

TRANSLATING DRAWBACKS TOWARDS ENGLISH LEARNING
TRADUZINDO DIFICULDADES NO APRENDIZADO DE INGLÊS
TRADUCIENDO DIFICULTADES HACIA EL APRENDIZAJE DEL INGLÉS



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ABSTRACT

I have noticed that some intermediate students and teachers, myself included, tend to complain about students' performance while being informally assessed. This constant matter, raised my awareness of understanding why it was happening on a daily basis and got even worse when students were formally assessed. As a result, all students who were involved in these conversations were not promoted to the next level. To our biggest surprise, my peers, my coordinators and I, there were groups which 60% of students failed. Therefore, Exploratory practice has been developed as an approach to understand why students could not cope with all intermediate stuff. Firstly a PEPA activity was proposed in order to analyze what was going on. The students had to answer a questionnaire exposing their opinion about this problem, the reason why it was happening and it was, finally, followed by a discussion. After that, I could better understand that these pupils had the same learning strategy. This study tends to work mainly on the following topic: Translating Drawbacks Towards English Learning.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice. PEPA. Translation Drawbacks.

RESUMO

Notei que alguns alunos e professores do nível intermediário, incluindo eu mesma, tendem a reclamar do desempenho dos alunos durante avaliações informais. Essa constante me levou a buscar entender por que isso acontecia diariamente e piorava ainda mais quando os alunos eram avaliados formalmente. Como resultado, todos os alunos envolvidos nessas conversas não foram promovidos para o próximo nível. Para nossa grande surpresa, meus colegas, meus coordenadores e eu, havia grupos em que 60% dos alunos foram reprovados. Portanto, a Prática Exploratória foi desenvolvida como uma abordagem para entender por que os alunos não conseguiam acompanhar o conteúdo do nível intermediário. Primeiramente, uma atividade PEPA foi proposta para analisar o que estava acontecendo. Os alunos responderam a um questionário expondo sua opinião sobre o problema, o motivo pelo qual ele ocorria e, por fim, participaram de uma discussão. Depois disso, pude entender melhor que esses alunos tinham a mesma estratégia de aprendizagem. Este estudo se concentra principalmente no seguinte tópico: Traduzindo Dificuldades no Aprendizado de Inglês.

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Palavra-chave: Prática Exploratória. PEPA. Dificuldades na Tradução.

RESUMEN

He notado que algunos estudiantes y profesores de nivel intermedio, incluyéndome a mí, tienden a quejarse del rendimiento de los alumnos durante las evaluaciones informales. Esta situación constante me hizo reflexionar sobre por qué ocurría a diario y empeoraba aún más durante las evaluaciones formales. Como resultado, ningún alumno involucrado en estas conversaciones fue promovido al siguiente nivel. Para nuestra sorpresa, la de mis compañeros, mis coordinadores y la mía, hubo grupos en los que el 60% de los alumnos reprobó. Por lo tanto, se desarrolló la Práctica Exploratoria como un enfoque para comprender por qué los alumnos no podían con todo el material de nivel intermedio. En primer lugar, se propuso una actividad PEPA para analizar la situación. Los alumnos debían responder un cuestionario expresando su opinión sobre este problema y la razón por la que ocurría, seguido de un debate. Después, pude comprender mejor que estos alumnos compartían la misma estrategia de aprendizaje. Este estudio se centra principalmente en el siguiente tema: Traduciendo las dificultades en el aprendizaje del inglés.

Palabras clave: Prática Exploratoria. PEPA. Dificuldades en la Traducción.



1 INTRODUCTION

In this monograph, I will address a prevalent situation experienced by intermediate teachers and learners in EFL courses. These institutions have got full classrooms filled with students who believe translation is the only learning tool they can use to become proficient in English. The use of translation is basically used at elementary and high school in Brazil. When these students join language courses, they adopt the same strategy. According to Phillipson (1992), the more English taught, the better the results, and sooner learners hear and use English, they early will internalize it and begin to think in English.

Although English institute teachers are trained to discourage and even disallow learners from using Portuguese in English course classes, their native language (L1) is used as if they were not exposed to any other kind of learning technique. This behaviour involves receptive and productive skills, which have become a real matter to some students when it comes to producing and understanding real language.

My colleagues and I tend to share our experiences and these conversations are basically about our professional routine. The disadvantages related to translation as a learning tool have really caught our attention and I always found myself involved in listening to my peers' complaints towards this matter. In practice, teachers have been worried about the use of L1 concerning students' learning process and freer production. Instead of moaning around, I felt the need to investigate the extent to which translation may be a disadvantage when it comes to learning an L2.

At first, my question was: "Why do my students need to translate word by word?" When I formulated this question, I included myself in the group of teachers who were complaining about their students' performance in classes and tests. A POTENTIALLY EXPLOITABLE PEDAGOGIC ACTIVITY (PEPA) was conducted based on this question and my students gave obvious answers. They said it was too difficult to understand through English definitions (meanings). They also reported that as English language learners back in elementary and high school, they were told to translate long texts word by word. Therefore, it was easier to learn that way. Finally, they said they felt secure while learning English.

Then, while I was having a conversation with Professor Inés Kayon Miller, I could understand that I was really against the use of L1 as a learning strategy. I have to mention that, while I was taking basic, intermediate and advanced lessons I was not exposed to translation techniques or asked to translate L2 into L1. Therefore, I do not share views with translating strategies. Inspired by my teachers and colleagues and based on my own



experience as a teacher, I felt the need to enhance my understanding of how the use of the native language may have a negative influence over my students' main goals.

After having considered all these facts, I could conclude that I was totally against the use L1 in L2 lessons. Contrary to this, it was visible that the use of L1 was appropriate in some situations like: record keeping, classroom management, scene setting, language analysis, phonology, morphology, spelling, cross-cultural instructions and many other classroom situations. Therefore, I decided to have some peer observation lessons. Three of my colleagues kindly consented to my visit in their basic level lessons throughout the semester. My idea was to observe how often Portuguese would be used by teachers and students. I did not hear much of it in class, but I was puzzled by the continuous use of Portuguese in most intermediate level classes I had observed. Consequently, I decided to consider the drawbacks of L1 interference in the performance of L2 intermediate students. I also took into consideration that inter-language reflected some of the learners' system of rules. It is neither their first language, nor the target system, but it occupies a transitional point between the two. Some of these rules influenced L2 learning. I cannot over-generalize the use of this acquisition system. Some students were able to understand in English and keep on dealing with L2 without L1 interference.

According to Allwright (2003), Exploratory Practice (EP) has been developed as an approach to help understand the quality of language classroom life with the emphasis on understanding. This practice also allows teachers and learners to investigate what happens in the classroom to develop their own understanding towards language learning and teaching processes. I totally believe that Exploratory Practice may facilitate teachers' reflection upon their role as language facilitators by observing their pupils, peers and themselves. Therefore I do not intend to propose solutions. It is debatable to affirm that students are aware of how translation has become a false friend and how some of their learning goals have not been achieved so far.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 EXPLORATORY PRACTICE

Exploratory Practice (EP) has been developed as a set of principles which promotes a form of professional development for teachers who may have little time to dedicate to classroom research. It also highlights the importance of creating opportunities to reflect upon puzzles that emerge from the experiences lived in the classroom/workplace through pedagogical activities Miller, 2010:3). This is the kind of situation in which many language teachers find themselves.



“ Exploratory Practice is being developed not in order to offer a way of changing our practice,(...), but in order to offer a sustainable way of develop our understandings within our practice, with the absolute minimum of intrusion, and the maximum of benefit.”

The first key word to EP is “develop”. It can be seen as a form of teacher development. This professional will be in charge of investigating, reflecting and understanding what goes on in the classroom. Opposite to this, there will be no problem solving involved in EP. EP is concerned with a puzzle that, in my case, can not only be applied in the classroom the micro-level, but also in the institutional level.

Both teachers and learners are engaged in seeking for a useful way of developing their understanding of this matter.

The second key word is related to classroom “life”. It depends on participants’ quality of life as a communally shared social experience, which includes teachers and learners taking places as individuals but strongly being affected by the participants’ lives outside it (Gieve & Miller, 2006). The idea of classroom life is also based on providing an environment in which mutual collaborative engagement, provides shared understanding and generates more productive and less antagonistic ideas. As learning a foreign language is essentially a cultural and social activity, it opens up new opportunities for a new level of understanding, giving the learner individual perspectives. In other words, quality of life plays an important role during this process. It’s important to mention that, when students feel integrated in this on-going process, they make the work a continuous enterprise. Classroom becomes a place to surpass obstacles and makes the students more competent to achieve their goals. Consequently, they become researchers too.

Lastly, let us consider the term “indefinitely sustainable”. Contrary to what happens in most English courses, my coordinators, my pupils and I decided to conduct this research for a relatively long period of time. Therefore, our experiences of teaching, learning, researching and understanding will be a continuing experience. Except for some students who were not able to cope with the fact that they would have to re-do the semester, most of the students in the class kept on moving and believed there may be room for understanding how their learning process has been affected by L1.

To sum up, the seven core principles of EP are:

1. Focus on quality of life as the main issue.
2. Work to understand it before thinking about improving it.
3. Involve everybody as practitioners developing their own understandings.



4. Work to bring people together in a common enterprise.
5. Work cooperatively for mutual development.
6. Make it a sustainable enterprise.
7. Integrate the work for understanding into existing curricular practice to minimize the burden

I strongly believe that generating learning through planning facilitates research perspective into language learning and teaching. It raised understandings that were important not only to me, my peers and coordinators but also to the learners involved in this study. Allwright (2001:13) explains what can be understood by saying that:

“At first sight it may seem obvious that what the profession needs to understand, and perhaps the learners also, is what works and what doesn’t, so that class time is not wasted on ineffective language activities. And certainly, when teachers talk about what is puzzling about what happens in their lessons they seem most likely, at least initially, to come up with “micro-method” problems (such as: “How can I get my learners to use English in group work, instead of their first language?”). But when teachers probe further, and try to understand what lies behind their “problems” (to turn their “how” into “why” ones), the discussion seems inevitably to settle on what it seems appropriate to call “the quality of life” in the classroom.”

Although Exploratory Practice mainly involves teachers and learners as partners to observe what happens in the classroom, I have to mention the fact that English language institutes have been observing and analyzing their groups’ results too. Directors supervise their teachers’ lessons, plans and groups’ grades. It is a strategy, used amongst directors, to select teachers who have better performance. This way, the best ones will have more groups. We, teachers, have to bare in mind that we must constantly think about how we are seen as educators, how we see ourselves as teachers and make better use of EP to enhance, somehow, our reflections upon classroom matters.

2.2 PREVAILING VIEWS OF THE TRANSLATION METHOD

The aim of this section is to revise some notions which we believe contribute to the students’ failure while taking part in intermediate foreign lessons. Firstly, it is important to reinforce the idea that the students who were involved in this project, made use of translation on a daily basis as their only learning method or tool. Even though it is widely used throughout the world, there is no teaching methodology that supports it (Richard and Rodgers, 1986:4) and many teachers, including me and some of my peers, speak out against it. Secondly, there are books based on grammar translation methodology, but I could



not find any which supported translating vocabulary, grammar and literature in English classrooms. Therefore, I will present some examples from my own classes which show how translation from L1 to L2 may become an obstacle when learning the target language. Finally, I will give some examples of how translating has become a drawback.

2.3 ARGUMENTS AGAINST TRANSLATION

There are lots of valid suggestions to keep translation out of the classroom. One of the examples given by one of my students was pretty simple but very effective. He said: "Teacher, you are blonde". In this example, he tried to consider the translation of verb be. He told me that he would need background knowledge to know if "you are" would be "você é ou você está". By using this, I could raise my students' awareness of not existing a certain explanation in L1 for every word in L2.

The second example was given by M.R., another student who participated in this project. She used to hand in compositions which made no sense at all. She used to think that L1 could be applied to all her productive tasks. This pupil created a word-to-word translation method to write her papers, which were admissible when she was a basic level student. When she tried using this crutch in order to brainstorm her ideas for writing intermediate written tasks, she realized how inefficient it was. She could not deal with correct collocations, prepositions, vocabulary and so on.

The third example was experienced by a student who had failed her midterm. She used to interrupt anyone who attempted to speak in English because she could not understand what was said. This prevented her from picking up new vocabulary and brushing up what was learned. She felt the need to understand every single word in L1. It also made our classroom environment a bit uncomfortable because she wanted to interrupt not only me, the teacher, but also her peers. It made her feel inferior and weaker than her classmates. When mid-term test results were handed in, she noticed that her performance was much lower than she had expected. Therefore, she decided to drop out.

Lack of oral participation is another relevant aspect to be pointed out. Krashen (1988:67) proposed that "first language interference should be reduced", since moderate use of L1 can aid and facilitate the teaching and learning of the target language L2. Based on my intermediate students' examples, they have the tendency not to express themselves orally because of the reasons listed below:

- learners do not understand teachers' commands even if they are simple ones;



- learners need time to organize their ideas in Portuguese then they translate into English but it is time consuming and they won't be able to produce language effectively;
- learners are afraid of being corrected on the spot;
- learners are afraid of speaking out loud;
- learners lack knowledge of L2
- learners slip back into L1 to compensate deficiencies in the foreign language.

It is important to mention that learners also slip back into L1 while being asked to produce any written activity, like a composition. They made use of translating tools like google translator, dictionaries to translate every single word and even copied entire texts from web sites. These strategies were commonly used to compensate their L2 deficiencies.

2.4 PSYCHO-LINGUISTIC VALUE

Contrary to what I expected, 90% of my students want their teachers to use only English in the classroom. Only 10% see this as inappropriate. The latter said they felt lost and needed constant help to move on. After seeing these results, I was caught by surprise when I saw my students' translating routine. They said that it was difficult to use their productive skills in English because they could not do it in Portuguese either. And this was how the concept of learning styles came to my mind. I could notice that most of my students had different ways of acquiring a foreign language and that each one created his or her own strategy towards the material they were learning. Based on the aspects mentioned, it is fair to inform that the students involved in this study were exposed to every non-translating tool. The most important aspect is to make students think in English. To achieve this goal, the English school offers classes in L2 since their very first contact, books with very good visual aids, CDs, websites, dictionaries, picture dictionaries, tutorial lessons, slides, leveled grammar books, realia, flipcharts and well prepared teachers who grade their language level while teaching. These elements are considered helpful but instead of trying to adapt to this reality, students tend to make use of L1 as a crutch to understand every single word. They behaved as if they were attending translating lessons while being basic level students. When they start attending intermediate level lessons, they understand that L1 is no longer a useful contribution to their learning process. Contrary to what is expected from intermediate level students, they misunderstand commands in English. Their oral performance takes much more time than their peers do and students also make basic language mistakes. Learners' participation is reduced by the fear of giving a wrong answer. Having all these aspects



considered, I have to mention the fact that my pupils' sense of achievement was no longer positive. Consequently, they felt less productive and discouraged to continue attending lessons.

3 METHODOLOGY

I adopted Exploratory Practice (EP), which is a set of principles that practitioners (teachers and students) work together in order to understand what they want to understand by using normal pedagogic practices as investigative tools, so that working for understanding can be viewed as part of the teaching and learning, no extra to it (Allright 2003). I aligned this project with EP because I considered it would contribute to the quality of life in my intermediate classroom.

3.1 PEPA

A potentially exploitable pedagogic activity (PEPA) was designed to understand our classroom routine. The students completed a questionnaire, designed in Portuguese to see how they felt about their performance. If they needed help to continue their studies and why they kept using translation as a learning tool. Some compositions were collected and oral production activities were recorded.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Five students from two different groups, aged from 15 to 32, were invited to take part in this study mainly because they had been my students in the basic levels. Since their first basic lessons, they were told not to use translation as their first learning tool. After that, they took other basic and intermediate courses with other teachers, who always complained about their classroom performance. The everyday exchanges I used to have with my colleagues raised our awareness of the matter.

Now these students are in the intermediate level and they have been facing hard receptive and productive skill problems. By using this PEPA, there was a pursuit of intensifying the quality of classroom life. The students involved in this project were willing to understand why their learning beliefs were no longer helpful. Consequently, students would become aware of what was spoiling their performance. Due to the fact that these students had been facing problems to communicate in English, the written questionnaire and our talk were in Portuguese. Their compositions were the only material produced in English. Throughout these activities, the dedication of the participants was intense and they really felt the need to get involved.



The English school involved in this research adopts two kinds of assessment. An informal assessment which evaluates their homework, oral performance, participation, compositions and attendance and a formal one, which considers their oral, reading, listening, text production and English in use performances in formal tests. Students decided to join this research, after receiving their report cards and reflecting upon their low grades. The teachers' suggestions were based on giving them hints to improve their performance. We, teachers, normally tell students they should listen to their CDs in order to improve their listening and pronunciation skills. Reading language leveled books and magazines in L2 is also suggested to revise vocabulary and grammatical structures. Their compositions are corrected and some new instructions are given. The students have the opportunity to rewrite them and also have some tutorial lessons. All these suggestions are given not only to help them improve their performance, but also to avoid using translation. In a way, these pupils knew that something had to be done to prevent their semester failure.

Retrospectively, I can see that the activity proposed was effective. First of all, students reflected upon their practice and they took their teachers' suggestions into consideration. They studied from their books, listened to their CDs and tried to understand L2 through meanings. It relies on visual aids, mime, gestures and definitions in L2 to convey the meanings of words and grammatical structures. They did their best to improve their oral skills. They said that this practice was not a novelty anymore. They explained that they were urging for help in order to solve these matters, which were quite old, but they had not found, up to that moment a tutor who would be willing to help them find a track. I was the only one who supported and guided them. Finally, it is fair to mention the fact that they have done a good job.

4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Data collection started in 2013 on the first day of class. I could notice that some students' level was lower than expected. I also timed them while doing some activities. By adopting this technique, I realized they were taking 50% or 100% extra time to conclude their tasks. In addition, their performance was also evaluated. I concluded that they were translating every single word and therefore, they could not finish the exercises in the allotted time. Trying to deeper understand this process, I asked the students if they were aware of what was going on and they immediately responded. They condensed their answers into two words, which were: "help us".

The second part of the investigation was based on some questions, which was sent by email. All of them were asked to respond and with short answers. Here are some



examples of what two of the students (M... and T...) reported as being their explanations for translating every single word while learning English.

Questões

- 1- Desde quando usa a tradução como recurso para o aprendizado da língua Inglesa?
- 2- Com que frequência traduz?
- 3- Como essa técnica ajudou no começo?
- 4- Sentiu necessidade do uso desse recurso ou foi incentivado?
- 5- Já passou por alguma situação em que a tradução não deu o suporte que esperava?
Quando? Como se sentiu e agiu para solucionar o problema?
- 6- Como vê as produções orais e escritas neste período? Acha que a tradução ao pé da letra continua ajudando? Dê uma breve explicação.
- 7- Se possível, tentaria não usar esta técnica?
- 8- Descreva em poucas palavras o que é traduzir.

Answers

M.....

Acess Inter 3

- 1- Desde quando eu senti necessidade de vocabulário.
- 2- A maioria das vezes.
- 3- No começo ajudou um pouco, mas agora não ajuda nada .
- 4- Foi por necessidade, mas o incentivo também ajudou .
- 5- Sim, em uma composição , tentei refazer do meu jeito e com o meu próprio vocabulário.
- 6- Bem difíceis, a tradução não ajuda em nada neste período .
- 7- Sim, tentaria .
- 8- Traduzir é se arriscar em outra língua sem ter a certeza se estar certo.

T.....

Inter 1B

- 1- Desde que entrei em contato com o inglês.
- 2- A quase todo momento. Quando trabalho com leitura a tradução é quase constante.
- 3- Ela me deu base para evoluir no inglês. Ao olhar uma frase e saber o significado de alguns vocábulos facilitou e facilita muito a compreensão do todo.



- 4- Senti necessidade e, normalmente, todos os professores que tive aboliaram essa prática de tradução.
- 5- Sim. Isso ocorre com frequência no exercício de ouvir o inglês, pois as falas são geralmente rápidas e não há tempo suficiente para traduzi-las por completo. Em tais situações, sinto-me perdida e é comum eu perder a concentração no restante das falas. Portanto, o que faço é unir as partes que entendi para deduzir o contexto geral.
- 6- As produções ficam mais lentas. Não, a tradução não auxilia quando desconheço muita parte dos textos e, quando isso ocorre, vejo-me desesperada por não conseguir compreender muita coisa. Porém, o pouco que entendo é na base da tradução, apesar de ver que tenho diminuído essa prática com o maior contato com a língua inglesa.
- 7- Certamente.
- 8- No meu atual estágio de contato com a língua, a tradução é a base principal do meu aprendizado que auxilia em muitos momentos, porém em outros não me fornece um suporte adequado.

Some of the compositions that they have written were collected but only a few students gave me a formal permission to show them. They can be seen in appendixes 1 and 2.

4.1 MAIN FINDINGS

In this section, I discuss the main findings from the conversation and the questionnaire conducted during this project. The participants seemed to show a high degree of motivation to stop using translation techniques during their learning process. Also, one of the students declared that she had had a hard time while doing listening comprehension activities. All of them felt sorry for using L1 while learning L2.

According to the participants' point of view, there are some situations in which translating means feeling secure. On the other hand, it is also mentioned that while one of them was taking a basic course, it was possible to deal with this technique. Now that they are in the intermediate level, they find it difficult to translate idioms, false cognates, expressions, phrasal verbs and collocations.

The analysis also shows that learners need to be sure of what words in L2 are in L1. This also reinforces the idea that although they were told to eliminate or at least reduce the use of L1 to understand words in L2, they insisted on not listening to the teacher's advice.



However, these learners agreed that the use of L1 facilitated their comprehension in class while attending basic level classes. But this was considered by them as a false friend. In addition, their involvement and practice to avoid the use of L1 while studying L2, made them reflect positively during the following lessons. This directly reinforced the quality of life in the classroom and due to the fact that I know they are going to attend my classes next term, I believe there will be room for further analysis of this subject.

4.2 COMPARING OTHER GROUPS' RESULTS

The topic being investigated is broad. When I first thought about reflecting upon this matter, I honestly did not realize how vast it was. It was not only a matter of preparing a questionnaire or collecting data. It also involved considering to what extent my co-workers would be open to reflect and change their opinion about their pupils. The data collected was just an informal talk with the teachers who were complaining about their students' performance and some of their groups results.

A formal assessment issue was discussed. It was related to how my coworkers felt about their students' failure. Some of my peers blamed the students' lack of commitment and inability to learn languages. They also mentioned that despite giving tutorial lessons, the students still ended up failing their courses. From this explanation, I can endorse my view of students and teachers reflect upon their own performance. These teachers had about 50% of failing students.

A comparison between my groups and the other teachers' groups was made and I ended up having a surprising feedback. My groups' formal assessment performance was higher. The ones who were involved in this research, increased their marks. I also have to mention the fact that these students were also informally assessed and their grades were better than their grades in the previous term. Our quality of life in the classroom became much more positive and learners felt more motivated.

The students also felt proud of their successful performance. The school involved in this research has got dozens of intermediate groups and my students have contact with peers who belong to other groups. They compared their results and shared EP ideas too. Some of their friends who did not pass, found it positive and asked me to help them better understand this practice.

This talk among teachers and students was an opportunity to continue using Exploratory Practice (EP), due to the fact that its results were positive. After all this process, students could deeply understand why their performance was too low. It was also possible to raise their awareness to the importance of reflecting upon their last learning habits and



how helpless these habits were during intermediate lessons. Most importantly, they were able to recognize that the new choice of a learning strategy was helpful and consequently their quality of life in the classroom increased. It is important to mention that these students' results at work were positive too. Moreover, it also highlights how important it is to integrate EP into my colleagues' and pupils' professional quality of life. It helped not only me but also everyone involved in this project to deeply understand students' learning drawbacks.

5 CLOSING REMARKS

This monograph did not intend to find solutions or answers to the poor performance my students were having. The key words to this work were “understanding” and “reflecting”.

The activities performed for this study, specially the talks, aimed to improve students' reflection upon the drawbacks of translation. The purpose of this research was to make students aware that this technique would be no longer effective for students who were in the intermediate level of English. Another purpose was that learners and teacher should be involved in the project as fellows participants. As Allwright (2003:119) clarifies: they participated intensely as “generators of understanding, not just consumers of it”.

The discussion with these teachers and students allowed me to reflect on my practice. On a daily basis, the semester schedule and the syllabus of the course make teachers part of a cyclical process which involves preparing and providing lessons, correcting homework and tests. Sharing opinions and exchanging beliefs among students and colleagues are left behind but they highlighted my reasons for investigating and reflecting upon the drawbacks of translations out of the target language.

Unfortunately, the participants of this research will no longer be my pupils next term. I wish to claim that the thinking and reflecting produced in this group may remain in these learners' minds. Added to this, I will keep on reproducing and believing in the effectiveness of this practice. I have been asked to share the effectiveness of this practice in a congress. I consider this an opportunity to multiply teachers' and students' quality of life in the classroom and in their everyday lives. I believe this pleasant experience may still be valid for non-Brazilian students and are learning any other L2. It is a topic which deserves further investigation on future occasions.

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APPENDIX 1

Notes

The compositions below were part of a midterm writing test. The activity was: write an email to a friend giving him/her your news and telling about a trip you've recently made.

Table 1

<p>To: Sirlene From:</p> <p>Hi Sirlene in my last holiday, I travelled with my sister Tamara. We went Minas Gerais, on the city Ouro Preto, is very famous because your historic is important for my country.</p> <p>At the first we came the hotel, wich was very good, I try out clothes because was cold, then we had breakfast.</p> <p>After we were go in the city, I took photos in front of churchil because is very different. I bought souvenirs, I liked t-shirt with the name's Ouro Preto.</p> <p>After the activite we went back the hotel, I and other people would go out in the night, then at night we had dinner in a popula restaurant the city.</p> <p>In the morning Sunday after breakfast we return for the Rio de Janeiro.</p>
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Table 2

<p>To: Jairo From:</p> <p>Hello Jairo, usually they don't have time to talk last manth, but next week I had time to go to Saquarema. I have good news to tell you.</p> <p>The first new, I go to Minas Gerais in last month. I finally got time to relax. I'd like to invite you for this travel with me but I don't know you have time to travel?</p> <p>Well, I inform the details when I stay in your home. See year your soon.</p>
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APPENDIX 2**Notes**

The composition below was part of an intermediate 1A writing test. The activity was: write an answer to the following topic.

“A terrible holiday experience”

You are somewhere on holiday but you are not having fun because everything is wrong: the hotel is dirty, the weather is horrible, somebody stole your bag, etc. Send an email to your friend describing the situation.

Table 3

<p>To: carolguedes@..... From:</p> <p>Dear Carol,</p> <p>Sorry for nor writing earling. I have very busy. I am writing to thanks you for a terrible holiday experience.</p> <p>Last vacation I went to the Recife but I didn't had fun because in airport had a confusions. The airplane later. WhenI finished in Recife It was raining. I had pick up a taxi. When finished the hotel is dirty, somebody stole my bag. It was weather, the car, be bedroom is service were horrible. The back was perfect. I didn't need again.</p> <p>Kiss, M....</p>



APPENDIX 3

Notes

Neither the English institute nor the students allowed me to record or transcribe their oral performance. Therefore, I am going to report my views based on their semester formal and informal assessments. I took message conveyed, timing, accuracy and fluency into consideration. I have to mention that, these aspects are the mostly used to assess students' performance through their term.

Message conveyed

Some students were not able to convey message. They could not make use of real language because they tried to translate every single word or invented ones which do not exist. For this reason, it was almost impossible to understand what they were trying to say. Learners used “brinks” instead of ear rings and “castan escure” to mean dark brown. Considering verb tenses, they were not capable of using some verb tenses such as present perfect or past perfect as well, while being asked to. Therefore, every oral production was either in the present or past. Some students mentioned the fact that, they could not find a similar verb tense in Portuguese and that would be the reason why these tenses were so difficult to be used by them.

Timing

This aspect was considered inadequate. There was no real communication going on. They made overuse of fillers, which reflected that they were trying to translate every word or were not fluent enough to maintain a good conversation pace. In general, some students spent 80% more time to conclude their tasks. To make matters worse, some students could not get a good grade while being formally assessed because there was no time to conclude their oral tests. It made students feel frustrated and some ones were not promoted to the next level.

Accuracy

Although learners have presentation stage and lots of room for controlled and freer grammar practice, they insisted on making use of translation which did not help much. Consequently, there was low control of grammatical use. There were numerous errors, mistakes and slips which prevented students from keeping minimum use of good grammar. I have to mention the fact that, these students are not formally assessed by their term



teacher. This kind of strategy helped me throughout this research because I could take not only my views into consideration but also share them with some peers. After having their feedback given, I could notice that my learners kept on using translating strategy even if they were told not to do so.

Fluency

During their lessons, learners could cover most of the content elements they were asked to. On the other hand, the quality was considered limited and students could not maintain speech in real time. There was inappropriate use of pausing, intrusive accent and sometimes inability to maintain the context. Students were trying to find words in Portuguese and translate them during these activities. Learners made overuse of “how do you say...in English?” which is considered a good tool for translating words which they were not exposed to. Contrary to what is expected, students used this question much more during fluency activities and asked for basic level vocabulary. These aspects were taken into consideration and I could conclude that their fluency level was not intermediate. Sometimes, they were no conversational openings or closings and the conversational structures were just ask and respond. For all these reasons, their conversation analysis was considered unnatural.

