

Developing Ability to Translate Homonyms and Homographs via Training in Part of Speech Identification and Dictionary Use

การพัฒนาความสามารถในการแปลคำพ้องรูปและเสียงและคำพ้องรูปโดยฝึกการจำแนกชนิดของคำและการใช้ดิกชันนารี

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยในชั้นเรียนในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาผลของการฝึกจำแนกชนิดของคำและการใช้พจนานุกรมต่อการพัฒนาความสามารถในการเลือกความหมายที่เหมาะสมของคำพ้องรูปและเสียงและคำพ้องรูปในภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีที่เรียนวิชาการแปลทั้งสิ้น 30 คน 2) หาปัจจัยซึ่งผู้เรียนเห็นว่าส่งผลต่อความสามารถของตนเองในการเลือกความหมายที่ถูกต้องของคำพ้องรูปและเสียงและคำพ้องรูป และ 3) ลสำรวจทัศนคติของผู้เรียนต่อการฝึกดังกล่าว เครื่องมือที่ในงานวิจัยประกอบด้วย 1) ใบงานซึ่งมีคำศัพท์เป้าหมายที่เป็นคำพ้องรูปและเสียงและคำพ้องรูป 60 คำ ซึ่งเลือกมาจากรายการคำศัพท์พื้นฐานที่ใช้กันทั่วไปของคำที่พบได้บ่อยที่สุดในภาษาอังกฤษ 2) แบบทดสอบก่อนและหลังการฝึกที่มีคำศัพท์เป้าหมาย 20 คำ ซึ่งเป็นคำที่ไม่ได้รวมอยู่ในใบงาน และ 3) แบบสอบถามจำนวนสองฉบับเรื่องปัจจัยที่ผู้เรียนเห็นว่าส่งผลต่อความสามารถของตนเองในการเลือกความหมายที่ถูกต้องของคำที่มีหลายความหมายและเรื่องทัศนคติของผู้เรียนจากการที่ได้รับการฝึก ผลการศึกษาพบว่าคะแนนทดสอบหลังการฝึกของผู้เรียนสูงกว่าคะแนนทดสอบก่อนฝึกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญที่ระดับ .05 แสดงให้เห็นว่าการฝึกช่วยให้ผู้เรียนสามารถเลือกความหมายของคำที่มีหลายความหมายได้ นอกจากนี้ นักศึกษาเห็นว่าทักษะทางด้านคำศัพท์เป็นปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อผู้เรียนในการเลือกความหมายของคำมากที่สุด นักศึกษาส่วนใหญ่มีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการฝึก โดยเห็นว่าการฝึกจำแนกชนิดของคำมีส่วนช่วยเพิ่มความสามารถในการเลือกความหมายที่เหมาะสมสอดคล้องกับบริบทและการฝึกการใช้พจนานุกรมเป็นประโยชน์ในชั้นเรียนการแปล

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คำสำคัญ: ความสามารถในการแปล คำพ้องรูปและเสียง คำพ้องรูป การฝึกการจำแนกชนิดของคำและการใช้พจนานุกรม

Abstract

The purposes of this classroom-based research were 1) to investigate the effectiveness of training in part of speech identification and dictionary use in order to develop the ability to select appropriate meanings of English homonyms and homographs of 30 EFL undergraduate students enrolled in a translation class 2) to identify factors the students perceived as affecting their competence in selecting the right meanings of the homonyms and homographs and 3) to explore their attitudes towards the training. The instruments used in the research were: 1) the training worksheets consisting of 60 target homonyms and homographs chosen from the General Service List of most frequent words of English 2) the pre-post tests consisting of 20 target words not included in the worksheets, and 3) two questionnaires on factors the students perceived as affecting their ability in sense selection of words with multiple meanings and attitudes toward the training. The findings showed that their post-test scores were significantly higher than their pre-test scores at the level of .05. This revealed that the training benefited the students in their sense selection of multi-meaning words. Results also showed that vocabulary skill was regarded as the most influential factor affecting their sense selection. The majority of the subjects had positive attitudes toward the training; the training in part of speech identification could make them more able to select meanings appropriate to the context and the training in dictionary use was considered useful in translation class.

Keywords: Ability to translate, homonyms, homographs, training in part of speech identification and dictionary use

Introduction

One main cause of common errors in translation tasks is the sense selection of words. Languages often contain lexical ambiguity because many words with the same pronunciation and spelling can have different meanings

(Bedny et al., 2007). Frost & Bentin (1992, p. 192) and Frost et al. (1990, p. 85) asserted that “ambiguity can exist in the relationships between the orthographic and phonological forms of a word, or between the phonological form and its semantic representation.” The English language is complicated by the fact that one word can carry more than one meaning and various meanings can be associated with a word. This can be clearly illustrated by homonyms and homographs.

Generally, homonyms are words with unchanged spelling and pronunciation but convey different meanings on the basis of the context in which it occurs. To illustrate the meaning of homonyms, the word *light* as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Hornby, 2000) is provided below.

- (n.) the energy from the sun, a lamp, etc. that makes it possible to see things
- light* - (v.) to make something start to burn
- (adj.) colors; pale in color
- weight; easy to lift or move; not weighting very much

On the other hand, homographs are words with unchanged spelling and varied pronunciation such as the word *lead*, which can be alternatively pronounced /led/ if it functions as a noun or /li:d/ if it is a verb.

- (n.) a chemical element
- lead* the thin black part of a pencil that marks paper
- (v.) to go with or in front of a person or an animal to show the way or to make them go to the right direction

When translating English to another language, these types of multiple meaning words can cause confusion because of their lexical ambiguity. Translators need to select an appropriate meaning of a lexically ambiguous word according to the lexical and contextual information as this is an important part of language comprehension (Ihara et al., 2007). Baker (1992) further suggested that non-equivalence between the source and the target languages causes most errors in translation. Possible mistakes can occur if translators are stuck on the core meaning or dominant meaning (Dunbar, 2005), and translate it by this meaning without considering the contexts which may require the less common (subordinate) meaning.

With regard to Thai EFL learners, multiple meaning words can cause a lot of problems in their semantic decision. Most of them cannot determine proper meanings of words in foreign texts. As seen in translation classes, they not only make structural and grammatical errors, but also select improper meanings of unknown words or even common words if those words have alternative meanings. What they tend to do is to choose the first meaning of the word that comes to mind or the first on the list in the dictionaries without any concern about its part of speech or checking all dictionary entries given. Consequently, they cannot comprehend the source text and transfer the meaning into Thai efficiently.

Background of the Study

1. Homonyms and Homographs in Language Learning

One of the most commonly studied forms of ambiguity in language is lexical ambiguity, such as homonyms and homographs (Titone, 1998). Each homonym and homograph generally has more than one unrelated meaning and includes both dominant and secondary meanings. A clear difference between these words is that the pronunciation of a homonym is the same regardless of its meaning, while a homograph is pronounced differently depending on the meaning it carries. Homonyms and homographs presented in isolation are clearly ambiguous and have multiple lexical entries. Many homonyms have their primary meanings within one word class as the word bank and some across word class as the word down. Homographs, on the other hand, entail different pronunciations when their meanings change. Examples of homographs are the words *lives* in “*She lives with her children.*” and in “*We’ll go there to start our new lives.*”, which are written the same but pronounced differently.

2. Importance of Parts of Speech

Traditional grammar generally categorizes parts of speech into eight types: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjection. In the process of learning a second language, learners have to mainly pay attention to how the word is used not what the word is (Khosravizadeh & Pashmforoosh, 2012). Knowing the grammatical class as contextual clues can help them to categorize the problematic written words, distinguish the function of words, and finally choose the correct meanings of the words. Ellis (1994) emphasized that it is essential to focus not only on meanings of words, but also on the association of meanings and word forms.

Making use of sentence context should lead to a final selection of only one proper meaning (Elston-Güttler & Friederici, 2005). A lot of words in English are phonologically and orthographically ambiguous; however, the ability to identify grammatical functions of the words in a context can help lessen lexical ambiguity (Melinger & Koenig, 2007). The context is one factor which influences lexical decision when dealing with multiple meaning words (Elston-Güttler & Friederici, 2005). Fraser (1999) suggested a practical way to learn vocabulary through reading by identifying the parts of speech and grammatical features of a word, drawing associations between that word, and commenting on the meaning of that word with others in the same semantic field. Hence, part of speech is one factor translators need to consider because a single form of vocabulary may have many grammatical functions (Nudtackien, 2007) and therefore many meanings.

3. Importance of Dictionary Use

Dictionaries have long been recognized as useful learning tools and a vocabulary learning strategy. Laufer & Kimmel (1997) pointed out that dictionaries are helpful in providing necessary information of words and this brings about the double benefits of developing vocabulary strategy and giving attention to useful words when it is used for high frequency words (Nation, 2008).

Dictionaries can be generally categorized into monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. (Thornbury, 2002) Both types have their strengths and weaknesses. Monolingual dictionaries offer examples of grammatical and semantic information, including how to pronounce each word. According to Schofield (1997), some experts regard the monolingual dictionary as the most useful vocabulary reference due to its abundant linguistic and semantic information. The dictionary, however, can cause difficulties for users, particularly those with low language proficiency.

On the contrary, bilingual dictionaries provide an explanation of words from one language into another language that dictionary users are familiar with, usually in L1. This kind of dictionary thus helps the users to quickly check a meaning of a word and understand the way dictionary entries are coded. The users can possibly cope with meaning search in spite of their weaknesses to relate the meaning between two languages. This is supported by Karbalaei and Amoli, 2011 and Hunt, 2009 that students still prefer bilingual dictionaries for fast consultation and feel more comfortable in dealing with their L1 though

most teachers encourage them to use monolingual dictionaries. The students even admitted that the monolingual dictionaries are better (Laufer & Kimmel, 1997; Nuccorini, 1992). As claimed by Piotrowsky (1989, cited in Laufer and Melamed, 1994: 566), “no matter what their level of competence, foreign learners and users use their bilingual dictionaries as long as they use dictionaries at all.” However, according to Intira’s study (1989, cited in Krajangsirisin, 2001), students did not use an English-English dictionary because of their limited vocabulary knowledge and lack of understanding in English parts of speech. In terms of translation, Bassnett (2003), nevertheless, asserted that competent use of the dictionary and grammar can help promote the translation ability.

This research aimed to study whether the training in part of speech identification and dictionary use would help students translate better and find out what factors they thought affect their ability to translate and how they feel about the training.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant difference in the students’ ability before and after being trained in the identification of part of speech and use of dictionaries?
2. What factors do students perceive as affecting their ability to select appropriate meanings of homonyms and homographs?
3. What are the students’ attitudes toward the training in part of speech identification and selecting appropriate meaning of words from the dictionaries?

Research Methodology

Pilot study

The pre-posttest and two questionnaires were piloted with 26 students, who had similar characteristics to the target population, to determine its reliability. The Difficulty Index (p) was used to determine the difficulty level of the test items and item discriminability index (D.I.) for their discriminability. The items which could not meet the criteria were revised. The Reliability Analysis-scale (Alpha) was used for calculating the reliability of the two questionnaires.

Participants

Thirty Thai second year EFL undergraduate students majoring in English took part in this classroom-based research. They enrolled in the Translation II course in the first semester of the academic year 2012.

Research Instruments

Dictionaries

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Monolingual Dictionary and Oxford Wordpower Dictionary for Thai Learners were used throughout the study.

Target words

In selecting 80 target words for this study, 2,000 most frequent words from the General Service List were taken (Nation, 2008, p.163-171). Firstly, the words were alphabetically arranged. Then the part of speech of each word was identified and only the words with two classes or more were kept. However, the number of homonyms and homographs was found not to be proportional (298 homonyms, 57 homographs). Hence, every fifth of the homonyms were chosen and then only 40 homonyms and 40 homographs were randomly selected. Among the 80 words, 59 have two parts of speech (mostly nouns and verbs), sixteen carry three grammatical functions, four carry four, and only one carries five. None of the target words function as pronouns and conjunctions. Thirty homonyms and thirty homographs were used in the training, while ten words of each group were used in the pre-test and post-test.

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan was written based on the three stages of a lesson consisting of presentation, practice, and production. Within one 240 minute session per week, 100 minutes were spent in the training at the beginning of each class time. The same format of the lesson plan was used in every period of the training; only target words used were changed. For each session, four target words were presented on the board and the students negotiated the meanings. Next, they were provided a worksheet to practice identifying the part of speech of each target word and other surrounding words. After that, they consulted their dictionaries by making use of guidewords, headwords, and

dictionary entries, and focusing only on the specific parts of speech. Finally, they translated the sentences or paragraphs in the worksheet.

Worksheets

Worksheets on homonyms and homographs were given to the subjects for practice throughout 15 weeks. The words already taught were also recycled but with different parts of speech in subsequent sessions.

Data Collection Instruments

Pre-posttest items

The pre-test and post-test included 20 target words. The students were required to translate 10 sentences and a short paragraph embedded with homonyms and homographs within 60 minutes. The words which appeared in the test were not used in the training.

Questionnaires

Related literature and studies (i.e. Baker, 1992; Nation, 2008 & Nuttall, 1996) were reviewed to get information as a basis for writing the questionnaire items. The first questionnaire consisting of 20 statements was designed to find out what factors the students perceived as affecting their ability to select appropriate meanings of homonyms and homographs. It focused on three main factors: vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and background knowledge. Another questionnaire aimed to investigate their attitudes toward the training in part of speech identification and dictionary use in the form of 20 statements. The questionnaires were assessed by three examiners. Their suggestions were noted and changes were made accordingly.

Procedures and Data Analysis

In the first week of the study, the students took the pre-test and completed the first questionnaire on factors they perceived as affecting their ability to select appropriate meanings of homonyms and homographs. Both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries were allowed during the test. In 15 subsequent weeks, they were trained to identify parts of speech and use the dictionary. The posttest, the first questionnaire, and the questionnaire about

their attitudes toward the training were administered in the last week of the study. Paired Sample t-test was used to measure the treatment effects based on the results of the pre-test and post-test. The descriptive statistics \bar{x} and S.D. were used to analyze the data of the two questionnaires.

Findings

Table 1 Translation ability before and after the experiment

Test	\bar{x}	S.D.	%	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test (20)	10.87	2.18	54.35	8.419	.000** N=30
Post-test (20)	14.77	1.60	73.85		

** Significant at .05 level

As shown in Table 1, there is a significant difference between the scores of pretest and posttest ($t = 8.419$; $p = .000$). The posttest scores ($\bar{x} = 14.77$, S.D. = 1.60) were significantly higher than the pretest scores ($\bar{x} = 10.87$, S.D. = 2.18).

Table 2 Students' perception on factors affecting their ability to select appropriate meanings of homonyms and homographs before and after the training

Statements	Before the Training After the Training			t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
	S.D.	\bar{x}	S.D.		
- Ability to identify words in British English and American English	0.82	4.17	0.74	4.597	.000**
- Ability to select proper meaning of a word according to the context	1.01	4.1	0.66	3.994	.000**
- Multiple meanings of English words in the same part of speech	0.89	4.2	0.92	4.257	.000**

Statements	Before the Training After the Training			t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
	S.D.	\bar{x}	S.D.		
Vocabulary Skill					
- Semantic complexity of technical terms in the source language	0.83	4.33	0.84	5.299	.000**
- Lexical difference between the word units like idioms and collocations, for example, “She saw him off at the airport.”	1	4.03	0.89	4.349	.000**
- Tendency to choose the dominant meaning	0.89	3.77	0.68	1.829	0.078
Average	0.89	4.07	0.81	9.198	.000**
Grammatical Competence					
- Ability to identify the part of speech of words in sentences					
- Ability to deal with prepositional phrases in sentences	0.96	4.2	0.8	5.058	.000**
- Differences in tenses between the source language and target language	0.87	4.07	0.78	5.137	.000**
- Ability to use present participle and gerund, for example, “A girl sitting there is my friend”, and “Running in the morning is a good exercise.”	0.89	3.67	0.8	3.471	.002**
- Ability to use past participle, for example, “A letter written in Thai is acceptable.”	0.8	3.9	0.76	4.397	.000**
- Ability to distinguish meanings from different punctuation forms	0.94	3.83	0.83	2.827	.008**
- Ability to use active/passive voice	0.91	3.83	0.95	2.894	.007**

Statements	Before the Training After the Training			t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
	S.D.	\bar{x}	S.D.		
Vocabulary Skill					
Background Knowledge					
- Ability to relate prior knowledge in translating	0.9	3.8	0.61	2.984	.006**
- Ability to comprehend the source text in different social and cultural context	0.9	3.9	0.84	3.357	.002**
- Sufficient existing knowledge in wordchoice	0.99	3.73	0.69	2.599	.015**
- Impact of cultural familiarity relevant to the source language	0.98	3.83	0.75	3.542	.001**
- Sufficient background knowledge in making inferences	0.74	3.67	0.76	1.934	0.063
- Awareness of complexities between different culture	0.79	4.17		4.983	.000**
Average	0.74	3.85		7.179	.001**
Overall Average	0.78	3.93		12.419	.006**

*Note: Criteria for Rating Scale Interpretation

1.00-1.80 = Lowest, 1.81-2.60 = Low, 2.61-3.40 = Moderate, 3.41-4.20 = High, 4.21-5.00 = Highest

Table 2 shows that the students considered all factors having roughly the same level of importance before the training. The mean value of vocabulary skill was 3.18, grammatical competence 3.17, and background knowledge 3.15. After the training, all factors averaged at the level of high; the mean value of vocabulary skill was 4.07, grammatical competence 3.88 and background knowledge 3.85. There were significant differences between the mean values of all aspects before and after the training but with the exception on the issues of “Tendency to choose the dominant meaning” and “Sufficient background knowledge in making inferences”.

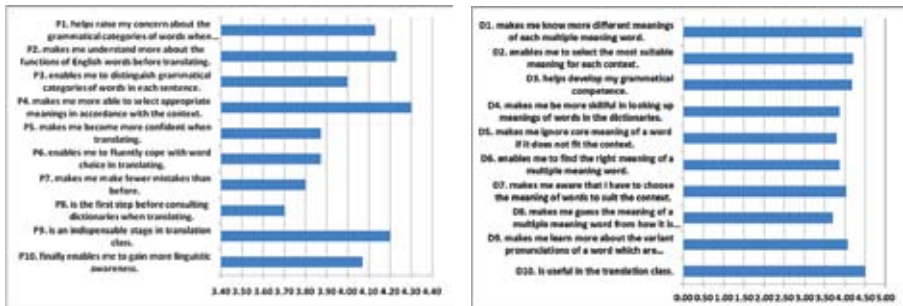
Table 3 Students' attitudes toward the training in part of speech identification

Training in	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level of Agreement
Part of Speech Identification	4.01	0.69	high
Dictionary Use	4.06	0.65	high

and dictionary use

As seen in Table 3, the means of the students' responses show that their attitudes toward the training in dictionary use averaged at 4.06, while the attitude toward the training in part of speech identification averaged at 4.01, which were at the high level.

Figure 1 Details of students' attitudes toward the training in part of speech identification and dictionary use



Part of Speech Identification

Dictionary Use

Figure 1 shows that the training in parts of speech identification made them more able to select appropriate meanings in accordance with the context (\bar{x} =4.30, S.D.= 0.70) while the training of dictionary use was considered useful in the translation class, averaging at the highest level (\bar{x} =4.50, S.D.=0.68). With respect to the findings above, the trainings could raise their linguistic awareness (P1, P2, P3, P10), their awareness of the importance of the context (P4, D2, D5, D6, D7), confidence (P5), linguistic competence (P6, P7, D1, D3, D4, D8, D9), and cultivate their perception on the stage in translation (P8, P9, D10).

Discussion

The first research question sought to determine whether there was a significant difference in the students' ability before and after the training. With regard to Table1, the training in part of speech identification and dictionary use might help increase the students' ability to translate homonyms and homographs more effectively. Concentrating on the part of speech of each word as a primary indicator, they took less time in the looking-up process and could systematically and correctly select the meanings of the target words to fit the context. This is congruent with Fraser (1999) and Nation (2001), who asserted that students need to identify the grammatical function of a word before consulting the dictionary and focusing on the entries in that word class only. Similarly, Nation (2008) stated that a helpful way to train learners in receptive dictionary use is to encourage them to guess the word meaning from the context and the ability to identify the part of speech of words is necessary.

As for the second research question, it is interesting to note that both before and after the training, vocabulary skill was regarded as the most influential factor affecting their ability to select suitable meaning of the words, followed by grammatical ability and background knowledge. The same point was indicated by Wilkins (1972 cited in Thornbury, 2002, p. 13), "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." The finding is also congruent with Çelik and Toptaş's finding (2010, p.62) that, "Vocabulary is generally considered as the basic communication tool, and often labeled as the most problematic area by language learners". It may be a good indicator that the students gradually realized the importance of these factors on their reading comprehension, decision in selecting word meanings and also efficiency in translating although their perception on the tendency to choose the dominant meaning ($t = 1.829$, $p = .078$) and on the sufficient background knowledge in making inferences ($t = 1.934$, $p = .063$) before and after the training were not statistically different.

The tendency to choose the dominant meaning of a word can possibly result from the fact that most students in Thailand have been traditionally taught vocabulary in a passive way. Most teachers of English in Thailand have taught students to memorize one word with one meaning instead of making them

aware of possible meanings the word can have in other contexts. However, after the training, the problem involving vocabulary skill shifted from ambiguous words to technical terms. It may be assumed that after the training, they might gain much more knowledge in parts of speech and dictionary use and became skillful to handle the problem of dominant meanings but technical terms are still another linguistic difficulty for them. Though they could identify and select proper meanings of the target words in their exercises, they still could not totally understand the meaning of the whole sentences or paragraphs because of other surrounding technical terms in the sentences. They knew the meanings of these unfamiliar words from their dictionaries but they could not efficiently activate their prior knowledge to comprehend the precise meanings. Hence, the problem of technical terms became more prominent.

Finally, positive changes were found in the students' attitudes after the training (see Table 3) but the students thought that the training in dictionary use was more beneficial to them than the training in part of speech identification (see Figure 1). The students looked up a wanted word in their dictionaries and focused only on the entries according to the parts of speech the word belongs to. This helped them save time to confirm or determine the most proper meaning of the word. Frequent classroom practices also enabled them to be more careful about the word meanings in various contexts, helped contribute to their translation ability, and thus served the main purpose of the training as well. Teaching grammar is necessary in translation class. As Brown (2001, p. 362) asserted, "Grammar is the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence." Sufficient understanding in grammar thus possibly makes learners know the correct meaning of a word. In addition, Battenburg (1991, cited in Hartmann, 2003, p. 356) suggested that "Skills and strategies for using dictionaries should be taught in every second and foreign language classroom, for students are not only learning about dictionaries but also about language..." And the training in both aspects has yielded promising results in this study.

Pedagogical implications

With positive attitudes, the combined training could help direct the students' attention, and raise their linguistic awareness in multiple meaning words when

translating. This could possibly expand their linguistic skill. It is thus necessary to continuously promote this explicit training in not only translation class but also other language classes for their lifelong learning and sustainable language development.

Recommendations for further studies

Although the findings of this study have shed some light on the role of the training, some limitations yield suggestions for future research. Similar studies can be done with more various types of texts with unknown words in different levels of difficulty. Enlarging the sample size and comparing differences between students' proficiency should be taken into consideration in future studies.

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