

The Role of Translation in English Language Learning: A Qualitative Case Study of BA Translation Graduates from Cihan University–Sulaimani

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Abstract

This qualitative case study aims to examine how translation functions as a supportive learning strategy for English language learning among BA translation graduates from Cihan University–Sulaimani. Data were collected during the 2024–2025 academic year through structured interviews with fifteen BA translation graduates. Using thematic qualitative analysis, the study identified the key themes related to perceived benefits, challenges, and conditions for effective use. The results showed that utilizing translation tasks in a planned and progressive manner can contribute to vocabulary development, enhance grammatical awareness, and improve reading comprehension by linking the source-language meaning to the target-language grammatical structure. On the contrary, the participants noted that excessive dependence on translation can slow down spontaneous speaking and increase reliance on the first language, and can make the translation of idiomatic expressions and cultural elements difficult. Overall, the study concluded that translation is most effective when used as a scaffolding teaching tool alongside communicative practice, intensive linguistic input, and writing activities rather than as a sole learning approach. The paper proposes practical guidelines for integrating translation into EFL learning within translation departments.

Keywords: Translation, English language learning, translation pedagogy, BA translation graduates, thematic analysis.

1. Introduction

English plays a central role in higher education and employability in the Kurdistan Region, where academic study and professional communication increasingly require functional proficiency in English. Nevertheless, many Kurdish-speaking learners continue to face challenges in vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, and fluent production, particularly when they move from classroom knowledge to spontaneous use (Brown, 2014). In translation departments, BA translation students are repeatedly exposed to bilingual input and translation tasks. In this study, BA translation graduates reflect retrospectively on how such experiences supported (or constrained) their English learning during their undergraduate studies (Cook, 2010).

Translation in language learning has long been associated with the Grammar–Translation tradition, which emphasizes written accuracy, explicit grammar, and bilingual text work (Cook, 2010). For much of the twentieth century, this orientation was criticized because extensive reliance on the first language may limit opportunities for listening and spontaneous speaking and may encourage word-for-word processing rather than communicative use (Brown, 2014). However, more recent scholarship argues for reconsidering translation—not as a standalone method, but as a purposeful pedagogical tool that can support learning when used selectively and integrated with communicative practice (Hall & Cook, 2012). Empirical work in language learning and translation pedagogy suggests that translation tasks can help learners strengthen form–meaning connections, build vocabulary, and increase grammatical awareness when the tasks are planned and aligned with learning goals (Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Liao, 2006). At the same time, local and regional scholarship published in the *Journal of the College of Languages* emphasizes that translation is not merely linguistic substitution but also involves meta-linguistic, psychological, and interpretive processes that can activate reflective language awareness (Ismail, 2023). In addition, recent JCL research comparing human and machine translation highlights that AI-driven tools may achieve speed and surface fluency while still facing difficulties with context, idiomaticity, and cultural nuance—domains that are central to translator training and advanced language development (Mohamedamin, 2026).

Therefore, this study investigates BA translation graduates' perceptions of learning English through translation and identifies the conditions under which translation supports learning rather than constraining it. The study addresses three research questions: (1) What benefits do BA translation graduates attribute to translation for learning English? (2) What challenges do they report when using translation for language development? (3) Under what conditions do they consider translation most effective? The study contributes context-sensitive guidance for integrating translation tasks into English language learning within undergraduate (BA) translation programs.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualizes translation as a supportive learning strategy that can scaffold English language learning when it is used purposefully and integrated with broader communicative and skills-based practice (Cook, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012). Rather than treating translation as a single "method," the framework draws on complementary perspectives that explain (a) how bilingual processing supports comprehension and noticing, (b) how first-language knowledge transfers to second-language learning, and (c) how meaning is constructed through comparison, interpretation, and context.

2.1 Cognitive and metalinguistic perspectives

From a cognitive perspective, L2 learners naturally draw on their first language as a bridge to understand and organize new linguistic input, especially at early and intermediate stages (Cook, 2010). The strategic use of the mother tongue can therefore support comprehension, reduce cognitive overload, and help learners map form to meaning more efficiently (Butzkamm, 2003; Hall & Cook, 2012). In translator education, translation tasks may further enhance metalinguistic awareness because learners must reflect on grammar, lexis, register, and meaning relations across languages while producing acceptable target-language output (Ismail, 2023; Tsagari & Floros, 2013).

2.2 Cross-linguistic influence and transfer

A second foundation is cross-linguistic influence, which explains how knowledge of the first language shapes second-language learning both positively and negatively (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Transfer can facilitate learning when learners build on existing linguistic resources (e.g., conceptual knowledge, discourse routines) but can also lead to interference when structural or pragmatic

patterns are inappropriately carried over (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Cummins's interdependence perspective similarly suggests that skills developed in one language can support development in another, particularly when learning activities promote deeper processing and explicit connections between languages (Cummins, 1979).

2.3 Comparative analysis and noticing

Comparative approaches argue that systematic comparison between languages supports noticing of differences in grammar, collocation, and meaning, which can guide more accurate production and reduce persistent errors (Lado, 1957; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). In this study, translation is treated as a structured contrastive activity that can make learners attend to tense/aspect choices, word order, and lexical selection, thereby strengthening explicit knowledge that can later support more fluent use (Cook, 2010; Laufer & Girsai, 2008).

2.4 Sociocultural and interpretive perspectives

Constructivist and sociocultural perspectives view learning as an active process in which learners build knowledge through interaction, mediation, and meaning-making rather than passive reception (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Translation tasks can function as mediated activity: learners interpret meaning, negotiate equivalence, and make principled choices about form and intention, which can support deeper learning when paired with feedback and communicative practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Brown, 2014). Importantly, translation is not only linguistic substitution; it involves cultural, identity, and conceptual dimensions that may create difficulty for learners and require interpretive competence (Agha, 2025; Shahadha, 2025). In contemporary practice, this interpretive dimension remains particularly relevant when learners use AI tools, which may produce fluent surface output yet still require human judgment for context, idiomaticity, and cultural nuance (Mohamedamin, 2026).

3. Translation in This Study: Scope and Forms

3.1 Written translation

In this study, written translation is treated as an intentional learning task used to support English development in a translation-program context. Classic definitions describe translation as producing target-language text that is equivalent in meaning to the source-language text while meeting the linguistic and pragmatic norms of the target language (Catford, 1965; Nida, 1964). From a learning

perspective, written translation can support vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, and reading comprehension because it requires close attention to meaning, structure, and lexical choice across languages (Cook, 2010; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). Accordingly, the framework positions written translation as a scaffold that can be effective when used selectively and combined with communicative tasks and extensive input (Hall & Cook, 2012; Brown, 2014).

3.2 Oral translation (interpreting)

Oral translation (interpreting) involves rendering spoken messages into another language in real time and is characterized by immediacy and time pressure (Pöchhacker, 2010). Although interpreting is not the primary focus of the present study, it is acknowledged as part of translator education and as a domain that highlights the importance of context, pragmatic meaning, and rapid decision-making (Pöchhacker, 2010; Ismail, 2023).

4. Translation Approaches Used in This Study

4.1 Semantic translation

Semantic translation prioritizes conveying the source text's contextual meaning as accurately as possible while respecting the grammatical and semantic constraints of the target language. Newmark describes semantic translation as an approach that aims to render "the exact contextual meaning of the original" as closely as the target language permits (Newmark, 1988, p. 39). In a learning context, this approach is relevant because it encourages learners to attend carefully to meaning relations, lexical choice, and grammatical form, which can support accuracy and deeper comprehension during translation tasks (Cook, 2010).

4.2 Communicative translation

Communicative translation focuses on producing a target text that achieves an effect on the target reader comparable to that of the source text on its original readers. Newmark characterizes communicative translation as an approach that attempts to produce "an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original" (Newmark, 1988, p. 39). For language learners, this approach aligns with the goal of producing natural, comprehensible output, since it emphasizes readability, pragmatic appropriateness, and communicative intention rather than strict word-for-word correspondence (Hall & Cook, 2012; Brown, 2014). In this study, these two approaches are treated as complementary: learners may shift toward semantic translation when accuracy and meaning precision are crucial, and

toward communicative translation when naturalness and audience impact are central.

5. Pedagogical Value of Translation for English Language Learning

5.1 Vocabulary development and grammatical awareness

Empirical research indicates that translation activities can enhance vocabulary learning and grammar awareness when tasks require learners to process meaning deeply and compare forms across languages. Laufer and Girsai (2008) found that learners engaged in translation-based activities outperformed comparison groups in vocabulary learning and use. Similarly, Liao (2006) reported that EFL learners perceived translation as useful for understanding complex grammatical structures, noticing differences between languages, and supporting longer-term retention. These findings support the assumption that translation can function as a structured form-focused activity that strengthens form–meaning mapping, especially when implemented with clear objectives and feedback (Cook, 2010).

5.2 Metacognitive and metalinguistic development

Translation tasks can also support metacognitive development because they require learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their language choices. Tsagari and Floros (2013) argue that translation promotes metalinguistic awareness by pushing learners to reflect on grammatical contrasts, lexical appropriateness, and meaning equivalence while revising their output. Such reflective processes are particularly relevant in translator education contexts, where students are expected to justify choices and evaluate alternative renderings (Ismail, 2023).

5.3 Reducing anxiety and increasing confidence

Controlled use of the first language may reduce anxiety in language learning settings by providing learners with reassurance and a tool for clarification. Atkinson (1987) notes that strategic L1 use can lower affective barriers, support comprehension, and increase willingness to participate. From this perspective, translation can serve as a confidence-building scaffold—especially for learners at lower proficiency levels—provided it does not replace opportunities for communicative practice (Brown, 2014; Hall & Cook, 2012).

5.4 Linking prior knowledge to new learning

Meaningful learning is strengthened when learners connect new input to what they already know. Hall and Cook (2012) explain that using learners' own

language can help them relate new concepts to existing knowledge, which may improve comprehension and retention. Translation naturally activates this mechanism by requiring learners to connect concepts across languages and to make explicit decisions about meaning, structure, and appropriateness (Cook, 2010).

5.5 Developing comparative and multilingual competence

Translation also fosters comparative competence by encouraging learners to analyze language patterns across two linguistic systems. Witte, Harden, and Ramos de Oliveira Harden (2009) emphasize that translation in language learning can support multilingual competence, including the ability to switch perspectives, evaluate equivalence options, and communicate across languages. This competence is central to translation programs and aligns with the broader goal of developing flexible, context-sensitive language users rather than learners who rely on literal mappings between languages (Gass & Selinker, 2008)

6. Theories of Language Learning (and Their Relevance to Translation)

This study treats translation as a **supportive learning strategy** rather than a standalone method. Accordingly, language-learning theories are used here to explain *why* and *when* translation can facilitate English development among BA translation graduates, and under what conditions it may become limiting.

6.1 Behaviorism

Behaviorism views language learning as habit formation through stimulus–response patterns, repetition, and reinforcement (Skinner, 1957). From this perspective, translation can function as a controlled practice technique: learners repeatedly map an English structure onto an equivalent structure in Kurdish (or vice versa), which may strengthen recall of formulaic patterns and basic sentence construction through repetition. However, because behavioral practice may prioritize accuracy and memorization, it should be used selectively and combined with meaning-based practice to avoid over-reliance on mechanical, word-for-word production (Brown, 2014).

6.2 Cognitivism

Cognitivism emphasizes internal mental processing—how learners notice, store, retrieve, and apply linguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2015). Translation can support learning cognitively by helping learners make explicit links between form and

meaning and by encouraging deeper processing of vocabulary and grammar during comprehension and production. In input-oriented views of learning, comprehension plays a central role; translation may support comprehension by clarifying meaning and supporting noticing of linguistic differences, especially when used as a scaffold rather than a replacement for direct L2 exposure (Krashen, 1985; Cook, 2010).

6.3 Constructivism and Sociocultural Theory

Constructivist and sociocultural approaches view learning as an active process in which learners construct meaning through interaction, mediation, and problem-solving rather than passive reception (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Translation tasks align well with this view because they require learners to **interpret**, **evaluate**, and **justify** language choices, often negotiating meaning beyond literal equivalence. In advanced translation contexts, this meaning-making extends to cultural and conceptual dimensions, where learners must account for identity markers, pragmatic intent, and culturally embedded meanings. Regional research illustrates these challenges clearly: translating identity markers requires attention to cultural nuance beyond lexical substitution (Agha, 2025), while conceptual differences across languages can shape meaning transfer and complicate equivalence decisions (Shahadha, 2025). These perspectives support the idea that translation can foster deeper language awareness and interpretive competence when paired with reflection and feedback (Ismail, 2023).

6.4 Communicative Approach

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) views language primarily as a tool for communication, prioritizing meaningful interaction and pragmatic appropriateness rather than isolated form practice (Brown, 2014). Within a communicative framework, translation can still be valuable—provided it is used strategically to support communicative goals (e.g., preparing a message for a real audience, reformulating meaning naturally, or resolving ambiguity). This aligns with functional concerns such as clarity, readability, and audience effect, which are especially important in professional translation contexts. For example, research on plain language and legal translation highlights how translation quality is judged not only by fidelity but also by communicative effectiveness and reader accessibility. Likewise, translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization can be discussed as choices that influence how meaning and culture are communicated to the target audience.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore BA translation graduates' perceptions of using translation as a supportive strategy for English language learning. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences, beliefs, and rationales in their academic context. Data were collected through structured interviews, ensuring that all participants responded to the same set of questions while providing sufficient detail for interpretive analysis.

7.2 Participants and research context

Participants were 15 BA translation graduates from the Department of Translation at Cihan University–Sulaimaniya. All participants had completed the BA program and had graduated at the time of data collection (2024–2025). Participants were recruited purposively because they could provide information-rich reflections on how translation contributed to their English learning during their undergraduate studies.

7.3 Data collection instrument (structured interview)

A structured interview guide was developed to elicit participants' views on (a) perceived benefits of translation for learning English, (b) perceived challenges and limitations, and (c) conditions under which translation is most effective. The interview questions were aligned with the study's aims and research questions, and they focused on concrete learning experiences such as vocabulary learning, grammar awareness, comprehension, and communicative use. The guide also included questions about how students balance translation with other learning activities (e.g., speaking practice, listening, and writing), consistent with the view that translation can be useful when applied selectively rather than as the sole approach (Hall & Cook, 2012; Cook, 2010).

7.4 Data collection procedure

Interviews were conducted during the 2024–2025 academic year. Each participant completed one structured interview. Responses were recorded and

transcribed for analysis. To maintain consistency, the same interview schedule was used with all participants. Identifying information was removed from transcripts and participants were labeled using anonymized codes (P1–P15).

Because participants were interviewed after graduation, their responses represent **retrospective reflections** on how translation contributed to their English learning during their BA studies.

7.5 Data analysis (thematic analysis)

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns across participants' responses. The analysis followed a systematic process: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading, (2) generating initial codes, (3) grouping codes into candidate themes, (4) reviewing themes against the dataset, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting themes using representative quotations as evidence. This method was selected because it is suitable for identifying shared meanings and differences in participants' perceptions regarding translation-based learning practices.

7.6 Trustworthiness (quality of qualitative findings)

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed several strategies. First, the interview schedule ensured consistency across participants, which supports dependability. Second, an audit trail was maintained by keeping interview transcripts, coding notes, and theme development decisions. Third, the reporting of findings includes representative participant quotations to support interpretations and improve confirmability. These procedures follow common quality practices in qualitative research.

7.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles were followed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used for academic purposes only. To protect privacy, all data were anonymized and stored securely, and findings are presented without identifying information.

7.8 Problem statement

English proficiency is increasingly required for academic success and professional opportunities in the Kurdistan Region. However, many Kurdish-speaking university learners continue to face persistent challenges in

comprehension and productive skills, particularly speaking and writing. In translation departments, translation is frequently used as part of bilingual academic practice; yet its role in English language learning remains contested. On the one hand, translation may support comprehension and form–meaning mapping by helping learners notice linguistic contrasts and consolidate vocabulary and grammar. On the other hand, excessive reliance on translation may slow spontaneous production, increase dependence on the first language, and limit opportunities for communicative practice (Brown, 2014; Hall & Cook, 2012).

Accordingly, this study examines how BA translation graduates from Cihan University–Sulaimaniya perceive the role of translation in their English language learning, and identifies the perceived benefits, challenges, and conditions under which translation supports learning rather than constrains it.

7.9 Significance of the study

This study is significant in three main ways. Theoretically, it contributes to ongoing debates on translation in language learning by clarifying how translation can function as a scaffold for vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and comprehension in a Kurdish-speaking context (Cook, 2010; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). Practically, the findings can guide instructors in translation departments in designing translation tasks that support English development while maintaining sufficient opportunities for communicative practice and fluency-oriented activities (Hall & Cook, 2012). Socially and educationally, understanding factors that shape English learning in translation programs can support curriculum improvement and better preparation for employability and further study in the Kurdistan Region.

7.10 Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of translation as a supportive strategy in English language learning as perceived by BA translation graduates from Cihan University–Sulaimaniya. The study has the following objectives:

1. To identify the perceived benefits of translation for developing English skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, writing, and overall language awareness).
2. To examine the perceived challenges of using translation for learning (e.g., overreliance on L1, difficulties with idioms and culture-specific expressions, and time demands).

3. To determine the conditions under which translation is viewed as most effective (e.g., purposeful use, gradual progression, feedback, and integration with communicative practice).
4. To propose practical guidelines for integrating translation tasks into English language learning within undergraduate (BA) translation programs.

8. Results

This section presents the findings from structured interviews with 15 BA translation graduates (P1–P15). The analysis is organized thematically to reflect patterns across participants' accounts of (a) benefits of translation for learning English, (b) challenges and limitations, and (c) conditions under which translation is most effective.

8.1 Theme 1: Translation as a scaffold for comprehension and meaning construction

A clear majority of participants (13/15) described translation as an initial support that helps them stabilize meaning, particularly when they face dense academic texts or culturally loaded expressions. Students explained that translation allows them to “secure meaning first” before moving to higher-level processing such as summarizing, discussion, or writing, and they repeatedly framed translation as a step that prepares them to work in English rather than replacing English work. For example, P4 stated, “If I don’t translate the difficult parts, I feel I only guess the meaning. Translation makes the meaning stable,” and P12 similarly noted, “Translation helps me connect the main idea to the details; without it, I miss the point.” Overall, participants treated translation as a scaffold that supports comprehension at the early stage of learning tasks, especially under difficulty or uncertainty.

8.2 Theme 2: Vocabulary growth and stronger retention through translation tasks

Most participants (12/15) reported that translation supports vocabulary learning because it forces deeper processing and active retrieval, particularly for academic words, collocations, and discipline-specific terminology. Students emphasized that translating in both directions (English→Kurdish/Arabic and Kurdish/Arabic→English) builds not only recognition but also usable knowledge, including where and how a word naturally appears. P7 expressed this clearly: “When I translate, I don’t just learn the word; I learn where to use it,” while P1

added, “If I translate a paragraph, I remember the vocabulary more than if I only read it.” Several students also described a practical habit of recording translation-based vocabulary for later use in writing, as shown in P9’s comment: “I keep a glossary from translation tasks. Later I use the same phrases in writing.” These responses indicate that translation contributes to vocabulary development when it is paired with contextual use and revision rather than simple look-up.

8.3 Theme 3: Increased grammatical awareness through contrast and noticing

Participants frequently linked translation to increased grammatical awareness because it obliges them to compare structural differences between Kurdish/Arabic and English. Most students (11/15) stated that translation makes errors more visible and grammar choices more conscious, especially in tense/aspect, word order, articles, and prepositions. P3 explained this noticing effect by saying, “When I translate, I see why the tense is wrong... because Kurdish structure is different,” while P10 stated, “Translation makes me focus on sentence structure. I start to understand grammar rules in practice.” However, a smaller group (4/15) emphasized that grammatical gains depend strongly on feedback and correction; without feedback, learners may repeat the same patterns. This concern appears in P5’s observation: “If nobody corrects my translation, I may repeat the same structure mistakes.” In sum, translation appears to raise grammatical awareness primarily through comparison, but its long-term benefit increases when teachers provide feedback.

8.4 Theme 4: Reading and writing improvement, with mixed effects on speaking fluency

Students commonly described translation as helpful for reading comprehension and writing preparation, but they were more cautious about its impact on speaking fluency. For reading, most participants (12/15) stated that translation clarifies meaning and improves coherence across academic texts. P8 described this directly: “Translation helps me understand the logic of the text.” For writing, many participants (10/15) reported that translation helps them generate ideas and organize content, yet they also noted that direct transfer can create unnatural English unless careful revision is carried out. As P11 stated, “Translation helps me start writing, but I must revise to make it sound natural in English.” In contrast, speaking was the skill most frequently described as negatively affected by overuse: about half of participants (8/15) reported slower speech and hesitation because they translate mentally before speaking. P6 explained, “When I speak, I

translate in my mind first. That makes my speaking slow,” and P14 added, “Translation helps accuracy, but it makes speaking less fluent if I depend on it too much.” These accounts suggest that translation supports accuracy and preparation, but fluency requires additional practice that reduces reliance on constant mental translation.

8.5 Theme 5: Affective benefits—reduced anxiety and increased confidence

A majority of participants (9/15) described translation as a “safety net” that reduces anxiety and increases confidence, especially when learners fear misunderstanding complex content. Students explained that translation provides reassurance and helps them persist during difficult tasks, which can increase participation and willingness to engage. P2 stated, “If I know I can translate when needed, I feel more confident and less stressed,” and P13 similarly noted that translation helps them continue learning by reducing fear of misunderstanding. At the same time, a small group (3/15) warned that excessive comfort with translation may reduce the effort to think directly in English, as expressed by P15: “Sometimes translation makes you comfortable, and you stop pushing yourself to think in English.” This theme indicates that translation can reduce affective barriers, but students themselves recognize the risk of dependency.

8.6 Theme 6: Main challenges—idioms, culture-specific meanings, and pragmatic nuance

The most consistent difficulty reported across interviews concerned idioms, culture-specific expressions, and pragmatic nuance. Most participants (13/15) stated that these expressions often lack direct equivalents and that literal translation may preserve words while losing tone, intention, or cultural acceptability. P1 remarked, “Idioms are the hardest because Kurdish does not have the same image,” while P9 added, “Sometimes translation is correct grammatically but wrong culturally.” Many participants described having to choose between literal accuracy and communicative naturalness, indicating that effective translation-based learning depends on cultural knowledge and pragmatic sensitivity, not only vocabulary and grammar.

8.7 Theme 7: Time cost and cognitive load in advanced tasks

A considerable number of students (10/15) described translation as time-consuming, especially when dealing with long academic texts or specialized domains such as legal, medical, or media translation. Participants noted that the

time required for searching meanings and selecting accurate terminology can reduce time available for speaking and listening practice and limit overall exposure to English during busy academic periods. P5 explained, “Translation takes a lot of time... sometimes I focus on translation and ignore listening practice,” while P12 noted, “In specialized texts, I spend time searching for correct terms.” These responses suggest that translation is perceived as effective but costly, which reinforces the need for planned and selective use.

8.8 Theme 8: AI and machine translation—useful support but limited for nuance

Most participants (11/15) reported using AI or machine translation tools in both translation tasks and English learning. Students described these tools as useful for speed, general meaning, and initial drafts, but they repeatedly highlighted weaknesses in idioms, cultural nuance, tone, and context—areas that require human judgment and revision. P4 stated, “AI gives a fast translation, but I must edit it because it misses the real intention,” while P10 added, “For academic terms it helps, but for idioms it fails.” Several participants also explained that the learning value depends on whether students critically evaluate and revise AI output; as P7 put it, “If I copy AI translation, I learn less. If I compare and correct it, I learn more.” This theme indicates that technology can support learning when used critically, but it can reduce learning when used as a shortcut.

8.9 Theme 9: Conditions for effective translation-based learning

Participants consistently emphasized that translation is most beneficial when used purposefully and integrated with other learning activities rather than replacing them. The most frequent conditions identified were gradual progression from simple to complex tasks (12/15), bidirectional translation practice (10/15), ongoing teacher feedback (11/15), integration with speaking and listening practice (9/15), and prioritizing meaning and context rather than word-for-word mapping (13/15). P3 stated, “Translation is best when it is planned... start simple then increase difficulty,” P8 emphasized the role of feedback by saying, “Feedback is important; otherwise I repeat mistakes,” and P14 concluded, “Translation should support learning, but speaking practice must be continuous.” These responses collectively define a practical “balanced framework” grounded in student experience.

8.10 Summary of findings aligned with the research questions

In relation to benefits (RQ1), participants perceived translation as supporting comprehension (13/15), vocabulary development (12/15), and

grammatical awareness (11/15), with reported improvement in reading (12/15) and writing (10/15), as well as affective benefits such as reduced anxiety and greater confidence (9/15). In relation to challenges (RQ2), the dominant difficulties involved idioms, cultural meanings, and pragmatic nuance (13/15), alongside the risk of slowed speaking and increased reliance on the first language when translation is overused (8/15), and the time cost of translation in advanced tasks (10/15). In relation to effective conditions (RQ3), students emphasized planned and selective use, progression, feedback, and integration with communicative practice, indicating that translation is most effective as a scaffold within a broader learning approach rather than as the sole learning route.

9. Discussion

9.1 Overview of the main findings

The results show that translation is most helpful when it operates as a supportive scaffold within undergraduate translation education rather than as a substitute for broader English learning practices.

Students consistently linked translation to stronger comprehension, richer vocabulary learning, and clearer grammatical awareness, but they also warned that excessive reliance can slow spontaneous speaking and increase dependence on the first language. Taken together, these findings favor a balanced approach in which translation supports learning goals while communicative practice, exposure to English input, and guided writing remain central components of development (Hall & Cook, 2012; Brown, 2014; Cook, 2010).

9.2 Translation, comprehension, and form–meaning mapping

Participants repeatedly described translation as a way to “secure meaning” before progressing to higher-level tasks such as summarizing, discussion, or writing. This aligns with cognitive accounts suggesting that L2 learners naturally draw on their first language to organize new information and reduce processing difficulty, especially when texts are conceptually dense or culturally loaded (Cook, 2010). In practice, translating requires learners to connect source-language meaning to English lexical and grammatical choices, which supports form–meaning mapping and encourages deeper comprehension. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that translation-based tasks promote retention when learners must make

deliberate lexical and grammatical decisions rather than relying on surface recognition (Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Liao, 2006).

9.3 Vocabulary development and grammatical awareness through contrastive noticing

Students' accounts suggest that translation supports vocabulary development not only by providing equivalents, but by forcing attention to usage, collocation, and contextual meaning. This supports research showing that translation activities can be particularly effective when they involve active manipulation, comparison, and meaningful use rather than simple lookup (Laufer & Girsai, 2008). In addition, learners described translation as a trigger for grammatical noticing, because it makes differences between Kurdish/Arabic and English visible during production. This aligns with cross-linguistic influence research indicating that learners may reduce recurring errors when they are guided to notice structural contrasts and receive corrective feedback (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Importantly, the reported role of feedback matters because without correction learners may stabilize inaccurate mappings in areas such as tense/aspect, articles, and prepositions, which are known to be sensitive to cross-linguistic differences (Ellis, 2015; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

9.4 Reading and writing gains, alongside a fluency cost in speaking

The findings suggest that translation supports reading comprehension and writing preparation more consistently than it supports speaking fluency. Students often described translation as helpful in decoding complex texts and organizing ideas for writing, yet many also reported that speaking becomes slower when translation becomes the default mental route for production. This pattern reflects a common tension: translation can strengthen accuracy and monitoring, but it may reduce automaticity and speed in spontaneous output if learners continuously “think in L1 first” (Brown, 2014). From an input-oriented perspective, translation may assist comprehension and noticing, but it should not reduce time spent on direct engagement with English input or opportunities to practice meaning-to-English speaking and listening (Krashen, 1985; Hall & Cook, 2012). Accordingly, the findings support a staged use of translation that protects fluency by requiring follow-up communicative practice.

9.5 Idioms, culture, identity, and conceptual gaps as the central difficulty

The strongest difficulty reported by participants concerned idioms, culture-specific meanings, and pragmatic nuance, which reinforces that translation is not only lexical substitution. Effective translation requires sensitivity to context, intention, and audience effect, and these factors become especially important when no direct equivalence exists across languages (Pöchhacker, 2010; Ismail, 2023). Regional scholarship further supports this point: work on identity markers highlights how translation choices shape cultural stance and social meaning, which learners may overlook when they rely on literal mapping (Agha, 2025). Likewise, research on conceptual differences shows that translation often operates at a conceptual level rather than word-for-word, explaining why culturally embedded expressions are difficult for students even when their grammatical knowledge is strong (Shahadha, 2025). These findings suggest that translation tasks in undergraduate translation education should be treated as interpretive and culturally informed activities, not merely linguistic exercises (Ismail, 2023; Agha, 2025; Shahadha, 2025).

9.6 Learner decision-making between semantic and communicative priorities

Students' descriptions indicate that they often shift between prioritizing precision and prioritizing naturalness, which parallels Newmark's distinction between semantic and communicative orientations (Newmark, 1988). When learners aim for precise contextual meaning, they move toward a semantic tendency, whereas when they aim for readability and audience effect, they move toward a communicative tendency. This matters in undergraduate translation education because students are training for professional judgment: they need explicit guidance on when to prioritize meaning accuracy and when to prioritize reader impact, depending on text type and purpose (Newmark, 1988).

9.7 AI and machine translation: useful assistance, limited reliability for nuance

Participants' experience with AI tools reflects a realistic picture: technology can speed up draft production and provide general meaning, yet it is less dependable for idioms, tone, and culturally appropriate expression. This aligns with regional discussion highlighting that AI output may appear fluent but still require human judgment for pragmatic and culturally accurate meaning transfer (Mohamedamin, 2026). Students also described a learning trade-off: passive acceptance of AI output may reduce learning, whereas critical comparison and revision can enhance metalinguistic awareness and decision-making. This supports the broader argument that translation contributes to learning most when it requires reflection, evaluation, and justification of choices (Tsagari & Floros, 2013; Ismail, 2023).

9.8 Pedagogical implications for undergraduate (BA) translation programs

The findings point to clear instructional implications: translation should be integrated as a structured scaffold with gradual task progression, explicit objectives, and consistent feedback. Bidirectional translation practice, glossary-building, and post-translation reflection can deepen vocabulary knowledge and grammatical awareness, while required communicative follow-ups (summaries, discussions, short presentations, listening tasks) help protect fluency and reduce habitual dependence on L1 mediation (Laufer & Girsai, 2008; Hall & Cook, 2012; Brown, 2014). In addition, instruction should explicitly target idioms, pragmatic meaning, identity markers, and conceptual differences because these were the most reported obstacles and are central to professional translation competence (Agha, 2025; Shahadha, 2025). Finally, AI tools should be used under a critical framework that turns tool output into a basis for analysis and revision rather than a shortcut (Mohamedamin, 2026; Tsagari & Floros, 2013).

9.9 Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be considered. The sample was small and drawn from a single BA program, so findings may not generalize to other contexts. In addition, the study relies on self-reported perceptions rather than direct performance measures such as pre/post testing, classroom observation, or graded translation products. Future research could triangulate interview data with translation-task samples, classroom observation, and language proficiency measures, and could compare different institutions or proficiency levels to

determine whether the impact of translation varies by skill area, text type, and learner background (Ellis, 2015; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Recommendations

1. **Use translation as a scaffold, not a default route.** Plan translation as an initial support for comprehension and accuracy, then move quickly to English-only tasks such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and guided writing to avoid dependence.
2. **Sequence translation tasks from simple to complex.** Begin with short, controlled texts and gradually expand to longer and specialized genres so translation supports learning without consuming practice time.
3. **Require bidirectional translation with short reflection.** Use English→Kurdish/Arabic to secure meaning and Kurdish/Arabic→English to strengthen production, followed by brief reflection on grammar and vocabulary choices to deepen noticing.
4. **Teach idioms, pragmatic meaning, and cultural concepts explicitly.** Use targeted activities that compare literal and communicative renderings to address the most frequent learning difficulty and improve pragmatic accuracy.
5. **Protect speaking fluency through mandatory communicative follow-ups.** After translation work, include short speaking/listening tasks (oral summaries, role-plays, mini-presentations) to reduce mental translation habits and build automaticity.

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دور الترجمة في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة حالة نوعية لخريجي بكالوريوس الترجمة من جامعة جيهان – السليمانى

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المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة النوعية إلى استكشاف كيفية توظيف الترجمة بوصفها استراتيجية تعلم مساندة في تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية لدى خريجي بكالوريوس الترجمة في جامعة جيهان-السليمانية. جُمعت البيانات خلال العام الدراسي 2024-2025 عبر مقابلات منظّمة مع خمسة عشر خريجاً من خريجي دراسة بكالوريوس الترجمة واعتمدت الدراسة علي التحليل النوعي الموضوعي لاستخلاص المحاور الرئيسة المتعلقة بالفوائد المتصوّرة، والتحديات، وشروط الاستعمال الفعّال. أظهرت النتائج أن توظيف مهام الترجمة بصورة مخططة ومتدرجة يمكن أن يسهم في تنمية المفردات، وتعزيز الوعي النحوي، وتحسين الفهم القرائي، من خلال ربط المعنى في اللغة المصدر ببنية التعبير في اللغة الهدف، وفي المقابل، أشار المشاركون إلى أن الإفراط في الاعتماد على الترجمة قد يبيطئ التحدث التلقائي، ويزيد الارتكان إلى اللغة الأولى، ويصعّب التعامل مع التعابير الاصطلاحية والعناصر الثقافية، وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الترجمة تكون أكثر فاعلية عندما تستعمل بوصفها دعامة تعليمية إلى جانب الممارسة التواصلية والمدخلات اللغوية المكثفة ومهام الكتابة، لا بوصفها منهجاً وحيداً للتعلّم، مع تقديم إرشادات تطبيقية لدمجها في مقررات تعلم الإنجليزية داخل أقسام الترجمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة، تعلّم اللغة الإنجليزية، بيداغوجيا الترجمة، خريجو بكالوريوس الترجمة، التحليل الموضوعاتي.