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?
danger! ignorance on the road
خطر! حفر في الطريق
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.

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

**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.

\[
\text{MCS} = \frac{\# \text{ mistakes corrected}}{\# \text{ of mistakes identified}} - \text{penalty}
\]
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>MSC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post advanced</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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.