Google Translate in Vocabulary Learning: The Positive Impact and The Drawbacks

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ABSTRACT

From abundant of studies discussing about Google Translate and vocabulary learning, none of these revealed the impact, whether it is positive or negative, given by Google Translate in vocabulary learning. This article aims to 1) explicate the positive impact of using Google Translate in vocabulary learning and 2) to explicate the drawback of using Google Translate in vocabulary learning. The method used in this writing this article is Systematic Literature Review (SRs). To analyse the data, the writer used content analysis technique. The result of the study shows that Google Translate was found to enhance student engagement and self-awareness in their learning process. Google Translate also helped them master vocabulary because it is easy to use and accessible. It also assisted students to improve their vocabulary with words with similar meaning. Moreover, Google Translate could be used for spelling check. On the other hand, Google Translate also have drawbacks such as causing dependency for students. Students were too reliant on it causing them to give less attention to the vocabulary's deeper meaning. It is also not beneficial for students who want to learn figurative language because it cannot process figurative language well which may lead to the inaccuracy of the translation. Therefore, it is suggested that to maximize the use of Google Translate in vocabulary learning, students need to be assisted by their teachers.

Keywords : Drawbacks, Google Translate, Positive Impacts

INTRODUCTION

Learning new language means that learners will be exposed to new and unfamiliar words. To find the meaning of these unfamiliar words, learners need to consult dictionaries. Şevik (2014) found that EFL learners strongly believe that they need a dictionary to help them in learning English. Unlike the old days where people usually use paper/ traditional dictionaries, nowadays most learners use electronic dictionaries such as mobile dictionaries, online dictionaries, dictionaries on CD-ROMs as well as concordances. This might happen due to the effectiveness and practicality of the electronic dictionaries. Rezaei and Davoudi

(2016) found that the use of electronic dictionaries improved vocabulary learning and retention more than paper dictionaries among Iranian EFL learners.

To achieve proficiency in a language, learners not only have to master four language skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading skills but also have substantial amount of vocabulary of the language. Parahiba (2022) even believe that vocabulary is the first thing students should learn before those four skills. Vocabulary is believed to be a vital factor in uniting the entirely four language skills (Kezmez, 2021). Therefore, learning vocabulary is also essential for EFL learners because without it, they would not be able to comprehend what is being said in English (Al Manar & Nabila, 2022). There are several ways usually employed in vocabulary learning such as traditional method, contextual method, technology assisted method, and multimodal method (Fengyu, 2023). In traditional method, learners usually learn new vocabulary through flashcard and rote of memorization. This is a good method but it has its weakness because learners may not be able to use the vocabulary they have memorized in different context. They merely know the meaning of the words but do not have understand how to use it. On the other hand, contextual method allows learners to be able to understand the words within their specific context of use. Contextual method involves activities such as having conversation, watching movies or dramas, reading authentic texts, practicing language in the real context. These activities are helpful in improving learners'

exposure in the use of language in diverse situations and internalizing the vocabulary effortlessly.

Due to the rise of technology use in language learning recently, several applications and tools are also created to assist learners in vocabulary learning. These tools and applications give substantial impact toward vocabulary learning because they not only provide comprehensive meanings of words but also the pronunciation. Some of them also offer vocabulary in context of dialogue, stories or narration. This is effective in improving learners' pronunciation and understanding of the word meanings (Peter, 2012). To achieve better effectiveness, lecturers sometimes also use multimodal method. Multimodal method is the combination of several methods that lecturers believe suitable for learners based on their strength, preferences and learning styles.

The development of technology in the fourth industrial revolution era has led to the creation of numerous electronic dictionaries such as Papago, Kamusku, Google Translate, etc. These dictionaries can help EFL learners to translate unfamiliar words to their native language. Lately, Google Translate has been popularly used by students in the class to assist their language learning (Phuong, thanh & Hong, 2021). Google Translate particularly could do various more complicated tasks including translating text, audio, pictures, or even sites from source language to target language (Li, Graesser, & Cai, 2014). Moreover, it can be accessed through laptop, smartphone and also tablet wherever and whenever the learners need it as long as they are connected to the

internet. Hence, it is massively used by EFL learners in the class which is supported by Kumar (2012) who stated that many EFL learners use Google Translate since it is free, fast and easily accessible.

Zakaria and Ningrum (2023) define Google Translate as an AI used for translating language from several sources including text, voice, and even image. It can be accessed through its application which can be downloaded to smartphones or its web page. The service can be used offline and online.

Google Translate is very popular and widely used worldwide. Wise (2023) claimed that as of April 2023, there are more than 1 billion Google Translate users. People love to use this tool because it supports translation of many languages. As of May 2022, It is able to translate 133 languages used in the world (Caswell, 2022). Additionally, it has many features which can help students in studying new language. People can translate languages using Google Translate in several ways as follows (Wise, 2023):

1. By typing on your keyboard
2. By talking using your microphone
3. By taking snaps of images of text
4. By using your phone's camera to see instant translations
5. By writing or drawing letters or characters with your finger
6. By getting text translations without a data connection or Wi-Fi
7. By transcribing while someone speaks a different language
8. By pasting the text
9. By uploading the whole document from your computer
10. By linking the website/URL of the website

Recently, Google Translate has been associated with vocabulary learning. Google Translate as a translation tool or dictionary is used by students for vocabulary learning as revealed by Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017) in their study on the attitudes of 92 Saudi EFL university students. In addition, students also show positive perceptions toward the use of Google Translate in learning vocabulary as it could assist them in mastering vocabulary (Nugraha, Ratnawati & Surachmat, 2018). From these findings, it is found that Google Translate has good contribution on vocabulary learning. However, the utilization of technology into language learning sometimes has its own limitation and shortcoming such as mentioned by Stapleton and Leung (2019) who stated that even though Google Translate is popular, its use in language learning is still contentious due to its accuracy and effectiveness. In conclusion, the previous researches discussing about google translate mostly explain about its functions in translating words. Additionally, those related with vocabulary learning only limited to students' perceptions toward its use. None of the study found explain about the impact of using Google Translate in vocabulary learning whether it is negative or positive. Therefore, this article aims 1) explicate the positive impact of using Google Translate in vocabulary learning and 2) to explicate the drawback of using Google Translate in vocabulary learning.

METHOD

The method used in this writing this article is Systematic Literature Review (SRs). Lamé (2019) stated that SRs are transparent and reproducible methods for

synthesizing scientific evidence to answer research questions, including all published evidence and evaluating its quality. This method was employed to find out the positive impact of Google Translate use in vocabulary learning as well as the drawback of its use in vocabulary learning by collecting information from various literature such as dissertation, articles in journal or seminar proceedings, surveys, or news article with the subject of Google Translate use in vocabulary learning. Content analysis technique is used to analyse the data collected through December 2023. The process involves using specific procedures to draw valid conclusions from various documents and identify the characteristics of messages that were objectively and systematically carried out.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Positive Impact of Google Translate in Vocabulary Learning

Google Translate gives a lot of positive impacts in vocabulary learning. Bahri and Mahadi (2016) found that students acknowledged the value Google Translate bring to their independent language learning. Google Translate was found to enhance student engagement and self-awareness in their learning process. They can learn by themselves by using Google Translate as their assistance in understanding the vocabulary they found in their work. Therefore, they recognize it as a valuable complementary tool for language learning.

Respondents in Nugraha, Ratnawati & Surachmat study done in 2018 also praised Google Translate for its ease of use, speed, and

accessibility on smartphones, as it helped them master vocabulary. It encourages them to spend more time to learn vocabulary. In addition, Yuyun (2018) stated that learners utilize Google Translate to translate unfamiliar idioms, check spelling and diction, and discover new vocabulary. Google Translate serves as a versatile online dictionary, translator, and synonym reference, offering additional benefits beyond its primary role as a dictionary. The synonym reference feature allows students to enrich their vocabulary collection with words with similar meaning.

Moreover, O'neill (2012) discover that Google Translate could be used for spelling check. It was discovered through an interview with a participant of his study who later explain that She utilized Google Translate to verify the spelling of certain vocabulary she was unsure about. Correspondingly, Ducar and Schocket (2018) discovered that Google Translate use can improve learners' mastery of English spelling due to its ability to identify spelling mistakes and correct them. Moreover, the result of structured interviews in Kai and Tan (2021) study indicated Google Translate's effectiveness in facilitating vocabulary learning, suggesting English language teachers can incorporate it into lessons for peer assessment and learner-centered learning.

The Drawback of Google Translate in Vocabulary Learning

Besides the positive impacts given by Google Translate to learners' vocabulary learning, there were also found several drawbacks of its use. Nas (2022) found that students are highly dependent on Google

Translate. They always use Google Translate every time they found new vocabulary. This dependency will hinder their vocabulary learning process because learners will not try to understand and comprehend the meaning of the vocabulary or sentences but just directly use Google Translate to find the meaning instead. Then, they will merely know the meaning of the vocabulary without understanding it in deeper context.

In addition, Djidel (2015) discovered that Google Translate has a limit in translating a sentence of longer text. Sometimes, the meaning given is not really accurate. The translation quality is determined by the length of the text, as it cannot process idioms or figurative language (Van, Snyman, and Lotz, 2012). Students who are learning idioms or figurative language might misunderstand the real meaning. Combined with the dependency of students in using it, this will raise a problem in vocabulary learning because students will just take what it is translated without giving much attention to its accuracy.

Additionally, Google Translate's limitation is its lack of context, potentially leading to misunderstandings in word choice. Starkey (2004) believed that word choice is crucial for conveying ideas and vocabulary, which plays a significant role in language. A well-organized article ensures easy reader comprehension, requiring clear, coherent, and suitable word choice. Furthermore, Google Translate and machine translation are not capable of replacing human language skills. To learn vocabulary successfully, learners need to be scaffolded and assisted (Kayi-Aydar,2018). In other

words, Rogers (2018) claimed teachers should guide learners in vocabulary development to optimize study time and learning both inside and outside the classroom. Hence, teachers are decidedly needed to lessen the negative impact given by Google Translate.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As Google Translate frequently used in vocabulary learning, teachers/lectures need to pay more attention in its use for the reason that Google Translate not only give positive impact to learners' vocabulary learning but also has several drawbacks as well. Google Translate can be used to enhance students' engagement and self-awareness while studying.

As it can be accessed through smartphones, students are also encouraged to learn vocabulary more often since it is easy to use, quick and accessible. Students can also develop their vocabulary mastery of words with similar meaning using its synonym reference feature. Students can also use Google Translate to check the vocabulary speeling so that they can avoid spelling errors.

Further, Google Translate has drawbacks in vocabulary learning as well. Due to its accessibility and ease of use, students tend to depend on it greatly. It causes students to feel reluctant to understand the vocabulary deeper, rather just read the translation given by the machine. The quality of Google Translate's translation is also influenced by the length of the text, as it cannot process idioms or figurative language. This affects students who want to learn more about idioms or figurative

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learning for it may lead to confusion of the meaning given.

Therefore, it is suggested that teachers do not let students use Google Translate in vocabulary learning freely without assistance. For a better result in vocabulary learning, teachers need to assist and help students to utilize the machine. Teachers can scaffold and guide students while they learn the vocabulary using Google Translate.

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