of each of the immigrant-students absorbing countries (Albury, 2017; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2015). In light of the growing number of studies of mother tongue integration and translation as part of the process of second language learning, empirical evidences of the effectiveness of this method have been collected.

The importance of this paper resides in the fact that it presents these empirical proofs, so that they are incorporated in the educational-linguistic policy and in the second language curriculum in each of the immigration-absorbing countries, including in Israel. This guarantees that immigrant-students benefit from the optimal instruments school can offer them, learning by the most successful learning strategies designed for acquiring the language of the absorbing country (Coin, 2017; OECD, 2015a).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Students' immigration and learning of the target language

The term 'immigration' refers to the transition of people from one place to another, mostly from one country to another. This is a process, whereby people leave their place of residence, either from necessity or from choice, usually in order to improve their life (Levin, Shohamy, Spolasky, Levi-Keren, & Shemesh, 2003; Sime, 2018). Immigration with everything it involves, is a common occurrence (Albornoz-Crespo, Cabrales, & Hauk, 2018), that is expanding in the global age. It encompassed 258 million people in 2017, as compared to 173 million in 2000 (United Nations, 2018a). The immigrant population is motivated by economic, political, social and religious reasons and it consists of immigrants, residents returning to their country of origin, foreign workers and refuge seekers (Haim, 2013). Like many countries around the globe, Israel is an immigration-absorbing country and the immigration to it is on a large scale, both in absolute numbers and in proportion to the size of its population (DellaPergola, 2012; Malul & Rosenboim, 2010; United Nations, 2018b). For example, according to a report published by the United Nations (2013), in

2011 Israel was at the 19th place out of 220 countries or territories around the world according to the number of inter-nation immigrants living in it on a permanent basis (2 millions) and at the 7th place according to the percentage of immigrants out of the overall population (22%).

Children and youths who immigrate with their parents are usually not involved in the adults' decision to immigrate. For them, the process of immigration, including their integration at school, constitutes a huge challenge (OECD, 2015b). The young immigrants experience disengagement, integration and adjustment to a new environment that is mainly characterized by an unfamiliar language. Furthermore, the learning frameworks, academic expectations, learning contents and social environments are strange and different from those to which they have been accustomed in their countries of origin. Consequently, they have to quickly adapt all their life to the new demands (Coin, 2017; Haikkola, 2011; Levin et al., 2003; Reynolds, 2007).

2.2. Absorption at school of immigrant-students

Prominent indices of immigrant-students' absorption at school are mastering the new language and success in their studies in the new language (Kahane-Stravechinsky et al., 2010). According to the figures of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2018), in 2017, the immigration wave to Israel consisted of 26,357 people, 2921 of them children and youths at school age: 1292 – aged 10-14 and 1627 – aged 15-19. The students immigrating to Israel are integrated into the Israeli education system and constitute 14.2% of the entire student population at Israeli schools. The Israeli Ministry of Education (2011) attributes great importance to the acquisition of the language as a prerequisite for the immigrant-students' integration, not only in the education system but also in the community and the country. The policy of the Israeli Ministry of Education concerning the immigrant-students, embraces a multicultural and linguistic approach that respects every culture, creating a multicultural Israeli mosaic (Ministry of Education, 2018). Moreover, the Ministry of Education directs the schools to encourage the immigrant-students to preserve their mother tongue and allow them to use it also in the environment of the educational institution.

Immigrant-students need the second language of the target country in order to acquire the learning knowledge of all the school subjects. The learning language includes the special vocabulary of each of the learning subjects as well as the features of the written discourse of these subjects. There is a considerable gap between the time required for the acquisition of the second language for everyday communication which takes 18 months. Conversely, mastery of the learning language takes at least five years (Tabors, 2008) and can reach 11 years, according to the level of literate mastery in the mother tongue (Levin et al., 2003; Ministry of Education, 2009; Shohamy, 2015).

The policy of the Israeli Ministry of Education regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, advocates an approach that is contradictory to the policy it dictates outside the classroom. The Ministry of Education has given an explicit instruction, according to which teaching and public conversation in class between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves should be conducted in Hebrew (Ministry of Education, 2011). This instruction of using only Hebrew in the classroom, applies also to language classes and language teachers fully adhere to it.

This single-language policy in second language classes complies with the general linguistic policy that has been prevalent in Israel since the foundation of the state in 1948 until the beginning of the 1990s. The use of Hebrew only has been affected by pedagogical developments in language teaching worldwide.

Moreover, it has been perceived as a necessary national measure as part of building the nation and consolidating common Israeli culture and identity for all the immigrants who have arrived to Israel from the four corners of the globe (Elias, 2010; Golden, 2003; Shalom, 2012).

2.3. Integration of Translation in Second Language Teaching

Over the years, the role perceptions of the mother tongue in second language learning have undergone considerable changes worldwide. The reference to the mother tongue reflects the fundamental assumptions of approaches to language teaching in various periods (Cook, 2001; Crawford, 2004).

Until the last decades of the 20th century, translation was perceived as an inhibiting and undesirable means in foreign language learning (Carreres, 2006). Nevertheless, these years witnessed the acknowledgement of the importance of translation as part of the natural process of foreign language acquisition, followed by an extended directed use of translation in the institutionalized teaching of foreign languages. The new approach relates to the fact that translation is present in foreign language learning in any case (Zojer, 2009). Klaudy (2003) considers pedagogical translation as a functional instrument for language acquisition. Pintado Gutiérrez (2012) adds that using the translation of vocabulary and grammar in foreign language learning, is a multilevel skill and, thus, it can directly help the students towards autonomous learning. Carreres and Noriega-Sanchez (2011) as well as Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola (2014) sum up the issue of using translation in our days. They stipulate that we must no longer focus on the question whether translation has a place in teaching. Rather, we should focus on the following questions: how to integrate pedagogical translation in the curriculum? What types of translation are suitable for teaching various language skills? Which capabilities can be improved by using translation? What is the best way of using it in class?

Not many applied studies have investigated the use of translation in various ways as part of learning second language skills and its effectiveness for the learners. The study conducted by Yoshii (2006) comprised students from two Japanese universities who learnt English as a foreign language by means of glosses in Japanese. The findings showed that the acquisition of a new vocabulary and recollection of words over a long period of time improved by involving the mother tongue in the learning and not by explaining the words in the learnt language. Dagilienė (2012) investigated design and technology students in the Kaunas University of Technology at Lithuania, who learnt English through the integration of translation. The study illustrated that the translation activities were a practical pedagogical instrument, the effectiveness of which was manifested by the development and improvement of grammar and vocabulary as well as the speaking, reading and writing skills in the target language. Furthermore, the translation entailed a better comprehension of structures in both the mother tongue and in English. Dagilienė (2012) concluded that translation should not be overused and that it should be integrated in the target language teaching at the right time and with the suitable students. Moreover, a study of modern languages studies at the University of Cambridge showed that almost all the students felt that translation assignments benefited most the language learnt in the class (Carreres & Noriega-Sanchez, 2011).

Kalocsányiová (2017) conducted a study during a course in French in Luxembourg, where Luxembourgish, French and German are the spoken languages. The course teachers spoke also Arabic and the students who were mostly Syrian and Iraqi refugees, were allowed to use their mother tongue and other languages. The objective was to verify their understanding and choice of a more accurate formulation for

explaining their thoughts to their teachers. The presence of the mother tongue in the lessons creates more communicational interaction, mutual understanding, participation in the learning, empowerment of the learning environment. Moreover, it facilitates the students' performance of the learning assignments. The study of Gyogi (2018) investigated the use of written translation of e-mail messages from Japanese to English while teaching English to beginner students. The researcher concluded that translation activities allow beginner students to serve as cultural mediators between the writer of the original text and the reader of the target text, by reducing the elements that might harm the reader. Moreover, these activities encourage the students to be more aware of both their word choice and the implications of those choices. In Israel, the Israeli Ministry of Education (2009) has engaged in shaping a new educational-linguistic policy. Tannenbaum (2017), who heads this project, states that the program will recommend a multi-lingual educational policy, illustrating the importance of preserving the immigrants' language by the presence of their languages. Furthermore, it will empower the immigrants as well as provide an emotional response to their strong rapport with their mother tongue.

2.4. The new intervention program - Theoretical rationale of the program

The new intervention program highlights the importance of improving the writing skill in the process of second language learning, by translation from the students' language of origin. The program aims to provide a response to the acquisition of this skill, coping with its complexity that is manifested by the following two aspects: 1. among the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing, learnt in second language classes, writing is considered as most challenging for the students and the teachers (Yusuf, Jusoh, & Yusuf, 2019); 2. among the language skills acquired, the writing skill takes the longest time (Manchón, 2011; Shohamy, 2015).

The aims of the program are:

1. To examine how written expression proficiency can be improved by translating texts anchor from the source language of the language learners into the target language;
2. To investigate in Israel the attitudes of second language students and their teachers towards the motivation to learn the target language by translating texts from the mother tongue.

The target population of the program consists of students immigrating to Israel who are in the process of learning the target language, Hebrew.

During the intervention program, the students will translate texts from their mother tongue into Hebrew. The program sessions will last 30 academic hours.

The uniqueness of the proposed intervention program resides in the fact that it will be implemented in Hebrew language learning classes in Israeli schools, in which the immigrant-students' language of origin is not applied. The educational linguistic approach in Israel, on which the syllabus of second language learning is based, excludes the use of activities that integrate translation as an instrument for Hebrew language teaching. Hence, the proposed intervention program constitutes a breakthrough in Israeli second language classes, since it bridges between the immigrants' mother tongue and the Hebrew language, for the purpose of leveraging their writing skill.

3. Research Method

This is a theoretical paper, based on the up-to-date literature discussing the topic of "Learning a Second Language through Translation Activities". The conclusions of this paper were derived from this literature review.

4. Conclusion

The literature review shows that the views prevalent in the world since the end of the 20th century, concerning second language teaching, support the dominance of the target language, while admitting a limited use of the first language. Israel has not yet embraced this trend and in the classroom immigrant languages and translation activities are not in use.

This paper is important as far as the contribution to Israeli local knowledge and universal knowledge is concerned. From the point of view of local contribution in Israel, this paper will enhance both theoretical and applied knowledge of using translation as a lever for improving second language skills. As such, it will benefit those shaping the policy of second language teaching in Israel. Moreover, this paper has a universal contribution. Knowledge of using translation and translation activities in second language acquisition process can constitute part of the considerations of shaping an educational linguistic policy in schools. Furthermore, this knowledge can be implemented in the syllabus of second language teaching classes in each of the worldwide immigration-absorbing countries.

This paper paves the way for future research that will aim to examine the integration of translation activities as part of the curriculum for teaching writing skills in the target language. The study will be conducted in Israel. Thus, it will bridge the gap in knowledge between the global trend and local trend regarding the inclusion of immigrants' language of origin in the process of acquiring a second language. The research question is, "What effect does an intervention program that is based on written translation of authentic texts from the mother tongue to the second language have on achievement and improvement of immigrant youths' writing skills and motivation?". Furthermore, the research tools are authentic texts from the mother tongue of the immigrants.

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