

Students' Beliefs on Translation Strategy in Learning German Language

Bong Tze Ying

tzeying718@yahoo.com

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Ang Lay Hoon

hlang@upm.edu.my

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Hazlina Abdul Halim

hazlina_ah@upm.edu.my

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Miroslava Majtanova

miroslava@upm.edu.my

Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The growing number of research studies on the application of translation in language learning has shown that this topic is getting popular among education research groups. It is a challenging task for a non-native speaker to learn a foreign language, especially if the grammar of the student's dominant language is different from the grammar of the foreign language. Among the many methods employed in foreign language learning, the translation method continues to remain a controversial issue. This study is primarily designed to understand the role of translation for non-native speakers in the learning of German as a foreign language, specifically in ascertaining students' beliefs about using translation in their studies of the foreign language, and to find out the learning strategies, which involve translation. A total of 60 Malaysian undergraduates studying German as a foreign language in a public university participated in this study. Data collection was carried out using a questionnaire on the use of translation in learning German language and semi-structured interview. It can be concluded from the findings of the study that the majority of the participants believed that the use of translation is a helping strategy for learning the German language. Although a small number of the participants preferred to learn the German language without using translation, they agreed that translation really helped to develop their learning strategy, especially in a situation where they did not understand the German language spoken by their lecturer in class. It is hoped that the findings of this study will shed light on the use of translation in teaching and learning the German language.

Keywords: translation; foreign language learning; German; learning strategies; student's belief

INTRODUCTION

The term 'translation' usually means transferring meaning and conveying messages from one language to another (Cook, 2010). It is a process of "converting the target language into the native language (at various levels, from words and phrases all the way up to whole texts); converting the native language into the target language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 46). Translation can also be employed as a strategy in learning a foreign language (Chamot, 1987; Chamot &

Kupper, 1989; Chamot et al., 1987; O'Malley et al., 1985a, 1985b; Oxford, 1990; Lau et al., 2012; Abdul Halim & Ang, 2015). As defined by Chamot (1987), translation is “using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language” (p. 77). In a research conducted by Liao (2006), translation is explicated as “using one language as a basic for understanding, remembering, or producing another language, both at the lexical level and the syntactic level, and also in either direction from the target or source language into the other language” (p. 191). As Cook (2007) states, language learners naturally and constantly translate between the first language and the foreign language or source language. Therefore, translation is important in foreign language learning as learners naturally employ translation to facilitate their language learning.

Translation is one of the oldest methods used in language learning. For centuries, this method has been applied for learning a foreign language. Early in the 20th century, the use of the Grammar-Translation Method (GMT) was advocated as a means to both practise and test a learner's knowledge of the language system. GMT views translation as being essential for foreign language learning. The learner's native language is used as the medium of instruction in the GMT. He or she is expected to gain translation skills in order to analyse the target language's grammar rules, which are made available to him or her through literary texts (Richard & Roger, 2001). However, this method has always been a highly debated issue. Asgarian and Vefalı (2015) state that the predominant view is that a foreign language should be taught without reference to the learners' first language since it impedes the acquisition of a target language in the history of English language teaching. The method was criticised for its extensive use of the mother tongue in foreign language education (Asgarian & Vefalı, 2015). The Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Method were later established; these methods advocated that the students should be directly taught in the target language, and translation was banned as part of the classroom activities. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasised the importance of interaction through target language use in classroom activities.

There are a number of scholars who prohibit the use of translation in the classroom and disagree with the use of translation as one of the learning strategies in language learning. For example, Sorhus (1975) asserts that translation is a cause of interference in second language learning. MacDonald (1993) argues that the use of the target language in the classroom can motivate the students and they will feel more encouraged when they are able to understand and use the target language. He believes that over-reliance on the L1 will actually demotivate the students. In another study, Carreres (2006) opines that translation is a useless method and does not perform well in bringing out the exact meaning of a word, which can cause the students to feel frustrated and demotivated while they are trying to learn the language. A similar perspective came from Mogahed (2011) who reports that translation is not suitable for students as it can only apply well for those who are interested in literature or for those who have acquired a significant level of proficiency in the foreign language.

Although the use of translation is abandoned by many language teachers in language learning, there are still many studies in the field of using translation for learning a foreign language and these studies testify to the fact that this method is still used in many countries. Among the research carried out, several have proven that translation is one of the effective methods used by students for learning a foreign language. Corder (1981) emphasises that a student's mother tongue is a useful resource for the learner to compensate for his or her deficiencies in second language learning. Popovic (2001) claims that translation can be beneficial to a language class as it supports the students' learning. Translation can be a great aid to foreign language learning, as stated by Fernandez-Guerra (2014). The majority of the students in her study incline towards using translation of their mother tongue and they rank the use of translation as the most motivating method of learning a foreign language.

A few empirical research have also been conducted which specifically studied learners' beliefs on the use of translation in foreign language. Horwitz's (1987) study reported that 70% of German students and 75% of Spanish students supported the use of translation from English in order to learn a foreign language, while a mere 15% of the French students agreed with the use of translation. A similar study has been conducted by Hsieh (2000) regarding the attitudes and beliefs about translation on Taiwanese college students at the end of one year of EFL instruction. The study revealed that the use of translation gave support to their process of learning English in terms of improving their reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, and cultural background knowledge. Among the 52 participants in his study, 73% of the Taiwanese students mentioned that they learnt English language skills through their native language, which was Mandarin, and 65% thought that by using translation, they became more aware of multiple meanings in an English word.

Liao (2006) conducted a research using questionnaire to investigate learners' perceptions and learning strategies employed by Taiwanese English learners. Most of the 351 participants in his study believed that translation played a positive and supportive role in their learning process. Bagheri and Fazel (2011) adapted the same questionnaire to investigate how Iranian students used translation, particularly in their writing skills. The result of that study indicated that most of the students endorsed the belief that translation facilitates the acquisition of English writing skills. Along the same lines, Karimian and Talebinejad (2013) also conducted a similar research and adapted Liao's questionnaire, The Inventory for Translation as a Learning Strategy. Of the 170 Iranian students who participated in that study, the highest percentage (about 54%) agreed that translation was a helping strategy in their learning of a new language. The Iranian students made use of translation as a strategy to help them in the English-learning process. More recently, Asgarian and Vefalı (2015) conducted a similar study and found that the Iranian learners in their study believed in using translation as a helping strategy in the learning of a new language, developing their target language with the help of their mother tongue. Mutlu, Bayram and Demirbüken's (2015) study also focused on the use of translation from the learners' point of view in gaining skills in English and in learning lexical items. The results indicated that the learners, mainly the elementary learners relied on translation in the classes to improve in their language learning. All these empirical studies concluded that majority of the learners believed that the adoption of translation have positive effects on their foreign language learning process.

The use of translation for learning a foreign language has faced much criticism from some researchers and language teachers, but it is extremely difficult for the learners, especially less proficient learners, to avoid using translation in their learning process. Students in early stages of learning the language are certainly exposed to some explanation in their mother tongue especially when explaining difficult grammar rules that the students cannot grasp in English (Al-Musawi, 2014). The studies conducted by Husain (1995), and Chia and Chia (2001) found that less proficient English learners more frequently employed or benefited from translation strategies than their counterparts who were more proficient learners of English. All the above mentioned research showed that the issue of using translation in learning a foreign language has always been a controversial topic. For the purposes of this current study, it can be seen that not many details and outcomes could be gleaned from previous research discussed on the real impact of using the translation method for learning a foreign language, particularly the German language. As the previous studies on translation in foreign language learning were usually more focused on learning the English language, there is a distinct lack of focus on the study of the German language, especially in Malaysia. Hence, this current study is conducted to investigate the Malaysian students' beliefs and the use of translation as their learning strategy for learning German as a foreign language.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In Malaysia, a multilingual country, almost everyone can speak the official language (Malay). It is the outcome of the effort put in by the Malaysian government to promote Malay as the national language by making it the medium of instruction in all public schools, universities and institutes. However, the importance of English was not lessened. After Malay, English is the second most important language in Malaysia and it is a compulsory subject taught in all the public schools. Therefore, many people, especially who live in urban areas can understand English. Besides Malay and English, Mandarin and Tamil are commonly spoken among the Chinese and Indian communities, respectively (Dufour, 2017). It is a fact that most Malaysians can communicate in more than one language, apart from their mother tongues (Kärchner-Ober, 2012). Hj. Sarudin and Zubairi's (2009) study found that learning foreign languages is always encouraged in Malaysia and the Malaysian students in that study were extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to learn a foreign language. In addition, the German language has been included as a major or elective programme in several public and private universities of higher education, indicative of the fact that learning the German language is a growing trend in Malaysia. The German language deserves more attention in this area of study which seeks to have an understanding of how Malaysian undergraduates use translation, particularly in terms of their learning beliefs about using translation in their studies. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate students who use translation as their learning strategy in mastering reading, writing, listening and speaking of the German language.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- i) What are the students' beliefs in using translation as a strategy to learn the German language?
- ii) What kind of learning strategies which involve translation do the students use?

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in a public university in Malaysia. A total of 60 students participated in this study, the majority of whom were female students while only four of them were male students. The number of participants was limited by the intake of the programme. The participants were undergraduate students in Year 2 and Year 3 who majored in the German Language as a foreign language in the Bachelor Degree programme. This study did not include the Year 1 students because the German language class in the first year has minimum credit hours and the students only learn the basic skills of the German language such as phonetics, numbering and greetings. The vocabulary and grammar that they learned are too limited to allow them to engage in translation. Therefore, the Year 1 students were not eligible to participate in this study.

In terms of ethnic backgrounds, the participants consisted of two major ethnicities which were the Chinese and Malay. There were 38 Chinese participants (63.3%), 20 Malay participants (33.3%) and two Indian participants (3.3%) in the study. Other races did not participate in this study. All the 20 Malay participants used the Malay language as their daily conversation as it was their first language (L1). It was the same for the Tamil language; the two Indian participants used Tamil language as their L1 and the language of daily use. The majority of the Chinese participants used Mandarin as their daily language. Among the 38 Chinese participants, 35 of them (92.1%) used Mandarin to communicate with their family

and friends, while two participants (5.3%) used the English language as their daily language and one participant (2.6%) used Cantonese, a Chinese dialect.

INSTRUMENTS

All the participants took part in the quantitative survey and the instrument used was a questionnaire. The questionnaire, which was first designed by Liao (2006) originally in English, has been adapted by some researchers for their research studies, such as Bagheri and Fazel (2011), Karimian and Talebinejad (2013), Asgarian and Vefali (2015), Mutlu, Bayram and Demirbüken (2015). In the present study, the questionnaire was adapted and further amended by the researchers. It consisted of three sections. Section A referred to 'The Individual Background Questionnaire (IBQ)' with five questions to elicit the demographic characteristics of the participants: gender, ethnicity, the language used daily, and the language that was most frequently used in the translation for speaking and writing. Section B was 'The inventory for beliefs about translation (IBT)' (items 1-22) based on the Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). In Section C, 'The inventory for translation as a learning strategy (ITLS)' was used as strategy use measurement. It was also based on the five-point Likert scale, which was ranged as 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', 'Often' and 'Always'. A reliability analysis was carried out and the statistics indicates the Cronbach's alpha .996, therefore this questionnaire confirms its high reliability.

A retrospective interview was conducted after the questionnaire survey. The purpose of the interview in this study was to get more information from the participants to supplement the questionnaire survey. In addition to that, it is aimed to find out further in detail the students' opinion and the meaning they make of that experience, as mentioned by Patton (1990) and Seidman (1998). The interview guide applied in this study was also first designed by Liao (2006). It has been adapted and further modified in accordance to the focus of this study to probe students' opinions, reflections, evaluation of translation strategy and also their experience on how to make use of translation in their German learning process. The researchers identified salient excerpts that illustrated the participants' beliefs on the use of translation. The viewpoints from them would also be used to triangulate their responses to the questionnaire. Twelve students participated in the interview and selection was based on convenient sampling. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) proposed that, in standardised groups, dispersion is obvious when there are about 12 participants. In addition to this, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) claimed that a group of 20 participants or less allows them to foster a closer relationship with the researcher which then gives room for the participants to be more open in exchanging information. In addition, convenient sampling was used in this study because the twelve participants were easy to access by the researchers. Researchers' biasness is kept to the minimum possible as the sampling was done without prejudice and favour. The researchers did not coerce any participant to take part in the interview section. The twelve participants were willing to spend more time for this study and provide further information to support the questionnaire, specifically on their thoughts and opinions on their answers in questionnaire. Other participants did not want to be interviewed either because they found it inconvenient to attend the interview section or they did not want to try to share their view further.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The questionnaire was conducted after securing permission from the public university and also after getting consent from the participants. Firstly, they were asked to answer the questionnaire. The objectives of this study and clear instructions were provided by the

researchers so that the participants could complete the questionnaire accordingly. All the instructions were given in English, and the participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions when they did not understand items from the questionnaire. Secondly, the interview sections were conducted by the researchers. It was done in English and the duration of each interview was approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The participants were encouraged to talk freely about their opinions on the topic of this study, but the conversations were kept to the point and were focused on issues of interest in this study.

The data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics, which included means and standard deviations to summarise the participants' responses to the IBT and ITLS. The data analysis was based on Oxford's related classification (1990) for understanding the mean scores on instruments with a response scale ranging from 1 to 5 as used in this study. Average scores of 3.5 to 5.0 ($3.5 \geq M \geq 5$) were defined as high means, 2.5 to 3.4 ($2.5 \geq M \geq 3.4$) were medium means, and lastly, 1.0 to 2.4 ($1.0 \geq M \geq 2.4$) were low means. The type of classification used was not mentioned in a study by Liao (2006) but Oxford's classification was used by Asgarian and Vefali (2015). For the qualitative interview data, the participants' responses in the interview were tape-recorded, transcribed into text, examined and compared to get the overall result. Based on the transcriptions, the data were scrutinised to identify recurring themes. All the relevant data were then categorised under different themes, such as the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and the use of translation in learning German grammar and vocabulary. For data analysis purpose, attention was given to the source language used by the participants in translation, the translation strategies on the four language skills, and in learning grammar and vocabulary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study presents the results of the participants' beliefs on using translation as a method in learning the German language, and how they employed translation as their learning strategy to acquire the German language. Table 1 below shows the details of the source language that the participants most frequently used for translation, as one of their learning strategies in acquiring the German language.

TABLE 1. Source languages that the students used for translating when speaking and writing in German

| Source Language | Speaking | | Writing | |
|-----------------|----------|------------|---------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Malay | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 3.3% |
| Mandarin | 14 | 23.3% | 12 | 20.0% |
| English | 46 | 76.7% | 46 | 76.7% |
| Total | 60 | 100% | 60 | 100% |

Table 1 shows that among the 60 participants, 46 participants used the English language as their source language to translate into German when speaking, and only 14 participants used Mandarin to achieve the same task. In addition, 46 participants preferred to use English while 12 participants used Mandarin and 2 participants used the Malay language as their translation language when writing in German. The result indicates that the majority of the participants used English language instead of their L1 to translate in the speaking and writing of the German language. Although 63.3% of the respondents were Chinese and Mandarin forms the majority of their L1, this language was not found to be the major language used in the translation strategy in this study. Most of the participants instead preferred to use English to translate during the process of learning German. It was the same for the Malay language; only two Malay respondents translated from the Malay language in learning the German language.

This result shows that the participants preferred to use the English language, not their L1, in the translation strategy. The most probable reason is that the English language is the second most important language medium in the German class. The lecturers are mainly foreigners and English is therefore the common language between the lecturers and the participants. In addition, both the English and German languages belong to the ‘West Germanic’ group of the Indo-European language family and English has developed from ‘Low German’. Therefore, the German language and the English language share many similar characteristics. For example, the German alphabet contains the same 26 letters as the English alphabet. Both languages also have similarities in phonology which refers to sounds, stress and intonation patterns. These two languages also share many cognates in vocabulary. Listed below in Table 2 are a few examples.

TABLE 2. Similarities between German Language and English Language

| German Word | English Word | Similarities |
|--------------|--------------|---|
| alarm | alarm | Same spelling, meaning and pronunciation |
| arm | arm | Same spelling, meaning and pronunciation |
| baby | baby | Same spelling, meaning and pronunciation |
| bad | bad | Same spelling but different meaning |
| brief | brief | Same spelling but different meaning |
| gift | gift | Same spelling but different meaning |
| hause | house | Different spelling but same pronunciation and meaning |
| kindergarten | kindergarten | Same spelling, meaning and pronunciation |
| mutter | mother | Different spelling but slightly same pronunciation |
| name | name | Same spelling and meaning but different pronunciation |
| see | see | Same spelling but different meaning |

INVENTORY OF BELIEFS ABOUT TRANSLATION (IBT)

Section B of the questionnaire addresses the first objective of this study, that is, to find out the participants’ beliefs in using translation for learning the German language. This section contains 22 items and focuses on the participants’ beliefs of using translation as a learning strategy. The items 1 to 7 investigate the participants’ beliefs on the use of translation for learning the German language in reading, writing, speaking, and learning German grammar, idioms and phrases. Items 8 to 11 focus on questions about the use of translation in helping the participants to complete their German language assignment. Items 12 to 18 explore the participants’ responses when they are not using translation for learning the German language, and finally, items 19 to 22 pertain to the cognition of the participants’ beliefs on using their L1 or preferred language in translation when learning the German language. The results of IBT are presented in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3. Means and Standard Deviations for IBT items

| | Questions | M. | S.D. |
|----|---|--------|---------|
| 1 | Translation helps me understand textbook readings. | 4.0333 | .66298 |
| 2 | Translating helps me write German composition. | 3.8000 | .83969 |
| 3 | Translating helps me speak German. | 3.5000 | .85371 |
| 4 | Translating helps me understand German grammar rules. | 3.5667 | .85105 |
| 5 | Translating helps me learn German idioms and phrases. | 3.6000 | .71781 |
| 6 | Translation helps me understand my teacher’s German instructions. | 3.6000 | .76358 |
| 7* | Translating does not help me make progress in learning German. | 2.7667 | 1.21246 |
| 8 | Translation helps me interact with my classmates in German class to complete assignments. | 3.4333 | .67313 |
| 9 | The more difficult the German assignments are, the more I depend on | 3.5333 | .85304 |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---------------|---------|
| | Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English / Other translation. | | |
| 10 | Using Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English / Other translation helps me finish my German assignments more quickly and save time. | 3.5667 | .99774 |
| 11 | Using Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English / Other translation while studying helps me recall better content of a lesson later. | 3.4333 | .76727 |
| 12* | The use of Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translation may interfere with my ability to learn German well. | 3.3667 | .84305 |
| 13* | Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translation diminishes the amount of German input I receive. | 3.3667 | .84305 |
| 14* | I will produce Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other-style German if I translate from Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others to German. | 3.2000 | .91688 |
| 15* | I prefer my German teachers to use German to teach me always. | 3.1333 | 1.12697 |
| 16 | I feel pressure when I am asked to think directly in German. | 3.3667 | .91996 |
| 17 | I tend to get frustrated when I try to think in German. | 2.9667 | .88234 |
| 18* | When using German, it is best to keep my Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others out of my mind. | 3.4333 | .81025 |
| 19 | I believe one need to be immersed in a German-speaking culture for some time before he/ she is able to think in German. | 3.5333 | .85304 |
| 20 | At this stage of learning, I cannot learn German without Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translation. | 3.3667 | 1.05713 |
| 21 | I think everyone has to use Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translation at this stage of learning. | 3.4333 | .76727 |
| 22 | I like to use Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translations to learn German. | 3.5333 | .76947 |

* Items 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 18 were designed as negatively worded.

From the results reported in Table 3, a total of ten items (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 19 and 22) have the highest mean ($3.5 \geq M \geq 5$) which shows that the majority of the participants agree with the use of translation in their learning of the German language. The findings are further supported by interview responses. The participants expressed their opinions of the advantages and disadvantages of using translation in their experience of learning German. Some participants commented as follows:

*Participant 1: ...translation brings **more good than harm** actually because very rarely will translation give us the wrong understanding...*

*Participant 2: Translation is **definitely useful** for me. It helps to give me a brief idea on the meaning of the text or sentence.*

*Participant 3: I couldn't learn German language without translation because I'm not familiar with the language. Therefore, I find translation **a good way** to help me in understanding the language more.*

Participant 4: Sometimes I try to learn German language without translation as I don't want to too rely on it. But I will be stuck there when come to certain words that I really don't understand and couldn't guess the meaning of the words. I have no choice but to use translation again in order to complete my task.

Those who participated in the interviews agreed that translation did help them to understand the lecturer's instructions and to read the textbook. They believed that translation could help them to comprehend German and also help them to write compositions in German. In addition, the participants believed that without translation, they might not be able to complete their assignments successfully. They further explained that translation helped them to interact in German class. When they did not understand the assignment in German, they preferred to ask their lecturer or classmates. The answers would be translated into their L1 or preferred language for better understanding.

These findings are consistent with Liao's (2006) study which found that Taiwanese Chinese participants believed that translation played a positive role in their learning of the English language. This study mentioned that the participants' preconceived beliefs would

likely affect the way they use learning strategies to learn the English language. Asgarian and Vefali's (2015) study revealed that Persian students with strong positive beliefs about translation also tend to apply translation strategies more frequently in order to acquire English language skills.

Some negatively worded items in Table 3 are meant for cross-checking purposes, especially for exploring the participants' responses when they are not using translation in the learning of the German language. For example, the data collected in item 12 "The use of Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ others translation may interfere with my ability to learn German well" shows that there is a group of participants who worry that the use of translation may have negative effects on their ability to learn German well. The participants were also concerned that they applied the linguistic rules of their L1 or preferred language when translating to German. Although the use of translation did show some negative effects on the participants, they still continued to rely on translation as a learning strategy. The participants explained that they often felt pressured when they were asked to think directly in German. The first words that appeared in their minds were words in his or her L1 or preferred language rather than words in German. They tended to be stressed and frustrated when the lecturer requested them to think in German. Therefore, the participants still chose translation as their learning strategy although it is sometimes detrimental to them in the situation mentioned that translation may interfere with their ability to learn German well.

INVENTORY FOR TRANSLATION AS A LEARNING STRATEGY (ITLS)

Section C of the questionnaire addresses the second objective of this study, which is to find out the participants' strategic use of translation learning strategies. This section contains 27 items to elicit the use of translation as a learning strategy in each category. All the items are further categorised into six sub-sections, which are: the general use of translation in language learning, the focus on the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and the use of translation in learning German grammar and vocabulary.

TABLE 4.Mean and Standard deviations of ITLS items

| | Questions | M. | S.D. |
|---|--|--------------|-------|
| 1 | I practice mentally translating my thoughts from Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others to German in various situations. | 3.633 | .7123 |
| 2 | If I do not understand something in German, I will ask other people to translate it into Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others for me. | 3.900 | .8377 |
| 3 | I ask questions about how a Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other expression can be translated into German. | 3.233 | .7673 |
| 4 | I take notes in Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others in my German class. | 3.500 | .7702 |
| 5 | I use German-Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other dictionaries to help myself learn German. | 3.817 | .8535 |
| 6 | I use an electronic translation machine to help myself learn German. | 4.100 | .7059 |
| 7 | When I watch German TV or movies, I use Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other subtitles to check my comprehension. | 3.667 | .6013 |
| 8 | I try to clarify the differences and similarities between Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others and German through translation. | 3.400 | .7178 |

Table 4 contains eight items that aim to reveal how the participants applied translation as a learning strategy in the general process of learning the German language. From the results reported in the Table 4, it can be seen that most of the items have an average highest mean of between 3.5 and 5.0 (Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7), which reveals that the majority of the participants agreed that they use their L1 or preferred language to understand the German language during their learning process. In the participants' opinions, they were more

confident of learning German and understanding this language better with the help of translation. In the interview sections, the participants emphasised that they felt secured when the lecturer used English to teach German in the class, as the use of the English language helped the participants to understand the lesson better. The participants faced difficulties when the lecturer spoke in German; they had doubts and were not confident whether the knowledge that they received was correct. The participants also mentioned that they used translation tools such as German-English dictionaries, electronic translation machines, and internet sources to support them in the learning process. The participants also mentioned the differences and similarities in translation between their L1 or preferred language and the German language. The use of translation as a learning strategy provided the participants with better understanding for learning the German language.

TABLE 5. Mean and Standard Deviations of ITLS items in listening to the German language

| | Questions | M. | S.D. |
|---|---|-------|-------|
| 1 | When I listen to German, I first translate the German utterances into Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others to help me understand the meanings. | 3.333 | .9144 |
| 2 | I listen to or read Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other news first in order to understand German radio/ TV news better. | 3.400 | .8868 |
| 3 | I read the Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translation scripts before I listen to instructional German tapes or CDs. | 3.200 | .6587 |

The results in Table 5 show the participants' use of translation when listening to the German language. The participants always first translated the German utterances into their L1 or preferred language when listening to German. They explained that this helped them to have an adequate understanding of the conversation. The participants shared their experiences in class with the researcher during the interview. Their comments are as below.

Participant 1: Listening skill is my weakness in learning German language. When lecturers ask us listen to CDs and answer the question in the textbook, I always can't listen to the CDs clearly as the German speaker spoke too fast and I can't capture the conversation. I need to refer to the German text in the textbook and translate it, in order for me to understand the content of CDs.

Participant 3: ... I need to translate the German conversation I heard in the CD into English in order to help me understand the meaning of the conversation.

Participant 5: I couldn't understand the instruction clearly if our lecturers gave us the instruction in German. I always ask for help and request my lecturers to explain the instruction again in English.

From the interview excerpts, we know that the lecturers often play the instructional German tapes or CDs as a teaching tool for enhancing the participants' listening skill. However, out of 12 participants who participated in the interview, eight participants gave similar comments as Participant 3. The eight participants were unable to understand the instructions and thus they might have attempted the task wrongly. Therefore, most of the participants tried to understand the instructions in the textbook by using their L1 or preferred language before or after listening to the tapes and CDs. This same procedure was applied when the participants listen to the radio and TV news broadcasts in German. They looked for the written news from the website and mentally translate silently to their L1 or preferred language in order to understand the German content of the news broadcast.

TABLE 6. Mean and Standard Deviations of ITLS items in speaking the German language

| Questions | M. | S.D. |
|--|-------|-------|
| 1 When speaking German, I first think of what I want to say in Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others and then translate it into German. | 3.500 | .8130 |
| 2 When speaking German, I think of what I want to say in German without thinking * first in Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others. | 3.067 | .8206 |
| 3 If I got certain German words or expressions in the middle of conversation, I translate from Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others into German to help me keep the conversation going. | 3.667 | .6553 |

* Item 2 was a reversed question

Table 6 contains three questions which focus on the participants' use of translation in learning to speak in German. Items 1 and 2 are two comparison questions which show whether the participants will or will not use their L1 or preferred language as their first step when speaking German. The results show that majority of the participants perceived the words in their L1 or preferred language and then mentally translated them into the German language. This concurs with the findings of Mutlu, Bayram and Demirbüken (2015) who state that in a speaking task in their study, the Turkish learners organise their ideas in Turkish, and then translate them into English. In the same manner, a minority of the participants in the present study rarely spoke directly in the German language without using a translation of their preferred language. The participants mentioned that they needed to think in their L1 or preferred language when they came across certain German words or expressions in the midst of ongoing conversations and they translated the words into German to keep the conversation going. Table 6 indicates that the participants support the use of translation in their speaking skills in helping them to express their ideas during conversations.

TABLE 7. Mean and Standard Deviations of ITLS items in reading the German language

| Questions | M. | S.D. |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1 When reading a German text, I first translate it into Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others in my mind to help me understand its meaning. | 3.600 | .7636 |
| 2 I read Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translations in the course reference book to help me understand German articles in the textbook better. | 3.533 | .8530 |
| 3 After I read German articles, I use an available Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translations to check if my comprehension is correct. | 3.467 | .6756 |
| 4 When the teacher assigns German article for reading, I work with others to translate them. | 3.633 | .7123 |
| 5 When reading German, I try to grasp the meaning of what I read without * thinking of Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other equivalents. | 3.533 | .6235 |

* Item 5 was a reversed question

Table 7 illustrates that the high-average proficiency participants used translation when reading German text books, course reference books and articles. The participants translated the German text mentally into their L1 or preferred language to have a better understanding of the text. In addition, after the participants read the German article, they translated certain texts and words of which they were uncertain in order to check whether their understanding of the article is correct.

During the interviews, the participants explicated that they always need to translate the content in the textbook to have a better understanding of the text, and they do it by writing the translation next to the German text or the word that they do not understand. Upon requests, the participants showed their textbook and worksheets of which averagely on each page, contained remarks of meaning in English mostly, or other languages in some cases, next to the German vocabularies. This translation evidence provided a more detailed insight

on how they used translation in reading German text. Comparing the translation, either in English or other languages, and the German vocabularies, it was found that majority of the participants used literal translation (word-for-word translation) as their translation procedures in order to understand the German text. A few examples below show how the participants applied the literal translation:

Der Hochzeit – The wedding

Die geniale Idee – The brilliant idea

Der Mann erzählte mir – The man told me

Du kannst auf deine Leistung sehr stolz sein – You can be **proud** of your **achievement**

Er handelte immer vernünftig und diplomatisch – He always acted **sensibly** and **diplomatically**

From the examples, we can see that the participants translated certain word in a sentence in order to help them understand the meaning of a text. Literal translation was most fundamental, important and useful in seeing how the words were used to convey a meaning in German. German-English literal translation is applied to the text because German and English are extremely close in terms of culture.

These results are in line with the results from Karimian and Talebinejad's (2013) research which found that the Persian participants in that study made use of their mother tongue as a helping strategy in learning English. The participants mentioned that they underlined the difficult words while reading an English text and then referred to the English-Persian dictionary. Likewise, the results from Hsieh's (2000) study revealed that 85% of the participants felt that translation helped them to be more aware of how a text in English was correctly constructed and 62% felt that translation helps to extend the vocabulary and reading skills. Kerns (1994) also reported that foreign language participants mentally did a large amount of translation from second language into first language while reading a text.

TABLE 8. Mean and Standard Deviations of ITLS in writing the German language

| | Questions | M. | S.D. |
|---|---|-------|-------|
| 1 | To write in German, I first brainstorm about the topic in Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others. | 3.567 | .8511 |
| 2 | When I write in German, I first think in Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Others and then translate my ideas into German. | 3.633 | .8823 |
| 3 | I write Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other outlines for my German compositions. | 3.633 | .6630 |
| 4 | I write Mandarin/ Malay/ Tamil/ English/ Other translations in my German textbooks. | 3.733 | .7782 |

Table 8 shows how the participants rely on literal translation method in the writing of the German language. Among the four language skills, the participants felt that writing was the most difficult part of learning the German language and this skill scored the highest means on the use of translation as a learning strategy. This can be referred to the comments made by participants as below:

Participant 1: I am not used to write in German language. Therefore, I first write in English then only I translate my work into German.

*Participant 2: I have a plan before writing. I will think what I should write in my mother tongue (*Malay language), and then I design an outline first in English language. Lastly, I translate it into German to complete my writing task.*

Participant 5: ... I always look up the meaning of words in a German-English dictionary while writing.

The participants often and always used translation in writing, not limited to one translation but can be more, as shown in the comments given the last participant. They normally first think or brainstorm on the topic in their L1 or preferred language before translate their ideas into English or write in German.

This result is similar to Karimian and Talebinejad's (2013) study in which the participants gathered some information in their first language (Persian) and translated it to the target language (English) to write a composition. When the participants could not find the English equivalent of the words during the writing process, they had to look up the words in the Persian-English dictionary. The results shown in Table 8 are also in line with Kim and Yoon's (2014) study in which the participants relied upon their first language in the second language writing tasks. That study also reported that, on average, the participants frequently used their first language more than half of the time (53.2%). Kim and Yoon concluded that the use of first language could be beneficial to the learning of the second language if the learners could strategically employ their first language during the writing process. A similar perspective is found in Bagheri and Fazel's (2011) study which concluded that the majority of the participants in their study agreed with the belief that translation benefits their writing tasks, and they used a wide variety of translation strategies to learn writing. The result of the present study is in agreement with the result of above-mentioned previous studies that participants do rely on translation when they face writing difficulties in German language.

TABLE 9. Mean and Standard Deviations of ITLS in learning German grammar and vocabulary

| Questions | M. | S.D. |
|--|-------|-------|
| 1 I learn German grammar through Chinese/ Malay/ English/ Other explanations of the German grammatical rules. | 3.667 | .7516 |
| 2 I use Chinese/ Malay/ English/ Other translation of grammatical terms such as parts of speech, tenses, and agreements to help me clarify the rules of the grammatical parts of German sentences. | 3.300 | .6962 |
| 3 I memorise the meaning of new German vocabulary words by remembering their Chinese/ Malay/ English/ Other translation. | 3.100 | .9514 |
| 4 I learn German idioms and phrases by reading their Chinese/ Malay/ English/ Other translation. | 3.267 | .7334 |

Table 9 shows the results of the participants' use of translation to help them to learn German grammar and vocabulary. In the interviews, the participants mentioned that they needed the explanation from their preferred language in order to understand German grammatical rules. The direct translation of grammatical terms from the English language could help to clarify the rules of the grammatical parts of German sentences. One of the examples given by a participant was "*Sie erkundigte sich ob sie Jims telefon benutzen kann.*" First, the participants translated the only 'difficult' word "*erkundigte*" literally to its meaning in English "enquired" with the help of a dictionary. In this case, student's attention is drawn to the tense in the sentence. In German language, the word "*erkundigte*" is a past tense, comparing the original version of this word which is "*erkundigen*". The whole sentence was then translated to "She enquired to find out if she could use Jim's phone". The direct translation not only helped in explaining the meaning of this word but also translating the grammatical rules of the word.

In terms of learning new vocabulary, the majority of the participants explicated that they relied on literal translation to understand the meaning. They felt that they lacked confidence in understanding and interpreting lexical items as well as its meaning without translating from German to their preferred language. Thus, the participants felt that it was crucial to refer to their L1 or preferred language and a bilingual dictionary is their common preference in translating German language.

The result is consistent with the study conducted by Karimian and Talebnejad (2013) who reported that the use of direct translation of grammatical terms from the mother tongue could help to clarify the rules of the grammatical parts. The Persian participants in their study needed the security of their mother tongue to lower their anxiety level when learning English. The participants also used translation to memorise and retrieve English, to make up for their deficiencies in the English language, to self-assess and comprehend their target language tasks, and to have interaction with other people in learning English (Karimian & Talebnejad, 2013). In addition, if both first language and second language shared the similar lexical item and concept in idioms, the learners tended to learn faster and master the production of the new idioms, as shown in the research conducted by Yeganehjoo, Yap, Abdullah and Tan (2012). Liao's (2006) study found that in order for the students to improve their target language skills, they mostly used their mother tongue to expand their knowledge of vocabulary, structures, and expressions. Liao also reported in his study that translation could help the students to check their comprehension of different tasks, especially in reading and listening. Prince (1996) likewise found that students often used translation as a learning strategy and they believed that linking to the native language when learning a new word could make the process of learning new vocabulary more efficient. The result of this study is line with the previous studies mentioned above that translation do strengthen participants' grammar and vocabulary.

However, literal translation does not seem to be helpful in learning idiomatic expressions. Mistranslation tends to happen as shown in two examples from participants' worksheets as followed:

- “*Der Freund von Anna betrügt sie aber sie hat Tomaten auf den Augen*”. “*Sie hat Tomaten auf den Augen*” is a German idiom that means “to be blind for something”. The meaning of this sentence is “Anna’s boyfriend is cheating on her but she prefers to be blind and ignore it”. However, the student who used to apply literal translation had translated “*Tomaten*” and “*Augen*” literally to “tomato” and “eyes”. The meaning of the sentence was thus perceived wrongly as the translation turned out to be “Anna’s boyfriend is cheating on her but she has tomatoes on her eyes”.
- “*Obwohl er nicht für den Test gelernt hat, hat er den Test bestanden. Er hat Schwein gehabt!*” “*Er hat Schwein gehabt*” is another German idiom that means “he was dead lucky”. The correct translation for this sentence should be “Although he didn’t study, he passed the test. He had a stroke of luck!” Again, by applying literal translation, the student had mistranslated it to “Although he didn’t study, he passed the test. He had a pig!”

As every idiom consists of metaphorical and symbolic allusion rather than a straight forward meaning of word, participants need to refer to dictionary of idiomatic expression and not a word dictionary. Understanding the meaning of idiom based on word-to-word method using literal translation will serve as a preliminary step but definitely it is not the final effort to comprehend the entire meaning of the idiom. Through the interview, the participants shared with the researchers that one of the translation procedures they used to learn idioms is through machine translation. They used computer software or online dictionaries to translate a text that contain idioms. They found that machine translation was faster and more reliable as it was normally able to produce a basic translation of a text. It enabled the recognition of a whole phrase and suggested closer equivalence in the target language.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that the German language students believe that translation is a supporting method and they make use of translation as one of their learning strategies. The

students employ the use of translation in each language skill such as reading, writing, speaking and listening), especially in writing and in learning grammar, idioms and vocabulary. It is a fact that the finding is supportive to many other studies of the same scope regardless of languages and geographical settings. It clearly implies that translation strategy is a common means in learning a new language, especially a second language at a mature age. With the existing command of L1 and other languages, translation is one of the methods they used and cannot be avoided. Although a small number of students prefer to learn German by using only the German language, they also agree that translation do really help them when they do not understand the lecturer's use of the German language to teach in class. They hardly ever avoid the use of translation because of the multilingual setting they are in. As learning German as a foreign language is becoming more popular and important, it is hoped that the finding is useful for the students to learn the German language more efficiently, and the use of translation as a learning strategy for the German language should not be banned in class.

However, this study has limitation in some aspects. First, there is possible bias of convenient sampling in the data collection. The convenient sampling gathered data only a specific group of students and not the whole population. It is very likely that some students are over-represented while some are under-represented in terms of gender, culture-specific, individual preferences, learning experience, characters and others. In other words, the language learners might not be well represented. Second, the questionnaires generally could not provide a comprehensive picture of the complicated and interacting learning factors involved in the German learning process. Third, this study has affirmed the positive beliefs in applying the translation strategy in learning German language, but it has not covered the detailed procedure of how translation takes place in the learning process. Hence, more in-depth qualitative study will be essential to explore how the learners apply the translation strategy. Last but not least, this study mainly focused on the student's beliefs pertaining to translation strategy in learning the German language, hence, future research of qualitative study will be complementary to the current study to investigate the translation procedures applied in learning German language or other languages. The result from qualitative task may provide more insights into the role of translation in language learning.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bong Tze Ying received her B.A. (Hons) in Foreign Language from Universiti Putra Malaysia. She is currently furthering her studies for a M.A. degree in Translation and Interpretation at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interest is translation related to German, English and Mandarin.

Ang Lay Hoon (Ph.D) is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her main research interests are second language learning, sociolinguistics, translation, Chinese studies and cross-cultural studies.

Hazlina Abdul Halim (Ph.D) is an Associate Professor and the head of the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her research interests are in the areas of error analysis, communication and learning strategies in the French language.

Miroslava Majtanova (Ph.D) is a senior lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her areas of specialization are sociolinguistics, German studies with the focus on German literature, linguistics and didactics in the scope of teaching German as a foreign language.