

Machine Translation in EFL Writing Programs?

Research in progress...



Elana Spector-Cohen, Miriam Schcolnik, Tel Aviv University
Sara Kol, Tel Aviv University and IDC



**Do you tell your students not to
use *Google Translate* ?**





Outline

- Review of the literature
- Rationale for present study
- Method
- Results
- Conclusion
- Pedagogical implications



Previous Research

- **Garcia (2011)**

 - **Beginning university Spanish students**

 - MT improved writing

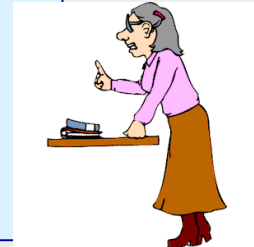
- **Duke University (2012)**

 - **Students**

 - MT useful for writing - 44%
 - MT useful for vocabulary - 85%

 - **Instructors**

 - Against MT for language classes - 80%



Our Pilot Survey (2013)



We checked (N = 203)

- **Use of MT among EAP students**
- **Attitudes toward MT as a tool for writing**

80% use MT frequently. Why?

- | | |
|--|------------|
| • I don't want to make mistakes. | 32% |
| • It makes my writing better. | 20% |
| • It's faster. | 17% |
| • It helps me learn English. | 16% |
| • It's easier than writing directly in English. | 10% |
| • Other | 4% |

Rationale



- **Widespread adoption of MT by students**
- **Limited research on use by language students**
- **No research on use by EFL students**
- **No guidelines for students and instructors**

Research questions



- 1. Are students aware of the mistakes made by Google Translate?**
- 2. Is awareness higher in higher level courses?**
- 3. Can students correct the mistakes?**



Method

Participants

- 86 EAP students from TAU and IDC
- Hebrew strongest language
- 3 different level courses

Procedure

- **Instrument:** *Google* translation (Hebrew to English) of 10 sentences with potential L1 interference (on paper)
- **Tasks:**
 - Identification of mistakes in MT output
 - Correction of mistakes

Method: Analysis



Mistake Awareness Score – MAS

MAS is the % of the **number of mistakes found** out of the **total number of mistakes made by Google**, minus the **penalty** for marking correct items as mistakes.

$$\text{MAS} = \frac{\# \text{ mistakes found} - \text{penalty}}{\text{total \# of mistakes}}$$

Mistake Correction Score – MCS

MCS is the % of the **number of mistakes corrected** out of the **number of mistakes identified**, minus the **penalty** for incorrectly changing correct items.

$$\text{MCS} = \frac{\# \text{ mistakes corrected} - \text{penalty}}{\# \text{ of mistakes identified}}$$

Results



Level	MAS	MSC
Intermediate	54.5	-
Advanced	70.4	86.8
Post advanced	75.7	88.1

- Advanced/post level students can identify, on average, **73%** of the mistakes made by Google Translate.
- They can correct, on average, **87%** of the mistakes they identified.
- Intermediate level students can identify, on average, **over half** of the mistakes made by Google Translate.

Conclusion

Advanced EFL students may be able to use *Google Translate* effectively in their writing.



Pedagogical Implications

We believe:

- **Instructors can no longer ignore student use of MT for writing.**
- ***Google Translate* can be a useful digital tool for EFL writing students, provided they learn how to use it effectively.**
- **Instructors should provide explicit guidelines for use of the tool.**



Where next?

- Check if the use of *Google Translate* enhances student writing. If so...
- Formulate guidelines for instruction.

