

# Investigating the Effectiveness of Google Translate among Iraqi Students

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Technology has been proved to be effective in helping the students to improve their English language through the use of various applications. The purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of Google Translate. The study also investigates the students' attitudes towards the use of Google Translate. Lastly, the study explored the advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate. The participants of the study are 50 Iraqi undergraduate students of the Academic year 2018/2019. A quantitative research design approach will be adapted to analyse the data gathered from the subjects. The study used a survey questionnaire to collect data from participants. The findings of the study showed that Iraqi Undergraduate students hold a high levels of attitude towards the use of Machine Translation (Google Translate). The results have also revealed that Google Translate has some advantages (low cost, easy to access, quick translation) and drawbacks (grammatical mistakes, no proofreading tool, etc).

**Key words:** *Google Translate, Constructivism, Vocabularies.*

## Introduction

In the past, language learners used a dictionary to get meanings of unknown words in another language. This might be time-consuming, and learners might find that it was hard to interpret the meanings, particularly, when translating whole texts. However, new technologies now have been developed to facilitate language learners to get information and access new knowledge in another language.

During the last century, scholars have focused on machine translation tools due to the recent technological revolution. Machine translation tools approved high performance in controlling various translation acts. Given the importance of communication and translation, not only the

students of translation make frequent use of Machine Translations (MTs), particularly Google Translate (GT), but also learners from various disciplines and fields of study consult GT for translating texts from English into their first language. Although it has shortcomings in translating different text types (Jolley & Maimone 2015), GT serves 200,000,000 users daily. Hence, it is frequently and widely used due to its convenience, user-friendliness and speed. There is a growing necessity for investigating the frequency of using the Google translation tool by learners. Accordingly, some researchers have investigated the frequency of usage and required training for using machine translation tools (Jolley & Maimone 2015; Korošec 2012).

Most of the studies in previous literature have examined and evaluated GT through experimental designs (Ganjalkhani, 2014; Karnal & Pereira, 2015; Hampshire & Salvia, 2010). Some studies have focused on student attitudes toward GT by conducting quantitative surveys (Jolley & Maimone, 2015; Korošec, 2012). However, the number of studies conducted in the Arabic context on the usability of GT is very limited (Kumar, 2012).

Furthermore, Arab and non-Arab students use Google Translate for translating different text types such as persuasive, technical and literary texts. In addition, the literature introduces Google Translate as an ever-growing translation tool that supports various languages, including Arabic. Few studies were reported on Google Translate usability by Arab learners of English (Abuelyaman et al. 2014). The current situation of a growing number of Iraqis undergraduate students required further investigation for the usability of Google Translate as assistant translation tool in their education performance. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Iraqi EFL undergraduate students' usage and attitudes toward Google Translate and the advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate in Iraqi universities. This current study aims to fill the gap of the absent studies that need to be done in the Arabic context and among undergraduate students in Iraq.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the students' attitudes toward the using of Google Translate among Iraqi undergraduate students.
2. To explore the advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate among Iraqi undergraduate students.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the students' attitudes towards the using of Google translate?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate?

### **Significance of the study**

The results of the study are expected to contribute to the development of applied linguistics in particular. It is expected to provide not only theoretical significance but also practical input. Theoretically, this research was expected to deepen the knowledge of MT as one of language learning tool in learning English. On the other hand, the practical significance of this research was showing the advantages that learners should know about MT (GT) in EFL learning process. The researcher found that learner can consider the use of MT in EFL learning process. In addition, this research will contribute to the academic literature of machine translation tools for foreign language learning in a foreign context and the role of MT used in the learning process, and also contributed to the experience of L2 learners.

### **The Scope of the Study**

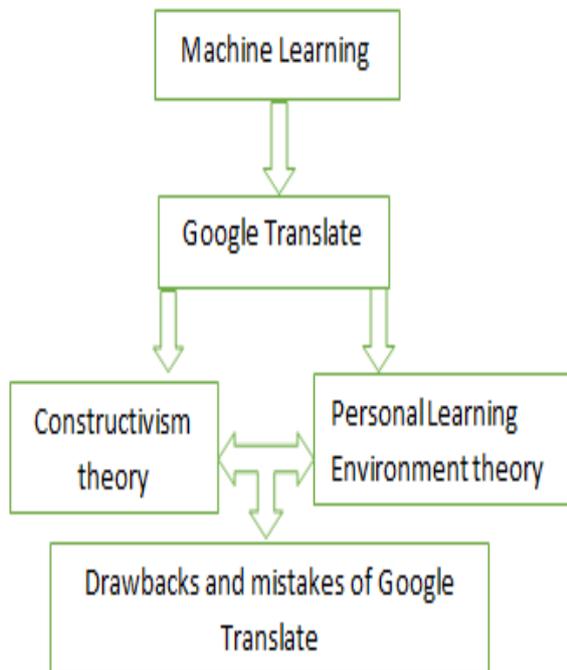
The study is for the discipline of translation specifically in terms of the mistakes and drawback found by the students; a quantitative study had been conducted by implying a questionnaire survey as a data collection instrument. This research will focus on specific translation tool named (Google translation tool). The samples of the current investigation will be Iraqi students—the reason for choosing this research area because learners use GT as a tool for translating their assignments.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Figure 1 illustrates the research's conceptual framework. The study adopts two theories to lay the foundation of the study, namely the theory of constructivism and Personal Learning Environment. The first theory is the theory of constructivism that revolves around the construction of knowledge based on previous knowledge with multiple perspectives (Reeves 1992). Hence, this theory helps the learner use his/her prior knowledge to build new knowledge using web-based tools (GT tools) (Koohang et al. 2009).

The second theory is personal learning environment theory advocates lifelong, informal learning where learners with different learning styles can benefit from the learning environment (the Web and GT) (Attwell 2007). Thus, this theory facilitates learner; (learners with different learning styles) use of GT for translation of different texts informally, personally in and out of class. Based on the tenets of these theories, the study examined the issues of GT and the usefulness of GT. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the mistakes and drawbacks of machine learning.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework



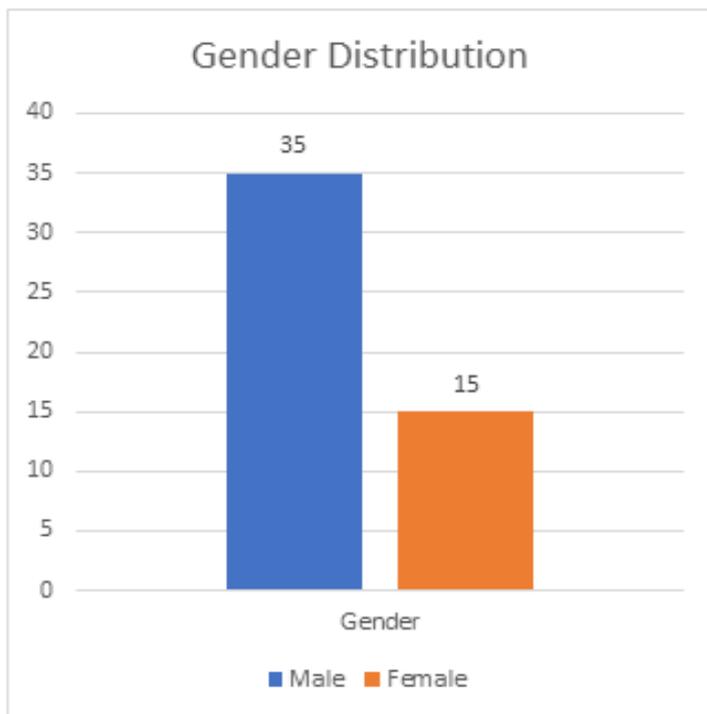
## Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative research approach, based on the descriptive approach. The data analysis included doing descriptive and inferential statistical analysis based on the research questions. For the research questions, the analysis included finding out the means, standard deviation, and percentage of the students' responses to each item in the questionnaire. This was helpful to identify the trends and norms of the students regarding the students' attitudes towards the use of google translate and the mistakes and drawbacks of Google translate and machine learning. A questionnaire will be employed in this study to collect data. There are several reasons for choosing this instrument. First, it is easy to collect data from a large number of participants in a short period of time. Second, the researcher could analyse it with elaborating the details. Third, the researcher will get exact and accurate responses. The sample of the study will be 50 undergraduate students studying English language in two of the Iraqis universities\_Kirkuk and Anbar\_during the studying year, 2018-2019. The selection of the sample because the undergraduate students level make a lot of use of machine translation (Google Translate). The questionnaire will be distributed to gather the data from the sample of the study. To report the mean scores of the subjects' responses for each case which ranges from 1-5, the measurement offered by Hanson et al. was adopted (Hanson, Creswell, 2005). According, to these researchers, the mean scores of agreements range from 1.00 to 2.33 are construed as low. Mean scores of agreements range from 2.34 to 3.67 are construed as moderate and mean scores of agreements range from 3.68 to 5.00 are construed as high. The following are the findings.

## Findings and Analysis

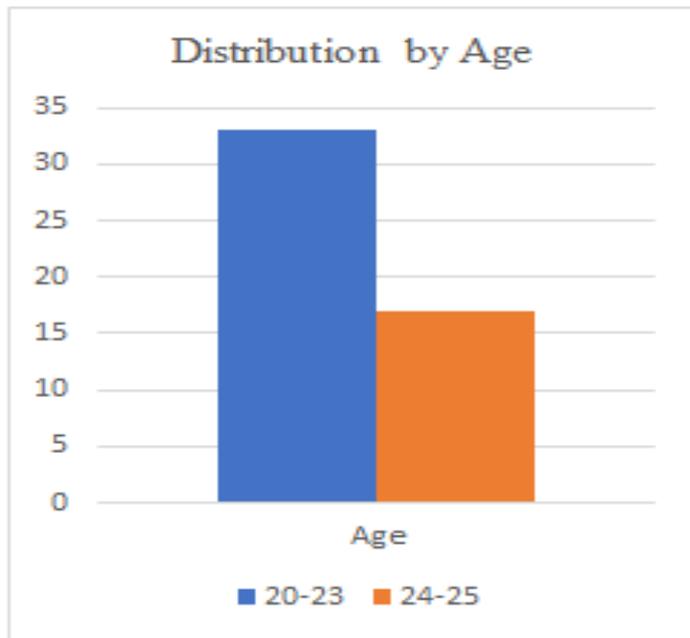
Findings of demographic information: The first question in the demographic part of the questionnaire asked the students to select their gender. The figure below shows the distribution of students in the current study by their gender. The total number of participants who responded to the questionnaire is (50). The male subjects were (35), and the female subjects were (15).

**Figure 2.** Gender Distribution



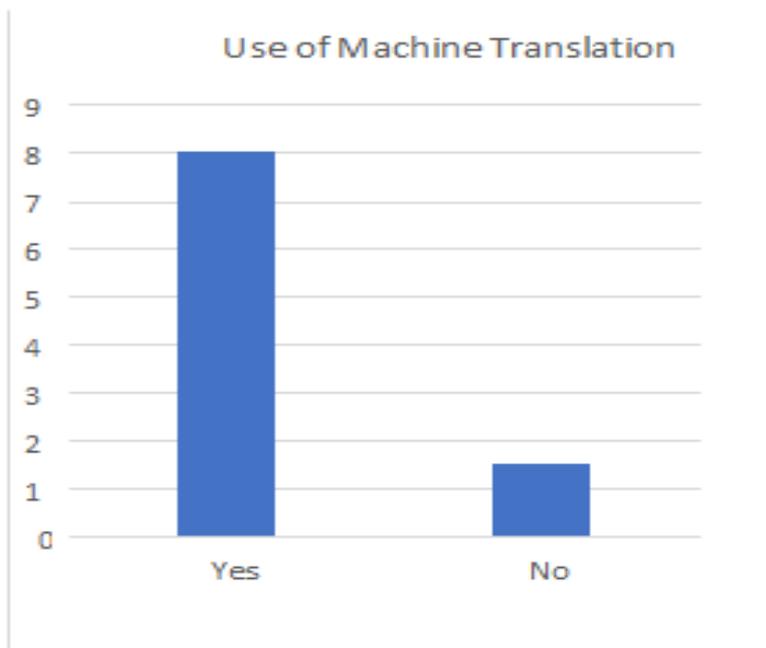
Furthermore, based on the analysis of the demographic information, participants were in age groups of 20-23 were (33) and 24-25 (17). It is noted that the age group of 20-23 accounts for the greatest number of participants. This shows that the students are mostly adults with few of them as middle-aged respondents, which is typical in university settings.

**Figure 3.** Distribution by Age



Question three in the demographic information part of the questionnaire required the subjects to select the answer if they use machine translation in translating words from the English language to the Arabic language. The figure below shows that 45% (90) of the subjects use machine translation while only 5% of the subjects do not use machine translation in translating.

**Figure 4.** Use of Machine Translation



The purpose of these questions was to elicit the students' level of attitudes towards the use of Google Translate. Thus, to answer the first research question and to analyse the questionnaire, SPSS was run to do descriptive statistics to the mean score (M), standard deviation (SD) and percentage.

The students showed the high level of attitudes towards the use of Google translate; the students agreed that Google through machine learning is able to translate texts quickly and free and is easy to access. Based on the findings of the questionnaire, the students agreed that it gives them more advantages than disadvantages. The students also showed another high level of agreement that the quality of texts translated by machine translation is better than their translation. Through the use of Google Translate, the students learn new vocabularies. Moreover, the data showed that the students could write English sentences better and learn grammar and structure with the assistance of Google Translate. The findings showed that Google Translate does not make the students lazy in their effort in both reading and writing.

The students in the second-place showed a moderate level of attitudes towards the use of Google translate. They did not get much translation skills from using Google Translate. Also, the student do not gain confidence in using Google Translate. The gathered data showed that the students do not fully rely on the accuracy of Google Translate in translating from Arabic and vice versa.

The result of the second research question which tackles the advantages and drawbacks of Google Translate among Iraqi students. The participants of the study stated some advantages about the use of Google Translate like: It has the ability to translate almost all the languages around the world. Google Translate translates extremely quickly and is easy to access. The participants have also stated another advantage which is the low cost of Google Translate, which is free in most of the countries. The students also stated that they can get more skills and learn new vocabularies through the use of this application. On the other hand, the students also stated some disadvantages and drawbacks of Google Translate. These disadvantages can be stated as: the quality of translation is dependent on the language pair. The source and target languages are involved affect the quality of output text. Moreover, Google Translate is a web-based translation database, Spanish or English tend to be more accurate while other languages like “the Arabic language are less likely to be accurate and produces significant grammatical errors”. The participants of the interview stated that “Google Translate does not have a system to correct for translation errors which makes the students are lost in translation”. So, the pros and cons of Google translate make it clear that, although students may sometimes have success using Google translate, they would not want to use it for anything of great importance without checking to make sure that there are no errors in context, grammar or otherwise.

## **Discussion**

The findings showed that students realised that Google Translate had both benefits and drawbacks. They had positive attitudes towards Google Translate as it was convenient to use, and it was helpful for all students in learning English, especially in learning new vocabulary. The findings support some researchers stating that learners' positive attitudes are encouraged when computers are used for language learning (Lyons, 2017). However, the students admitted that their attempt in reading and writing English was reduced and the problem of vocabulary retention occurred when they used Google Translate. These findings correspond to Kumar (2012), who found that students viewed Google Translate as helpful, but they could not learn English well because it affected their ability to think.

For the advantages, the students stated that Google Translate was a convenient and fast tool for translating texts. Students mentioned that they gained a lot of vocabulary knowledge in using Google Translate, particularly for poor English learners. Students stated that they could easily understand English sentences because Google Translate could translate the whole sentence at one time. Students admitted that Google Translate's output was more reliable than their own translation. Thirteen students reported that a speaker button was beneficial for pronunciation practice.

Results of this study suggest that students realise Google Translate as a useful English learning tool. But sometimes it is also bad for their study because it sometimes produces inaccurate or inappropriate meanings of words. And students pay less attention to learning English when using Google Translate. Students agreed that they get the meaning of the text but they did not pay much attention to the knowledge of new words. So, they cannot retain the knowledge of new vocabulary for a long time. These drawbacks of Google Translate although affecting students' English learning led students to still believe that Google Translate gives them more advantages than drawbacks.

## **Conclusion**

This study was designed to investigate the students' attitudes towards the use of Google Translate among Iraqi undergraduate students. Lastly, the study investigated the advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate. The study collected the data by using a survey questionnaire which was administrated to a group of Iraqi English language students. The students' responses were analysed descriptively for the mean scores, standard deviation, percentages and inferentially to find whether the mean scores were statistically significant in order to answer the research questions. The findings of such analysis were reported and discussed in comparison to other previous studies in the area of using Google translate. The second instrument of gathering data was an interview. Moreover, the students showed a high



level of attitudes towards the use of Google translate. The findings also revealed some advantages (translate quick, easy to access etc.) and disadvantages (inaccurate output text, Proofreading tool etc.) of using Google Translate.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

#### Purposes and Attitudes in Using GT

This questionnaire is designed to investigate purposes and attitudes towards using Google Translate (GT) for English language learning among Iraqi undergraduate students in Iraqis universities during the academic year 2018-2019. The questionnaire contained 5 sections.

Part 1 General information

Part 2 Attitudes towards using GT

Part 3 Benefits and Drawback of GT

Instructions: Please tick   in the boxes, tables or give written answers. Make sure you complete all questionnaire items. Thank you.

Part 1 General information

Sex: male  Female

1. Do you use Google Translate (GT)?

Yes  No

No	Items	M	SD	Hanson et al (2005)
1	GT gives me more advantages than disadvantages.	4.45	0.82	High
2	GT is free and easy to access	4.50	0.79	High
3	GT can translate texts quickly.	4.60	0.84	High
4	The quality of texts translated by GT is better than by my translation.	4.30	0.72	High
5	I can rely on the accuracy of texts translated by GT (English to Arabic translation).	2.80	0.86	Moderate
6	I can rely on the accuracy of texts translated by GT (Arabic to English translation).	2.95	0.80	Moderate

7	I gain a lot of vocabulary knowledge when I use GT.	3.90	0.84	High
8	I feel more confident when using GT for English writing.	3.95	0.81	High
9	I can write English sentences better with the assistance of GT.	3.75	0.82	High
10	GT makes me lazy to think and to use my effort in reading.	3.50	0.90	Moderate
11	GT makes me lazy to think and to use my effort in writing	2.44	0.83	Moderate
12	I gain translation skills from using GT	3.66	0.82	Moderate
13	I feel more confident when using GT for English writing.	4.20	0.81	High
14	I understand an English passage better with the assistance of GT	3.30	0.81	High
15	Using GT, I don't need to remember new vocabulary or guess meanings of words.	2.90	0.80	Moderate
	Total	3.80		High

#### Advantages

1. Easy to Access
2. Low costs
3. The ability to translate many languages
4. Learning new vocabularies and gaining new skills

#### Disadvantages

1. Grammatical mistakes
2. No proofreading tool
3. Not accurate output text