



# The Effect of Personality Factors on Learners' View about Translation

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## ABSTRACT

The present study investigated learners' view about translation (use of mother tongue) and the effect of two personality factors, tolerance of ambiguity and risk taking, on translation. 140 EFL learners participated in this study. An Oxford placement test was administered to homogenize the learners. Test. They answered three questionnaires of ambiguity tolerance, risk-taking and translation belief. According to statistics, a Chi-square analysis showed that participants had a positive viewpoint about the use of translation. An independent sample t-test was used to determine the effect of risk taking on students' translation viewpoint. The results revealed that risk taking affects negatively on translation belief. On the other hand, it seemed that risk-averse learners had positive translation belief. Unlikely, risk takers did not tend to use translation for language learning. Moreover, the t-test analysis of the effect ambiguity tolerance revealed that this personality factor had no effect on learner's viewpoint about translation.

**Key words:** Tolerance of Ambiguity, Translation Belief, Risk-Averse Learners, Risk-Takers

## INTRODUCTION

Some foreign language teachers may use translation as to ensure students' comprehension but many others may totally reject the use of the mother tongue in the form of translation in classrooms. A look at the literature of language teaching shows that many theoretical works and even practical methods have assumed that teachers should teach the second language (L2) without restoring the learners' first language (L1). It has become a common belief among language teachers that translation postpones the acquisition of L2 (Malmkjar, 1998). Ambiguity tolerance is one of the variables of personality factors which Brown (2000) defines as the degree to which you are cognitively willing to tolerate ideas and propositions that run counter to your own belief system or structure of knowledge. He also defines risk-taking as willingness to try something new and different with the possibility of being wrong (Brown, 2001). These individual differences reflect people's personality and they affect the way people learn (Ely, 1989). Moreover to the effects of individual differences on the learners' proficiency, it is worth studying the role of learners' personality factors on their beliefs about translation.

Although a number of researchers have implemented translation in language teaching, not enough attention has been paid particularly to the effects of personality factors on learners' point of view about translation. EFL learners and teachers have different views toward translation tasks and its use in their teaching and learning activities. While most teachers ignore the role of translation in EFL learning possibly because of the institutions limitations and the course book's objectives, learners depend on the positive role of mother tongue use in language learning (Politzer, 1983; Chamot et al., 1987).

Students' native language and its role in language classrooms have, for a long time, been a matter of discussion. Experts and researchers have dealt with this very important issue via calling it the translation. It seems that there is a gap between what teachers and students think to be helpful for classroom teaching and self-learning activities and that learners are more willing to hear mother tongue from teachers' side because it helps them understand, recall, and even produce utterances in a foreign language. However, it appears that not much research attention has been paid to the use of translation tasks in foreign language learning (FLA) from the learner's view points. Some researchers reported that learners' views influenced on selecting a learning strategy (Wenden, 1987; Horwitz, 1988). Their study shows how their views toward language learning affected on picking strategies, their planning priorities, attending pattern, and criteria for assessing the helpfulness of learning task. However, some preconceived beliefs restrict their range of strategy choice and use (Horwitz, 1988).

### Personality Factors and Translation

The study of personality factors is an approach, known as trait theory. Although trait theories are the most effective means to study personality, psychologists have not agreed which trait theory is the most appropriate (Cooper, 2002). In his study, William's (2005) reported the cultural significance as one personality

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factors closely related to other factors like risk-taking and ambiguity tolerance in the use of translation tasks. From the point of view of culture as life itself not simply as knowledge or as manner, the term "translation" refers to the act of negotiating linguistic and cultural codes. This is what Kramsch supported in his theory: as he says "nature, culture and language are interrelated" and a lack of cultural knowledge leads to misuse or misunderstanding of language, and affects the learners' performance on translation.

### **Tolerance of Ambiguity in Language Learning**

A perfect definition of ambiguity tolerance should separately define the two concepts of ambiguity and tolerance and integrate them as well. As McLain (1993) explains ambiguity emerges where there is not enough information in the context. Further, Budner (1962) defines three different types of ambiguous situations: they are complicated situations where there are too many cues, contradictory where cues are not easy to distinguish and new situations where there are not sufficient cues. Tolerance or intolerance includes different reactions ranging from rejection to attraction. A lack of enough information is the feature of any ambiguous situation. Ambiguity implies the perception of insufficient information to completely comprehend stimuli or "their temporal or spatial interrelationships" (McLain, 1993). Learners may perceive ambiguous stimuli as new, or difficult to predict or too complicated to comprehend. They can have many different interpretations (McLain, 1993).

### **Risk-Taking in Learning**

Brown (2001) defines risk taking as the willingness to venture into the unknown. It is an eagerness to try something new and different without putting the primary focus on success or failure. Learning needs risk taking. It is an important factor affecting second language learning. Teachers are the main source of taking new knowledge. Interacting with them requires risk taking. It is a factor to learn a new language in the foreign language classrooms. It happens to all learners to make many mistakes but they should learn to use their mistakes to work for them (Brown, 2001). He maintains that "interaction requires the risk of failing to produce intended meaning, of failing to interpret intended meaning, of being laughed at, of being shunned or rejected. But the rewards are great and worth the risks" (2001).

### **Learners' View Points about Translation**

There are not many studies analyzing students' point of view about translation tasks, however, students may have positive or negative attitudes toward it. For example, Horwitz (1988) reported that the majority of Spanish and German students believed that language learning should result in the proficiency to translate that language. Although both teachers and students knew about the mental translation, they did not believe translation as a language learning task or strategy (Kern 1994). In comparing the "context" with "use of translation" in learning second language vocabulary, Prince (1996) found that students and teachers have different attitudes toward it. While teachers broadly perceived learning vocabulary in context as a favorable task, students believe that translation and the links to their mother tongue was more helpful in learning a new vocabulary. Hsieh (2000) found that translation improved students' English reading ability and increased their comprehension, use of strategies, cultural background knowledge vocabulary learning. He reported that translation helped learners develop vocabulary knowledge and reading skills. Naghipoor and Bolori (2013) reached a similar result after studying the effects of translation on listening comprehension. They concluded that teachers should take into account translation as a task in teaching listening comprehension. The purpose of this study was to investigate learners' views about translation tasks to find their attitudes toward using translation tasks in EFL learning. The present study measured two personality factors influencing L2 learning, risk-taking and ambiguity tolerance and their effect on learners' views about using translation tasks. This study tried to find the different views of risk-takers and risk-averse learners along with those with high and low ambiguity tolerant learners about translation task use.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

140 pre-intermediated level learners of English ranging from 16 to 26 years of age with the average of 21 years participated in this study. An Oxford placement test was administered to homogenize the participants. Those who scored one standard deviation below and above the mean entered the study. The number of males and females was equal and no one had lived in English speaking countries. None of the participants had any experience of translating professionally or academically. They were informed about the instruction just before taking the test.

### **Instruments**

This study included four sets of tests about translation belief, tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking, and an Oxford placement test. An Oxford placement test was given to set the learners in the appropriate group. In order to measure the learners' ambiguity tolerance and risk taking, two sets of questionnaires were used these personality factors. Ambiguity tolerance tests were adopted from McLain (1993) included 25 questions. The risk-taking questionnaire which contained 30 items was adopted from what the Ministry of Education uses in its system.

The authors used the Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT) designed by Liao (2006) to measure translation beliefs which contained 24 questions. In order to assure full comprehension, all of the questionnaires were converted into Farsi. All three questionnaires were put in Likert scale. The Chronbach's Alpha was used to calculate their internal consistency. The reliability of the tests was set ranging from 0.85 to 0.89.

**Procedures**

The research was conducted in the non-profit university of Ayandegan in Tonekabon. The participants were homogenized after giving Oxford placement test with one standard above and below the mean score. The participants were informed about the instruction and the time for answering each test, and then the three sets of questionnaires of risk-taking, ambiguity tolerance and translation use view point were presented to them. First, a pilot study was conducted in order to confirm the clarity of effectiveness of data collection, instructions and questions, and procedures. In order for the authors to identify low and high ambiguity tolerant students and risk averse and risk takers, participants were notified to mentions their name, age and sex on the answer sheets. According to a criterion set by the test developers, those who scored above 100 were in high risk taking group and those who scored less than 70 were in the low risking group. The same procedure was set for the ambiguity tolerance. Those who scored one standard deviation below and above the + and -1 standard deviation.

**RESULTS**

To analyze the data obtained from the four sets of questionnaires, chi square and independent sample t-test were used. In order to assess the first question which was about the learners' view about translation, a chi square was used. To answer the other questions addressing the effect of ambiguity tolerance and risk taking on learners' translation belief samples of t-test was used. For the analysis participants' view about translation use, the frequency of each scale was measured and displayed in Table 1. the responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The frequency of each scale for translation use view measured and shown in table 1.

As shown above, 55 percent of participants chose option "agree" which indicates that they have a positive view toward translation use. Chi-square was used to investigate the differences among participants' choices of each level response regarding their translation view. Chi-square Analysis reveals that the difference between levels of responses is significant,  $\chi^2 (4, n=1825) = 165088, p.000$ . Researchers assigned a criterion by which the participants were divided into two groups, those who scored above 100 and those who scored less than 70. They are namely risk takers and risk avers learners respectively.

Table 2 shows that risk-averse learners outperformed the risk takers ones. Risk-averse learners' mean is 114, which is significantly higher than risk-taker learners' mean. An independent samples t-test was run using the scores of risk-taking and translation use view and the result showed a significant difference between risk-taker group and risk-averse group on their view about translation,  $t (33) = 7.3, p = .000$ .

To answer the third question, participants were divided into two high and low ambiguity tolerance groups based on a standard deviation between 1 and -1. As shown in Table 3 the low ambiguity group had a better mean than the high ambiguity tolerance group (104 > 101). The researchers ran an independent t-test by the scores obtained from ambiguity tolerance and translation view. The result showed no significant difference between high and low ambiguity tolerance groups on their belief about translation [ $t (28) = .458, p = .650$ ].

**Table 1: Frequency of Observed and expected in Translation Use View**

Items	Observed N	Expected N	Percent
Strongly Disagree	47	365	2
Disagree	143	365	8
No idea	287	365	15
Agree	1030	365	55
Strongly agree	310	365	18
Total	1817	365	-

**Table 2: Statistics of Risk takers and Risk Avers Groups**

Group Risk-Taking	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Error Mean
Risk-averse L 1. Translation view	30	5.5	115	1.5
Risk-takers	30	24.5	89	4.45

**Table 3: Translation belief in high and low ambiguity tolerance learners' group statistic**

Group Risk-Taking	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Error Mean
Translation use view Low Ambiguity Tolerance	15	20	104	5.3
Translation use view High Ambiguity Tolerance	15	20	101	5.1

## DISCUSSION

The statistics revealed that most learners had a positive view toward using translation tasks in their approach to language learning. The present study confirms the findings of Prince (1996). He stated that students preferred translation use to context learning for learning new vocabularies. It is also consistent with Hsieh's (2000) work which reported students found translation use helped them improve their vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. This is somehow their positive view about translation use. Liao (2006) arranged an interview about learner's view about translation and reached the same results:

"(1) Translation can help students comprehend English; (2) translation can help students to check whether their comprehension is correct; (3) translation eases memory constraints in memorizing more words, idioms, grammar, and sentence structures; (4) translation can help students develop and express ideas in another language; and (5) translation can help reduce learning anxiety and enhance motivation to learn English"

Data analysis of the effects of ambiguity tolerance and risk-taking on learners' translation view revealed that they had some effect on learners' view about translation use. It indicates that high risk-takers had a negative point of view about translation and its use on the other hand risk-averse learners had a positive view about translation. According to what (Brown, 2001) says, if we assume risk-takers as being eager to try out new information intelligently regardless of embarrassment in language, we can think of risk-takers as a type of learners who are willing to learn and use target language without transferring it into their mother tongue because of the possible embarrassments or complexities involved. On the other hand, risk-averse learners mostly avoid uncertain situations and try to recheck their learning with their mother tongue even if it took more time and effort as a result they might use translation to compensate their uncertainties.

The study revealed that there is no significant difference between high and low ambiguity tolerant learners' belief about translation. Low ambiguity tolerant ones might have a positive belief about translation because they think of English as a new and unfamiliar context compared with their mother tongue but students with high ambiguity tolerance are supposed to feel more comfortable with learning a new language without mediation of their first language and might not have a positive belief about translation (Ely, 1995). However analysis of the data confirmed the hypothesis that ambiguity tolerance had no effect on learners' translation belief. Although no significant effect of ambiguity on learner's belief about tolerance was found, it does not imply that ambiguity tolerance does not have any effect on other aspects of language learning. Investigating the effect of ambiguity tolerance on other learning strategies, especially on the realm of language proficiency, can give us a clear picture. For instance, Lori (1990), Chappelle (1983), and Naiman et al. (1978) devoted their works to find the relationship between ambiguity tolerance and language learning progress. The ideal case for the learner is when they neither are high nor are low ambiguities tolerant rather they on the midpoint (Ely, 1995). While Alptekin (2006) stated that high ambiguity tolerance can negatively influence reading comprehension, El-Koumy (2000) reached the same result which indicated moderately tolerant learners were more successful than both high and low students in the process of reading in a foreign language. However, Kazamina (1999) stated that defining the midpoint fully is not easy. Teachers should consider all levels of ambiguity tolerance and measure the effect of other individual traits which are closely related to this trait.

The analysis of the results of the study shows that of the two variables, risk taking is and ambiguity tolerance is not affective on the learners' belief about translation. This comes to mind that individual differences are effective on learners' translation belief; however effectiveness of the type of individual differences is also important. Variables are relative. Some of them are highly effective and some are not. Learners can reveal their positive belief about translation through ranging aspects from specific strategies to reaction to teacher's prescribed approach. It is common among learners with different beliefs to use different approach.

## CONCLUSION

The study in general confirmed that EFL learners had a positive belief in language learning. The students mostly agreed that they had a positive belief about the role of using mother tongue in their learning activities. The study found that risk-taking affected learners' translation belief in the way that risk-averse learners had a positive belief, but risk-takers had negative belief about translation. The present study could be more reliable if the size of population was larger, or more regions were included. Due to time and cost limitation the number of personality factors was limited. To have a better picture of personality factors on the translation belief, the future studies can address more variables. Investigating more factors and including variables like self-esteem, introversion, extroversion will make the research more complex, the number of research questions too many, and the analysis of the data more difficult. To know the different levels of learners' belief, they can be classified into different language proficiency levels. While the present study focused on learners' belief, the future studies can investigate teachers' point of view and other learning strategies.

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