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## EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF MACHINE TRANSLATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH STUDENTS' TRANSLATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to discover the benefits of integrating machine translation in language learning, translating tasks in particular. By a qualitative methodology, the paper aims at drawing some groundbreaking results about undergraduate English students attending the Translation course. Moreover, the paper also explores the opportunities provided by AntConc to analyze their translations and to find frequent MT signals such as literal translations or unnatural syntax patterns. Many advantages noted by the students associated with MT will be explored in this research, including the ease of translation and ability to grasp the new vocabulary, the access to unknown text which previously led to misunderstanding and uncertainty, the flexibility and adaptability of different machine translation applications which give them the opportunity to engage in independent learning and much more. Some analysis of translated tasks used by more than one student will focus on the use of MT tools reflected in the same literal meanings and ungrammatically correct structures. Furthermore, the paper will provide insights from both the students' perceptions and translation practices serving as future data which can be reorganized and carefully incorporated into the framework of language learning in order to enhance the process of language acquisition and learners' active engagement in and out of educational environments. However, the current research offers only some introductory ideas which can further be developed for future research in the respective area of the relation between machine translation and language learning.

**Keywords:** machine translation, language education, language learning, translation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, machine translation (MT) has emerged as a significant tool reflecting its effects in learners' language acquisition and linguistic proficiency (Hutchins & Somers, 1992). Even though the existence of machine translation is signified by current trending applications such as Google Translate and many other AI generated-tools, its relation to language learning has existed decades ago, even before the users could access these applications. The connection between machine translation and language education has been strengthened as internet access and smart gadgets are brought to learners' fingerprint. The rapid development of digitalization and artificial intelligence intervening in the education system has led educators and professionals question the quality of these technological output (Arenas & Moorkens, 2019; Benda, 2014).

Educators intend to create classroom activities that enhance the learning process for learners, facilitating both comprehension of the topic and the acquisition of the target language, without causing learners' boredom or excessive stimulation which may lead in negative output (Bowker & Ciro, 2019). Nevertheless, learners tend to prefer participating in activities that are accessible and easier to apply. Being constantly exposed to the internet throughout the day, learners often seek for machine translation technologies into foreign language lessons in order to access quickly translated materials that will help them in completing the tasks. However, these technology interventions enhance the understanding of language and encourage self-directed learning (Schmidhofer & Mair, 2018; Enríquez Raído & Sánchez Torrón, 2020). Both students and teachers may use the technology to access authentic materials and create curricular activities to fulfill the needs. By using applications that provide linguistic support and immediate translation to the target language, they can revive the classroom activities and instructions (Kim, 2019; García, 2010; Jiménez-Crespo, 2017; Kol, Schcolnik, & Spector-Cohen, 2018).

The incorporation of machine translation tools can greatly enhance learners' engagement and facilitate the acquisition of foreign languages, but despite the benefits, these technologies also present obvious obstacles that need to be resolved (Lee, 2021; Case, 2015). Accuracy, reliability, lack of cultural immersion, and over-reliance are some of the obstacles that need to be considered. Machine translation is hermetic to the details of the context and the final output can never match that of a text created by a human (Jiang, Yu, & Zhao, 2024). In addition, as students tend to frequently depend on translation tools, they overlook essential cognitive processes such as critical thinking and creativity (Cancino & Panes, 2021; Garcia & Pena, 2011).

Encouraged by the existing literature and the everyday contact with students' assignments, translation tasks in particular, we had the urge to discuss with our students and get to know their perspectives on MT tools along with the intention to observe and analyse their translations. However, the integration of these translation technologies into educational environments requires careful consideration.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

Driven by the integration of technology in education, translation studies in particular, a study of students' translations and perceptions on applications which facilitate the process of translation was designed while incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analysis as methods of data interpretation.

### ***Sample Selection***

21 undergraduate students attending the Translation Course were asked to discuss the advantages of the incorporation of machine translation tools into the process of translating tasks part of the course curriculum. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured and all the gathered data do not contain personal information regarding the students' ID or additional notes.

### ***Procedure***

The required data were gathered during the fall semester. The topic of machine translation incorporation in language learning was covered during the course. Prompted by these discussions, the answer sheet was compiled in two sections: the first one required students to express their opinion on the advantages of machine translation usage and the second section consisted of a text in English which had to be translated into students' native language, Albanian. The text consisted of 305 words. They were allowed to use Google Translate as a machine translation tool. Simultaneously, the instructor used Google translate to have a MT-generated version of the task in order to proceed with the analysis of students' translations and make the possible comparisons.

### ***Data analysis***

Qualitative Analysis was applied to examine and analyze students' perceptions who shared their opinion related to the incorporation of machine translation into the process of translation.

On the other hand, quantitative analysis was applied to the second task: students' translations. This analysis aimed to locate specific MT markers (e.g., mistranslations, unnatural syntax) by using AntConc. Features such as concordance and collocates tool were used.

## **3. RESULTS**

### ***Students' perceptions***

Students' perceptions drew attention to several advantages of incorporating machine translation in language learning, the process of translation in particular. These benefits involved themes such as flexibility, cost-efficiency, speed and capacity to handle large volumes of work.

Frequently noted benefits were flexibility and adaptability. According to one student, "machine translation has the advantage of versatility via the use of many machine translation source engines, thereby simplifying the task". This versatility enables users to explore various machine translation innovations and platforms, adjusting them to suit particular translation requirements. Another student observed that "there are many specialized programs available for translation, allowing the institutions to differentiate itself and explore several options to choose the most suitable one for the task". The flexibility of machine translation makes it appropriate for a wide range of translation use cases, including both commercial and academic settings.

Many students emphasized time-saving as a significant benefit of machine translation incorporation. As one student commented, "machine translation is fast and does not require managing translators". Another student stated that "a computer program can translate tremendous amounts of content quickly", emphasizing the time efficiency of MT tools. Students repeatedly mentioned that machine translation give them the opportunity to quickly translate large documents, which actually would take human translators a much longer time to process until the final output. For instance, one student noted that "it is possible to translate large documents in a very short time with low cost", highlighting the benefits of speed and cost-effectiveness.

Cost-efficiency was another theme deriving from students' perceptions. Several students pointed out the capability to process and translate various texts from MT without any cost, especially the cost that is actually needed for human translators involved in the process. As some student mentioned, "machine translation is economically advantageous for handling substantial amounts of translations, thereby eliminating the need for exorbitant fees to be given to the translators" and "machine translation (MT) alleviates the need for a significant number of physical translators to handle extensive quantities, thereby reducing expenses". Applying MT translations was considered beneficial according to students, especially for institutions due to the cut of expenses for hiring translators. However,

there is a debate on the quality of MT translations regarding official documents, but it will be discussed in further research.

Along with the advantages in terms of speed and cost, students underlined the programmability and developer-friendly characteristics of machine translation systems. According to one student, “machine translations have the qualities of adaptability, programmability, and developer-friendliness”. This functionality enables adaptation and upgrade of MT engines to fulfil the exactly identified user needs. Another student noted the “capability to retrain machine translation into specific workflows and strings”, which may improve the uniformity and quality of translations by ensuring the consistent use of appropriate language.

Furthermore, students noticed that machine translation is continually evolving with technological progress. “The performance of machine translation technology is continuously advancing”, demonstrating that while machine translation may not be flawless, it is progressing and gaining more dependability with time. Another student expressed concern that “the advancement of technology and programming has led to increased effectiveness and quality of machine translation”, suggesting an optimistic mindset for the future prospects of machine translation in translation activities.

### Students' Translations

To begin with, we picked the first phrase from the source text (ST): “It’s interesting” and the corresponding translation into Albanian language according to Google Translate was “Është interesante”. The majority of students (90.47%) have decided on using the same phrase, with some differences in gender in some translations such as “Është interesant” because it was followed by a masculine name “fakti”, or “Është interesante” followed by the conjunction “qe”. Only two students have used another sentence structure and incorporated “it’s interesting” within other words.

Some other MT phrases were chosen such as “kjo është afatgjatë- that is long-lasting”, “në të vërtetë- indeed”, “dominim të historisë- a domination of history” and “Arsyeja do të mbizotëronte-Reason would prevail”. The reason for choosing these phrases was their placement in the source text. They were originally emphasised (with dashes) due to their importance related to the content of the text. Two of these phrases were used only one time (4.76%) and the two others 13 and 14 times (61.9% and 66.67%) as illustrated in Table 1:

**Table 1**  
*Results of the phrases*

ST	MT	Frequency	Total	Mean	Percentage (%)
that is long-lasting	kjo është afatgjatë	1	21	0.0476	4.76%
indeed	në të vërtetë	13	21	0.619	61.90%
a domination of history	dominim të historisë	1	21	0.0476	4.76%
Reason would prevail	Arsyeja do të mbizotëronte	14	21	0.6667	66.67%

Source: The data reflected in the table are from the study conducted by the authors.

On the other hand, one of the depicted mistakes was the translation of the phrase “a capital R”. Seven students (33.33%) have translated it as “kapital”, which is not the appropriate translation in this context and does not have the same meaning as the original ST word. The word “kapital” in Albanian has other meaning such as property or money and it may cause ambiguity when read in this context.

Figure 1

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1 C.docx	esuan në dominimin ose sundimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndeshë për ta - për
2 D.docx	në dominimin ose në mbretërimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndeshë për ta - për
3 E.docx	an në rregullin ose në mbretërimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndeshë për ta - për
4 I.docx	në dominimin ose në mbretërimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndi për ta për
5 J.docx	në dominimin ose në mbretërimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndi për ta për
6 L.docx	e iluminizmit besonin në sundimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndeshë për ta - për
7 S.docx	: dominimin 5) ose në mbretërimin e arsyes - me një	kapital	R sepse ishte pothuajse një perëndeshë për ta - për

Source: The data reflected in the figure are from the study conducted by the authors.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The study revealed some of the advantages of integrating machine translation in language learning as perceived by students and illustrated by their translations. They put an emphasis on the efficiency and the speed of translating with MT tools, but also highlighted the access through these tools and the facilities to translate and comprehend large volumes of texts in relatively a short period of time. The findings sync with previous conducted research and existing literature (Garcia & Pena, 2011).

Advantages such as cost-efficiency and speed play an important role to independent work since there are several MT platforms that students can freely access, especially during their studies where the most critical factors can be budget and time. As stated by Kim (2019), students working independently is very crucial for self-directed learning. Requiring students to discuss the advantages of MT in language learning and analyzing their translations intend to reveal the applications of these advantages and the effects of MT usage in translations while trying to depict common MT patterns such as literal translation or the potential for syntactic errors, as Bowker & Ciro (2019) previously stated MT tendency to create unnatural translation.

The students' perceptions interestingly stressed the advantage of overcoming language barriers and accessing new vocabulary more rapidly with the use of MT tools. As revealed by Groves and Mundt (2015), digital tools can enhance independent work and learners' autonomy. However, the technological revolution and AI, aligned with the reliance on users on these platforms, MT in our case, lead to more advanced research and data collection. What is worth mentioned is the instructor's capacity and willingness to implement different strategies to sync traditional translation methods and MT tools in educational settings while maintaining the advantages that students agreed on.

On the other hand, students' translations the frequency of using some MT phrases revealed the shortcomings of MT. Students frequently translating phrases such as "Reason would prevail" and "indeed" by using the same syntactic structures, give us a hint on the reliance over MT patterns and direct translation. There may be environment where uniformity of text is required, but applying direct translation in education settings reveals the constrains on creative translation. These findings align with the conclusions of Kol *et al*, (2018) who noted that MT often lack the translation of idiomatic and culturally ingrained phrases.

In addition, the inefficient use of more complex terms such as "that is long-lasting" demonstrates a lack of interest or confidence among students to use more advanced language structures while incorporating machine translation tools. Lastly, the incorrect translation of "capital R" from some students revealed their over-reliance to MT and the direct application of the tool's output without post-editing techniques. These findings suggest that while machine translation (MT) may be a useful instrument for simple translation assignments, it may not yet be entirely trustworthy for more complex translation prerequisites, especially in learning environments.

In the context of language education, the findings of this study offer some introductory ideas of the possible role that MT plays while integrating with traditional language learning methods, especially in translation. Alongside with the advantages, there come some shortcomings of these tools while being used in educational settings. The limitations highlighted the need of human intervention in the integration of traditional translation methods and technological output in order to foster language learning and critical thinking.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the advantages of incorporating machine translation into the process of translation in educational environments. It was focused on undergraduate students who shared their perceptions on the topic and participated in translation process of a particular task designed by the instructors. Both, perceptions and translations were collected and analyzed. The results show that students favor the capability of MT to quickly translate content, including cost-efficiency and the ease to access even for considerably large number of texts. However, the reliance on MT, discovered through students' translation, pointed out some limitations such as MT patterns of literal or incorrect translation. Even though MT tools are useful regarding simple translation tasks, they still lack the ability to successfully engage in and translate more complex language or culturally nuanced.

Regarding the limitations, the focus of this study was a small sample of students who are not the representative of the larger group of learners or translation practitioners. The analysis was limited on some machine-translated phrases while using Google Translate as MT tool. In this way, the results are introductory to the theme of MT and its advantages on language learning, which lead to further research with a broader variety of target and instruments. However, despite the limitations, the findings explore the strength and some possible shortcomings of machine translation and its effects in translation. A more specific analysis of student's translations and the involvement of other MT algorithms lead to further investigations in the future.

To conclude, the findings suggest that MT can foster language learning while providing several advantages through the process of language learning and translation in particular, but it should not be used in isolation. As an alternative, it can be combined with traditional translation methods in order to enhance language learning.

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