

EFL Undergraduates' Awareness of Translation Errors in Their Everyday Environment

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Abstract—English is an international language. Establishing a bilingual (English–Chinese) environment has been enthusiastically promoted in Taiwan. Signs written in English and Chinese can be seen in the everyday environment of the streets, public transportation, airports, or stores. However, some of the English signs are poorly translated, such as “Hualien County Goveinment” (Hualien County Government), “Watch out for Snacks” (Watch out for snake), or “Champing” (camping) (Hua, 2012; Zheng, 2010). This case study analyzes 44 Taiwanese EFL college students' awareness of translation errors in their everyday environment. This study has two major findings. First, the errors participants identified and corrected were mostly rendition errors. Secondly, participants regarded the task of identifying errors in the daily environment as meaningful, but they were not able to correct these errors immediately when they found them. Three suggestions are made for the effectively integrating the identification of translation errors into translation classes.

Index Terms—everyday environment, language errors, rendition errors, translation errors

I. INTRODUCTION

English has been used as an international language. Establishing a bilingual (English–Chinese) environment has been enthusiastically promoted in Taiwan. Signs written in English and Chinese can be seen in the everyday environment of the streets, public transportation, airports, or stores. However, some of the English signs are poorly translated, such as “Hualien County Goveinment” (Hualien County Government), “Watch out for Snacks” (Watch out for snake), or “Champing” (camping) (Hua, 2012; Zheng, 2010). The Ministry of Transportation and Communication in Taiwan once held an event to encourage the Taiwanese to identify these errors and report them to the government in exchange for gifts (Zheng, 2010).

With regard to a translation learning strategy, college students in Liao's (2011) study claimed that having hands-on translation practice and experience in a translation class helped them learn to translate efficiently. This study aims to explore Taiwanese English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduates' awareness of translation errors in their everyday environment. In this study 44 participants were required to identify translation errors in their everyday environment and correct these errors. This study discusses the types of translation errors these undergraduates identified during the error correction and identification process. This study considered the following issues: First, what types of translation errors did the undergraduates identify and correct? Second, what was the 44 undergraduates' attitude toward the error correction and identification practice? Suggestions for integrating the identification and correction of translation errors with translation strategies will be provided for instructors of translation classes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Categorizing translation errors is not easy. The categories of translation errors have not been commonly agreed or confirmed (Hatim, 2001; Melis & Albir, 2001; Pym, 1992; Vivanco, Palazuelos, Hormann, Garbarini, & Blajtrach, 1990). Pym (1992) proposed binary errors and non-binary errors. There are only right and wrong answers in binary errors: for non-binary errors, there are at least two right answers and two wrong ones. Milie and Albir (2001) concluded that translation errors result from the translators' lack of knowledge and inadequate application or assimilation of the principles in governing translation.

Only a few books or studies in Taiwan have focused on translation errors. Most scholars have concluded that there are different types of translation error based on the practitioners' experience (Chou, 1986; Ke, 2003). Liao's (2010) empirical study focused on 1248 translation errors from his students' 188 translation exercises. Liao categorized these errors into three types: rendition errors, language errors, and miscellaneous errors. Students may not fully understand the original text. When they transfer these terms from English into Chinese, the transfer yields rendition errors. Students may make language errors such as using incorrect grammar, poor expression, wrong spelling, punctuation, and so on in their translated texts. Finally, students may make other miscellaneous errors such as forgetting to translate some terms due to carelessness.

Liu's (2012) study analyzed twenty English-major college students' translation errors. Liu (2012) concluded that the participants, especially the graduates, made more rendition errors than language errors because they had difficulty in comprehending the text. Insufficient accuracy and misinterpretation are the most common rendition errors. The

participants' errors mostly derived from confusion about vocabulary, syntax and grammar, misunderstanding the textual theme, neglecting the difference between the source and target language, and the pressure of limited time.

Chang (2011) studied 70 college students' errors in the translation product and process. Chang (2011) concluded that college students did not simply make these translation errors as the result of incompetence, but they were also associated with factors such as motivation, time, meta-cognitive strategies, or translation task.

Translation competence is the knowledge necessary to translate well (Bybee, 1996; Faber, 1998; Hatim & Mason, 1990). Nord (1991) defined translation competence as "having these different types of knowledge at one's disposal, and being able to use them to solve problems and make appropriate decisions" (p. 146).

This study mainly focuses on the Liao's (2010) rendition and language errors. These two errors are mostly related to textual, linguistic, and transfer competence. Translators have good textual competence when the target texts they write "have the structural features of formal, written English" (Campbell, 1998, p.73). Translators with linguistic competence can choose the appropriate words in constructing the texts (Bell, 1991; Campbell, 1998; Melis & Albir, 2001; Schaffner & Adab, 2000; Shei, 1998). Translators with good transfer competence have the ability to transfer from the original to the final text (Melis & Albir, 2001; Schaffner & Adab, 2000).

The result of the survey in Chen's (2009) study indicated that student-centered training was effective, because it guided students to acquire translation "know-how" and improve their translation competence. Liu (2012) recommended that Taiwanese college students need to strengthen their grammar and basic English skills to attain better translation competence. More translation exercises are suggested for a translation class. Teachers should train college students to identify their translation errors and to distinguish the linguistic differences between English and Chinese in translation.

The previous studies (Chang, 2011; Faber, 1998; Liao, 2010, Liu, 2012) focus either on language learners' translation errors or translation competence. This study discusses the types of translation errors 44 college students identified during the error correction and identification process. From a research perspective, drawing on previous empirical research on translation instruction at tertiary levels (i.e. Chang, 2011), the multiple sources of data and rich and thick descriptions was aimed to contextualize the study on EFL learners' awareness of translation errors in their everyday environment. From the perspective of language teachers, this empirical study was expected to provide a framework for the integration of identification and correction of translation errors in the translation classes.

III. METHOD

This is a case study, focusing on 44 Taiwanese EFL undergraduates' awareness of translation errors. According to Merriam (2009), a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (p. 40). This study was conducted in a translation course in the tertiary level. In this study, the case is a translation course and the unit of analyses is translation errors.

A. *Setting and Participants*

The study was conducted over three months from March to June 2013. The translation class met for two hours each week in the spring semester of 2013. The participants included one instructor and one translation class of 44 students from a university in Taiwan. This translation class was a required course for English majors and minors. The majority of the students were English majors. Nine students were Education majors, two were Music majors, and one majored in Environmental and Cultural Resources.

B. *Data Collection*

The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Data in this study was from (1) students' class projects, (2) peer correction, and (3) self-reflection. For the class projects, the participants were required in groups of four to collect at least five translation errors they could find in their everyday environment such as train stations, the campus, restaurants, street signs, websites, and so on. They had to identify five errors, explain the problems of these errors, and correct them. Each group gave an oral presentation on the class project. During the group's oral presentation, the rest of the class was required to identify the errors in their peers' projects and correct them.

At the end of the presentation on the class projects, the students were asked to reflect on their experience of identifying and correcting these errors. They wrote down their reflections either in Chinese or English based on the guiding questions included: (1) How did you feel about identifying and correcting these errors? (2) Why did you choose this particular spot/website/book? And (3) How did you know/tell that the translation was incorrect?

C. *Data Analysis*

Participants' projects, peer corrections, and self-reflections were transcribed into raw field notes. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality. The data was coded in the following three stages. First, the researcher read through all the notes and marked the data with a code (e.g. meaningful, products etc.). Secondly, while reading through these codes, the researcher labeled tentative categories (e.g. attitude, types of errors, strategies). Finally, the data was sorted on the basis of its relevance into topics that reflect the research questions, as in Figure 1. A set of codes for thematic analysis that captures the meaning expressed by the data was constructed (Flick, 1998).

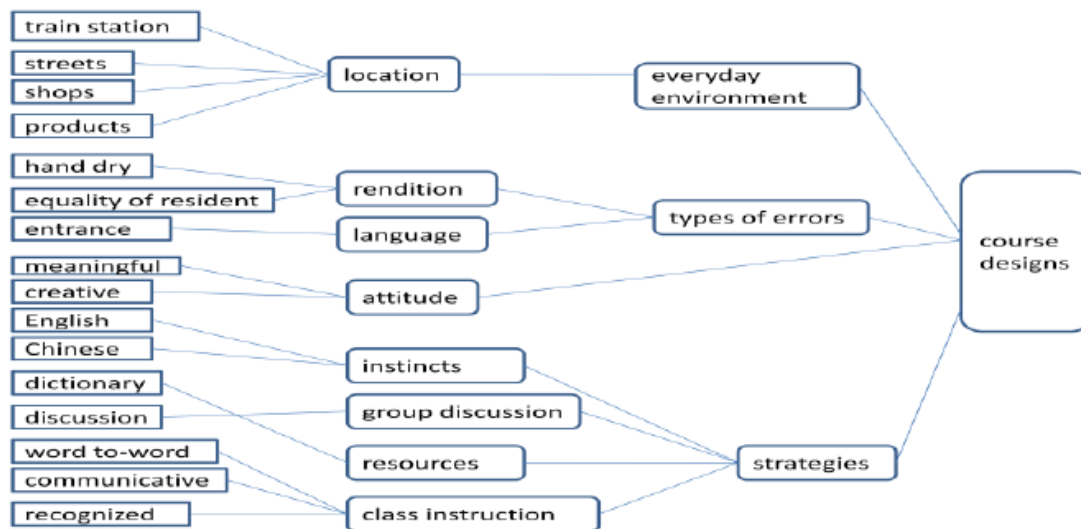


Figure 1. Data Analysis

A high level of validity is the goal for qualitative research. Peer examination is another strategy for promoting validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). A colleague who is familiar with language teacher education scanned the raw data and assessed whether the findings were plausible based on the data. Moreover, triangulation entails the use of more than one method or source of data in a research endeavor (Boeije, 2010). In this study, triangulating multiple sources of data (student’s work, peer correction, reflection) could add texture, depth, and multiple insights to an analysis and could enhance the validity or credibility of the results.

IV. RESULTS

Data were analyzed and discussed in terms of types of translation errors, peer corrections as well as undergraduates’ attitude toward and experience of error correction and identification.

A. *Types of Translation Errors*

The most common translation errors the participants identified were related to transportation or the train station (Table 1) followed by street signs and products (Tables 2 and 3).

As Table 1 shows, about 44.4% of translation errors (n=8) the participants identified were language errors in terms of prepositions, punctuation, sentence structure, capitalization, plural or singular forms, and word choice. Example 7 is a translation problem related to punctuation. Examples 3 and 5 are preposition issues concerning “by” or “for” and omissions of “of.” Examples 2 and 12 are expressions of the word “entrance,” as in “Entrance to...” Examples 9 and 11 are problems of not capitalizing the signs “Square” and “Shop.” Example 13 is an issue related to the plural form, “tickets.” The rest were rendition errors. Seven examples are related to word choices in equivalent and accurate translation, such as Examples 6 “maximum speed,” 8 “hand dryer,” 10 “Watch your step,” 15 “Wheelchair ramp,” 16 “Breastfeeding room,” 17 “Intercity bus station,” and 18 “emergency intercom button.” Examples 1, 4, and 14 are rendition errors that occurred when translators did not accurately translate terms from Chinese into English.

TABLE 1.
TRANSLATION ERRORS ON TRANSPORTATION

#	Errors	Corrections	Types of Errors
1	Don't sit for children below 145cm.	Children below 145cm are not allowed to sit here/ this seat.	rendition
2	Zhinan Rd. Entrance	Entrance to Zhinan Rd.	language
3	Breaking the cover for using the window-break tool in case of emergency	Breaking the cover by using the window-break tool in case of emergency	language
4	Elderly, disabled, passengers with baby stroller or large luggage are...	Passenger who are elderly, pregnant, with baby stroller or large luggage, and disabled are advised to take the elevator.	rendition
5	Beware children	Beware of children	language
6	Highest Speed Limitation	Maximum Speed	rendition
7	Caution keep hands clear of the gates.	Caution, keep hands away from the gates.	language
8	Bake the cell phone	Hand Dryer	rendition
9	Q square	Q Square	language
10	Slip carefully.	Wet floor! Watch your step!	rendition
11	Taipei Metro Souvenir shop	Taipei Metro Souvenir "Shop"	language
12	TRA North 1 Entrance	Entrance TRA North 1	language
13	Don't insert other kind of ticket	Don't insert other kinds of tickets.	language
14	Please use the level crossing's 「emergency button」 when necessary and If your car breaks down, is stuck in traffic or encounters other obstacles that prevent it moving away from a level crossing	Press the "emergency button" when your car breaks down or gets stuck in a traffic jam, or when you encounter an obstacle at a level crossing.	rendition
15	Disable Ramp/Accessible	Wheelchair Ramp	rendition
16	stfeeding room	Breastfeeding Room	rendition
17	Bus Station	Intercity Bus Station	rendition
18	Emergency Intercom Speaking	Emergency Intercom Button	rendition

About 72.7% translation errors (n=8) found in street signs in Table 2 are mainly rendition errors, related to the right choice of equivalent Chinese and English words, or to spelling. Three translation errors were language errors including "art nail" in Example 5, "book" in Example 6, and "Goveinment" in Example 11.

The errors occurred in the direct translation from Chinese into English, such as tou bi xi yi dian for "coin laundry system" in Example 1, ji pai for "chicken pie" in Example 2, you fan for "oil rice" in Example 3, liu lang gou zhi jia for "The Dog's Society" in Example 4, and di ya fang for "mystical room" in Example 7. The rendition errors in Examples 8, 9, and 10 did not accurately translate the Chinese sentences and expressions, so the participants corrected them to "No pets," "No littering," and "No recycling."

TABLE 2.
TRANSLATION ERRORS IN STREET SIGNS

#	Errors	Corrections	Types of Errors
1	COIN LAUNDRARY SYSTME	AUTOMATIC LAUNDRY CENTER	rendition
2	chicken pie	fried chicken breast	rendition
3	Oil rice	Sticky rice	rendition
4	The Dog's Society	Stray Dog Shelter	rendition
5	art nail	Nail art	language
6	Book	Bookstore	language
7	MYSTICAL Room	Classic Room	rendition
8	Prohibition domestic animal enrollment in preschool excreta	No pets/No poop	rendition
9	The prohibition randomly throws trash along with the place	No littering	rendition
10	No may reclaim.	No recycling.	
11	Goveinment	Government	language

All translation problems in products in Table 3 are mainly rendition errors, related to making the right word choice for Chinese and English equivalence. These errors were directly translated from Chinese into English, such as Mini Sleep Lamp for xiao ye deng. Participants in this study made corrections to these terms, as shown Table 3. Example 1 in Table 4 is a rendition where the translator did not fully understand the sentence and accurately translate it from Chinese into English.

TABLE 3.
TRANSLATION ERRORS IN PRODUCTS

#	Errors	Corrections	Types of Errors
1	Apply small amount to face and neck using firm and smooth circular movements from the central T-zone of the face towards the outer edges.	Take appropriate amount in the palm or on the cotton pad.	rendition
2	fabric soad noodle	Soap	rendition
3	Bean thread	Mung beans vermicelli	rendition
4	Spicy Shrimp	Sergestid Shrimp	rendition
5	Pafu snacks	Puff	rendition
6	Fire Pot	Hot pot section	rendition
7	Man Sleeve Shirt	Shirt for men	rendition
8	Breathable Tape	First aid tape	rendition
9	Mini Sleep Lamp	Night light	rendition
10	HIGH MOUNTAIN TEA	TAIWANESE TEA	rendition

While five translation errors were related to building signs (Table 4), errors were found in the brochures for local events (Table 5). All these errors were rendition ones. The participants felt that the errors set out in Table 4 were because the terms did not accurately explain the purpose of the location, such as “conference,” “service room,” “piano room,” and “water dispenser.” One group corrected these terms into “Conference room,” “Attendant’s room,” practice room,” and “pantry room.” Moreover, the best translation of Example 2 in Table 4 should be “do not solicit” or “no soliciting” instead of “Sales are not allowed.”

TABLE 4.
TRANSLATION ERRORS ON BUILDING SIGNS

#	Errors	Corrections	Types of Errors
1	Conference	Conference Room	rendition
2	It's refused to sell it	Sales are not allowed.	rendition
3	Service Room	Attendant's Room	rendition
4	Piano room	Practice Room	rendition
5	Water Dispenser	Pantry Room (or Kitchen)	rendition

Two of the translation errors found in local events brochures were rendition errors. Example 1 in Table 5 is a direct translation from the Chinese expression zong sheng ping deng; the accurate translation for this expression could be “Everyone is equal.” The participants thought that Example 2 “Boss is crazy” was cute, even though it is inaccurate.

TABLE 5.
TRANSLATION ERRORS IN LOCAL EVENTS

#	Errors	Corrections	Types of Errors
1	Equality of Resident	Equality of All Living Creatures	rendition
2	Boss is crazy	Big Sale	rendition

B. Peer Corrections on Error Identifications and Corrections

Overall, all participants in this study were surprised and satisfied by the errors their classmates identified and corrected. Joyce wrote, “My classmates did a great job. They were creative.” Sandy wrote in her reflection “Some of my classmates were very sensitive to the translations in their everyday life. I did not notice these errors myself.”

One group corrected the sentence “Breaking the cover for using the window-breaking tool in case of emergency” as “Breaking the cover by using the window-break tool in case of emergency,” but nine participants thought “for” was correct. With regard to “chicken pie” in Example 2 of Table 3, six participants thought the correct translation should be “fried chicken” instead of “fried chicken breast.”

In Table 5, for “Equality of Resident,” seven participants thought that “All living creatures are equal” and “Everyone is equal” were better than “Equality of All Living Creatures.”

C. Attitude towards Error Identification and Correction

All participants felt that they had fun in identifying and correcting these errors for this class project. About 68% of participants (n=30) claimed that they had never paid attention to the translation errors before doing this class assignment. While Mark said, “I seldom noticed these translation errors,” Frank responded as “I never noticed these translation errors until I did this class project.”

About 38.6% of the participants (n=17) identified these errors when they took public transport or were on their way home. Lily said, “I go home by train during the weekend. I begin to collect these translation errors when I take the train.” Helen also said, “While I walk to the train station, I notice the translation errors on the street signs.”

Almost 30% participants (n=13) referred to the problems in their everyday environment, such as in stores, on the street, or on some products. Eleven participants said these translation errors were too obvious to be missed. Catherine wrote, “I use cosmetics every day. The errors on the cosmetics I use are ridiculous.” Amy said, “Our group went shopping one day. We began to notice the translation errors when we walked aisle by aisle through the store.”

D. Experience of Error Identification and Correction

All participants enjoyed working this project with their classmates and discussing these errors in groups. Jacky said, "I liked to work with my group members. We discussed and corrected these errors together." Iris also shared her experience, "My classmates and the instructor gave us comments on our translation. I learned some new terms."

About 84% of the participants (n=37) responded that the translation strategies and exercises practiced in this translation class helped them identify and correct these errors. Betty wrote, "I recalled different types of translation techniques and tried to use communicative translation instead of word-to-word and literal translation" Cindy also said, "Our group tried to correct translation errors by using 'recognized translation,' the terms that were already translated."

More than 61% of the participants (n=27%) said they could not immediately correct these translation errors as Nancy said, "Some translations look awkward. I am not sure about how I should correct them." They were not sure about some of the expressions, so they had to rely on dictionaries or check the terminology online, as claimed by Phillip "Our group discussed these translation errors. We looked up these terms in the dictionary or checked websites."

About 34% of participants (n=15) said that they could correct these errors easily because these errors were so obvious. About 84% of them (n=37) claimed that they used their background knowledge of English and Chinese or their instinct to correct these translation errors. While Tina wrote "These errors are too obvious. I know they are incorrect," Linda said, "I corrected these errors based on my English proficiency and knowledge of Chinese comprehension."

V. DISCUSSION

This case study explores 44 Taiwanese EFL undergraduates' awareness of translation errors. Based on the above analysis of the data, the study has found the following. First, participants identified more rendition errors. Most of the errors identified and corrected were signs found in transportation. They found these errors because they had to take public transport. Second, when they identified the errors, they were not able to correct these errors immediately. They had to rely on dictionaries, online resources, or peers to correct these errors. Finally, they had seldom paid attention to translation in their everyday environment. Participants found that the exercise of identifying errors in their everyday environment was meaningful.

In order to effectively integrate the identification of translation errors and translation strategies in the translation classes, three suggestions are made, as depicted in Figure 2. First, instructors of translation classes should provide hands-on experience and exercises for learners, and such exercises should go beyond the classroom. Such exercises can be connected to the learners' everyday environment. Instructors can work with local organizations, institutions, or stores, so learners can practice translating or correct translation terms in their locality.

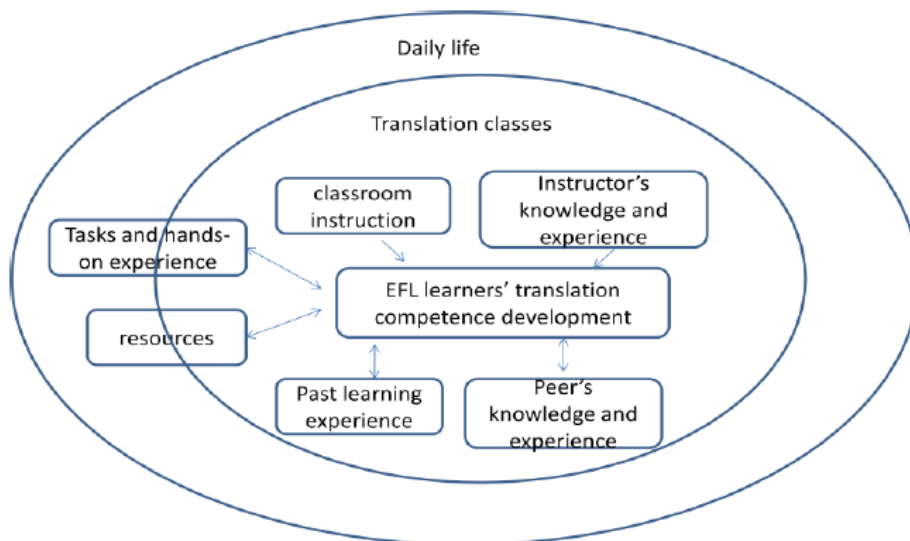


Figure 2. Course Designs for Translation Classes

Second, translation classes should not focus at the level of sentences or accuracy only, but should focus on the translation process itself. In typical translation classes, students are given the text and asked to translate it with the help of dictionaries or grammar books. Teachers discuss the translations sentence-by-sentence, giving the correct answers. This type of translation instruction focuses on the outcome rather than the process. The translation classes should not only focus on the what, but also on the how and the why (Lindgren, Sullivan, Deutschmann, & Steinvall, 2009). Chang (2009) suggested that the practice in translation classes should not be limited to sentence exercises. Rather, translation training should be part of the wider teaching activity, which refers to whole process including translating under time pressure, teamwork, searching for information, and using web resources.

Third, learners' translation competence can be fostered through learners' past language learning experience, teachers' instruction, resources, and peer collaboration. Lindgren et al. (2009) suggested that discussing ideas with peers in translation classes should be encouraged, because such discussion enables learners to see how their ideas relating to the translation develop as they work with the text.

VI. CONCLUSION

This case study analyzes 44 Taiwanese EFL undergraduates' awareness of translation errors in their everyday environment. This study has two major findings. First, the errors participants identified and corrected were mostly rendition errors. Secondly, participants regarded the task of identifying errors in the everyday environment as meaningful, but they were not able to correct these errors immediately when they found them. Three suggestions are made for the effectively integrating the identification of translation errors into translation classes: the inclusion of tasks related to the everyday environment, emphasis on the translation process, and collaborative learning.

As the number of the participants in this study was relatively small (only 44 participants), the findings of this case study cannot be generalized to a larger EFL learner population. However, the triangulated data collection can be used to explain EFL college students' awareness of language translation errors in their everyday environment. The findings and suggestions from this empirical study could provide the instructors and educators of translation classes at the tertiary level with a framework for integrating the identification of translation errors into translation classes.

This paper discusses 44 Taiwanese EFL college learners' awareness of translation errors in their everyday environment. These learners completed the task of error identification and correction as their class assignment. Service learning has been encouraged in educational settings in Taiwan. College students should be encouraged or required to work with local organizations, institutions, or stores to help correct translation errors, and to work on Chinese-English websites or brochures. A further study could explore how Taiwanese EFL college learners' translation competence can be developed and fostered through service learning.

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