

YES OR NO? GOOGLE TRANSLATE FOR EFL ONLINE WRITTEN DISCUSSION

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Abstract

Online written discussion is a difficult skill for some students because of the need for more vocabulary and the time constraint in expressing their ideas. Thus, this research aims to further the use of Google Translate in EFL online written discussions. This research was conducted in one private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, involving 134 respondents. Then researchers distributed open-ended questionnaires as the data collecting technique. The research revealed that the students used Google Translate for four different needs: for word translation, for grammar and spelling checker, for quick translation, and for arranging words into good sentences. The translation machine was the highest use of Google Translate during the online written discussion activity. On the other hand, the research result showed two Google Translate limitations: the inaccuracy of translation results and inauthentic students' writing. Despite some drawbacks of Google Translate, the students still consider Google Translate as a helpful tool for supporting them in learning English, particularly in online written discussions.

Keywords: Google Translate; Discussion; Online; EFL; Written

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of electronic tools and technologies has greatly transformed the English learning process, providing learners and teachers with abundant sources to explore in the field of language teaching and learning. Google Translate is one of the technologies that has profoundly assisted English learners in enhancing their skills and knowledge (Bahri & Mahadi, 2016). Google Translate is an open-source application that serves the translation process from one language to another quickly. Moreover, it is freely available and improving its ability to provide grammatically accurate translation (Mundt & Groves, 2016). The fact shows that millions of people, including English learners, use Google Translate to support the learning process (Groves & Mundt, 2015).

Many English learners admit that Google Translate provides them with significant support. Students use Google Translate to translate words, vocabulary, and sentences and compose their sentences (Fibriana et al., 2021). (Medvedev, 2016) points out the advantages of Google Translate, which are free, fast, and translated into many languages. In addition, the use of google translate English texts presented a number of components significantly higher writing quality than those of students' self-written texts (Tsai, 2019). Thus, Google Translate is one of the most practical tools that help English learners meet their translation needs. (Bahri & Mahadi, 2016) reported that students who utilize Google Translate are encouraged to learn independently and solve the language difficulties they face by their strategy. That fact reveals that Google Translate positively impacts students' motivation to learn English. Today, Google Translate covers a wider range of learning activities that are not only for the translation process but also assist the learners in speaking, writing, and reading (Fibriana et al., 2021). However, the

researcher limits the focus of this study to investigate the English learning activities in writing that utilize Google Translate.

Some studies have reported that writing is one of the most difficult skills for English learners due to the need to master vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and other writing techniques (Mantasiah, 2020), (Yusri et al., 2018). (Giannetti, 2016) also adds that using Google Translate enhances students' confidence in writing. Some students also believe that Google Translate is useful and helpful for their English writing activities. Similar research has been conducted by Tuzcu (2021) that implementing machine translation in writing activities as a pre-editing tool increases the creativity in the written products of low proficient EFL learners. However, Alley as cited in (Giannetti, 2016) argues that there are no limits to Google Translate use in the academic setting in many situations. It is a big issue that educators must tackle. Educators must emphasize that learners' abilities are more accurate than the translation result from Google Translate. It must be done because the tendency and reliance on Google Translate are increasing. There are also some problematic issues with using Google Translate in English learning.

Most English learners consider that using Google Translate is not cheating in writing. They even admit that Google Translate greatly helps them in their writing task (Fibriana et al., 2021). However, when students rely on Google Translate to translate their entire essay, that online machine cannot provide error-free writing results (Groves & Mundt, 2015). A study (Maulidiyah, 2018) revealed that the group of English beginner learners with low English language proficiency benefit more from Google Translate than the high proficiency learners. In some situations, low-proficiency learners use Google Translate even against the rule of the English language instructors.

Despite the usefulness of Google Translate for English language learners, some language instructors perceived that simply making the new technologies in the classroom does not make teaching and learning either effective or innovative (Kelly, 2005). Online translation machines like Google Translate have continuously created a learning atmosphere that focuses less on the student's language ability and more on the perfect result of the translation machine. The more worrisome impact of Google Translate usage is that anyone can easily use that translation machine to copy another's writing work and paste it into Google Translate, change the language, and claim it as their writing (Stapleton, 2005).

Some language instructors express misgivings about how they design the learning activities so that the learning process is independent of the translation machine inside and outside the classroom (Davis, 2006) (Watkins et al., 2004). (Groves & Mundt, 2015) add that many English language educators are hesitant to allow students to use Google Translate for the teaching and learning process because translation tools may undermine the actual language acquisition process. Nevertheless, the existence of Google Translate in the language classroom is inevitable. Several English language instructors believe that an online translation machine is not a suitable replacement for a manual human translator or even becoming the standard for the learners' language competency in the target language (Fibriana et al., 2021). In order to limit the excessive use of Google Translate or other translation machines, English learners must be further supervised and raise their awareness to wisely and accountably utilize Google Translate in their future writing activity (Maulidiyah, 2018).

Many researchers have conducted studies about using Google Translate for English writing activities. (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018) researched how students used Google Translate in writing assignments. The result showed that the students mostly utilized Google Translate as an online translation tool and looked up words rather than translating the whole text of their writing. Moreover, (Tuzcu, 2021) looked at the impact of Google Translate on beginners' writing skills. They showed that the English learners created better-written communication using Google Translate when they produced writing directly in a foreign language. It means that they

produced more sentences when assisted by Google Translate. In addition, a study by (Tsai, 2019) reported that the students' writing outcomes with the assistance of Google Translate contained fewer language errors, content, and grammar. He also found out that the students experienced positive learning in writing English with the help of Google Translate since it helped them choose the vocabulary and increase the quality of their writing.

Previous studies have largely focused on using Google Translate for the writing activity. However, no study specifies the use of Google Translate for written discussion, particularly online written discussion. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the occurrence in EFL classes about using Google Translate for online written discussion. The researchers formulate two research problems, as follows:

1. How often did the students use Google Translate to assist in EFL online discussions?
2. Why did the students use or not use Google Translate as assisting tool in EFL online discussion?

METHOD

This researcher employed a descriptive qualitative method. It is a method to describe phenomena that (Sandelowski, 2000) analyzed. The descriptive qualitative method generates an understanding of the phenomenon by getting into the participants meaning (Bradshaw et al., 2017). In this study, the investigated phenomena were students' perceptions and behavior toward using Google Translate in the EFL online written discussion. The online written discussion was held on the Padlet platform. The students were given several pictures and invited to express their opinions on the pictures.

The researchers distributed an online open-ended questionnaire to the participants through Google Forms. The participants were 134 non-English students who took general English. The researchers presented the questionnaire in Indonesian, so the participants found it easier to complete.

The researchers then applied qualitative data analysis proposed by (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). It suggested five steps in analyzing the qualitative data yielded from open-ended questionnaires. The steps were elaborated as follows:

1. Get familiar with the data
2. Limit and point out the analysis based on the research problem
3. Classify the data into categories
4. Identify and create correlational analysis between categories
5. Interpret the data and yield one holistic analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

From the data collection process, the researchers yielded two types of data used to answer the research problems. The first data revealed the students' frequency of using Google Translate as an assisting tool in EFL online discussion, as presented in Figure 1.

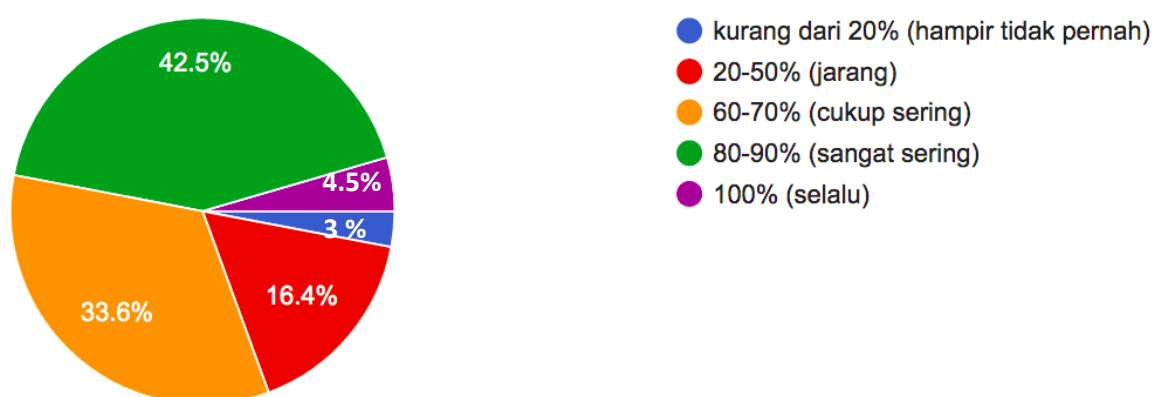


Figure 1. Students' Frequency in Using Google Translate in Online Discussion

According to Figure 1, the highest percentage is “*sangat sering*” or very often,” which got 42.5%. Then the second highest category is “*cukup sering*” or “quite often,” which got 33.6%. Next, the third highest category is “*jarang*” or “seldom” which got 16.4%. The rest of the result with the percentage 4.5% showed that the students “*selalu*” or “always” and 3% showed “*hampir tidak pernah*” or “almost never” use Google Translate in an online written discussion activity.

The students' frequency of using Google Translate in online written discussions differs for several reasons. Most of the students positively perceived the use of Google Translate in the online written discussion. Nevertheless, few students thought negatively about Google Translate usage in the online written discussion. The data related to the students' positive response toward Google Translate usage is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' reason in using Google Translate in online written discussion

Quantity	Students' Responses
102	Words, phrases and sentences translator
10	Grammar & spelling checker
8	Time-efficient translating tool
5	For arranging sentences into good order
125	TOTAL

The next finding revealed that few students considered not using Google Translate in the online written discussion activity because of two main reasons. The students' negative responses are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' reason of not using Google Translate in online written discussion

Quantity	Students' Responses
6	Inaccurate translation
3	Not authentic writing result
9	TOTAL

Discussion

The research result revealed that many of the participants used Google Translate with the frequency of always (4.5%), very often (42.5%), and quite often (33.6%). This finding aligns with the fact that Google Translate can provide users with banks of a hundred million words and phrases, making it popular among EFL learners (Komeili et al., 2011). (Maulidiyah, 2018) added that Google Translate is well-accepted and gets the first rank among the most prominent online translation machine. Students find it easy to learn English with the help of Google Translate. Then, the research finding showed that a few participants, 16.4%, admitted that they seldom use Google Translate, and 3% stated that they never use it. Those students perceived that their manual translation was better than Google Translate. This finding is supported by (Bozorgian & Azadmanesh, 2015) who mentioned that the Google translate results are not as good as human translation results since it cannot identify the rule of agreement.

Regarding research results, students' responses to using or not using Google Translate for written discussion were classified into two categories. The first category generated that the students favored using Google Translate for four main reasons. The reason for the highest number of responses (104 students) was its capability to translate words, phrases, and sentences. This finding is in line with the research finding conducted by (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018), which showed that most of the respondents who are EFL learners used Google Translate mostly for finding or translating vocabulary. (Clifford et al., 2013) added that Google Translate was a helpful tool for EFL learners to look up vocabulary they did not know during the learning process. The researchers highlighted that Google Translate was used a lot by the students for vocabulary issues because vocabulary played a crucial role in language skills since it determines the success of language use (Alqahtani, 2015).

Then, the results showed that ten respondents felt that Google Translate was beneficial for checking grammar & spelling during the online written discussion process. Google Translate has many helpful features that assist students in writing activities, including a spelling checker (Nomass, 2013). Spelling and grammar checkers are important features students use in writing because sometimes they need to correct spelling and grammar since they have language limitations and weaknesses (Huwari & Al-Khasawneh, 2013).

Next, one of the research findings revealed that the students liked to use Google Translate due to its fast capability in the translation process (8 students). It is supported by the research by (Josefsson, 2011), reporting that students mostly used Google Translate for translation since it is quick and time-efficient. Google Translate could save more time in the translation process than a manual dictionary, which takes much time (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018). During the online written discussion, the fast response of the students in expressing their arguments was needed since the transition topics of discussion lasted only about 5 minutes. Thus, the students must post their arguments or opinions quickly on the online platform, which is Padlet.

The last finding related to students' positive responses to Google Translate usage in the online written discussion was its ability to compile words into good order and yield meaningful sentences. Five students perceived that Google Translate assisted them in arranging the words into good sentences. They found difficulty related to word order since the systematical arranging is different in the Indonesian language. Thus, Google Translate helped the students check and put the words in good order so that the translation results have the same meaning as what they intended to write (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018).

In contrast, nine respondents stated they did not use Google Translate since it cannot accommodate their English learning process needs. Six students admitted that Google Translate results could have been more accurate in giving words, phrases, and sentences translation. It is in line with (Medvedev, 2016) mentioned that the limitations of Google Translate were the inaccurate grammatical output and inequivalent translation of cultural context. (Santoso, 2010) added that Google Translate could not properly translate idioms and figurative terms. Other research results showed that three students preferred something other than the automated translation results generated by Google Translate. They perceived that the writing was not authentic when Google Translate played a role.

CONCLUSION

Google Translate is a controversial tool in language learning, particularly EFL learning. In this research, online writing discussion was considered a quite difficult activity since it needs quick thinking in expressing ideas in a written form; most of the students in this research, 76,1 %, used Google Translate very often and quite often. Students tend to use Google Translate for four different reasons: for word translation, for grammar and spelling checking, for quick translator, and for arranging words into good sentences. Words, phrases, and sentence translation are the most used aspects of Google Translate. On the contrary, two drawbacks of Google Translate usage in the online written discussion were also reported: the inaccuracy of translation results and inauthentic students' writing. In a nutshell, due to the problematic usage of Google Translate, most students still rely on Google Translate in the EFL written discussion. Although they realized that Google Translate has some limitations, the students still believe that Google Translate is more advantageous than disadvantageous for the English activity of written discussion.

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