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Approaching Task-Based Activities to Improve EFL Students' Translation Competence

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Abstract

Although many translation studies have been conducted, the combination of translation studies orienting to the translation process and translation training is still rare. This study aimed to discover the development of translation processes in EFL students' cognition during translation practice after they had been trained in translation theories through task-based activities. The research subject was 19 students who participated in the previous study conducted by Suyasa *et al.* (2022). The data were collected using three instruments, namely the researcher, translation tests, and questionnaires The data were analyzed based on the perspective of the translation process model proposed by Bell (1991), and were compared with the data taken from the previous study. The results of the analyses showed that after applying task-based activities in a translation classroom, there were significant improvements in the participants' cognitive processes during translation practice. The phenomenon implies that the adoption of task-based activities in translation training is able to give positive effects on students' cognitive process during translation practice, and in turn improve students' translation competence.

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1. Introduction

A study conducted by Suyasa *et al.* (2022) shows that there are many errors in EFL students' translation from L2 to their L1. They state that the errors conducted by EFL students shown in their translation are not only caused by the low level of EFL students' foreign language proficiency but also by their ignorance of the translation theory, especially translation process theory. Based on the research done on 27 EFL students at Ganesha University of Education, it is shown that the EFL students tended not to do thinking processes appropriately during translation practice.

Consequently, the language structures in their translation were difficult to understand. Most of their translation results even do not convey the meaning and message contained in the source text.

The study also shows that some respondents who have done some thinking processes that are in line with the cognitive process model proposed by Bell (1991) were able to yield better translation results compared to the respondents who have not done appropriate thinking processes during the translation practice. In addition, some respondents who had lower TOEFL-like scores but did more cognitive processes were able to get higher scores for their translation results than those having higher TOEFL-like scores but did not do cognitive processes appropriately. This implies that foreign language proficiency alone will not guarantee someone to be able to yield an appropriate translation. In other words, it shows that the knowledge of translation process theory is an important factor in translation practice. Thus, it cannot be underestimated in translation training (cf. Karimnia, 2012; Coban, 2015).

On the other hand, Silva and Fernandes (2016) argue that task-based activities are quite effective in improving the students' competence in translation. They state that participatory translation activities successfully develop critical thinking, and help students to produce better-elaborated target text, abilities believed to play a significant role in translators' education. The results of the research done by Suyasa *et al.* (2022) and the statement proposed by Silva and Fernandes (2016) lead us to some questions that are (1) how if the EFL students, who did not do appropriate cognitive processes during the translation, are taught the translation theory using the task-based method; (2) What cognitive processes are shown during the translation practice after they have been taught translation process theory; and (3) will the they show translation competence improvement after they are taught translation theory through task-based activities?

2. Material and Method

Materials

According to Bell (1991), to yield a good translation, a translator should do appropriate cognitive processes during translation practice. In this case, his model has two cognitive process phases: the analysis and synthesis phases. The analysis phase includes syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic analysis. After the three analyses have been carried out, a translator will get the semantic representation. The semantic representation can be revised, if necessary, in the idea organizer. If a translator wants to revise the semantic representation s/he gets, s/he should go back to the phase of analyses. The decision to translate the semantic representation is in the planner stage. Once the decision has been made up, s/he could do the next phase, namely the synthesis phase. The synthesis phase begins with the pragmatic synthesis in the target language, which is then followed by the semantic synthesis in the target language, and finally, the syntactic synthesis in the target language to produce an acceptable and grammatical translation in the target language (see Suyasa *et al.*, 2022).

On the other hand, Newmark (1988) proposes translation procedures that can help a translator to coup with the problems faced during translation practice. The procedures involve transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, sift, modulation, recognized translation, translation label, compensation, componential analysis, reduction and expansion, paraphrase, couplets, notes, additions, and glosses. He states that these procedures can be applied to translation units. Thus, these procedures can be used to deal with word, phrase, clause, or even sentence level in translation. Therefore, it is reasonable to combine these procedures with the model of the translation process by Bell (1991), especially in the synthesis phase. In this study, these procedures were also used to give some information related to cognitive processes done by the participants during translation practice, especially in syntactic synthesis.

The task-based method, emerging originally in foreign language teaching, is a method that gives tasks or activities in a classroom to be done by learners to comprehend, manipulate, produce, and interact in the target language. In this case, the learners are encouraged to focus on using their language knowledge to convey meaning rather than the form (Nunan, 1989). Similarly, Branden (2006) states that the task-based teaching method is a teaching model that gives some activities to learners to gain a particular goal, and the focus of the activities is on the language function, not the form. In addition, tasks given to learners can be used not only for teaching and assessing language but also for researching the process of learning (cf. Ahmadian, 2016). In relation to translation study in which the trends give more weight to the meaning than the form (see Munday, 2001), it implies that the task-based teaching method will give some benefits to translation practice as well as translation study.

Branden (2006) also states that the task given to the learners could be everything as long as the task can integrate the language use in its accomplishment. Whereas, Wilis and Wilis (2007) state that every topic can be set as a task, and one of the teachers' roles is to choose a particular task that can motivate the learners to improve their communicative competence. These imply that a task out of language topic that can incorporate language use in its accomplishment can be used in the learning process. Further, Willis (1996) as cited by Celik (2017) suggests three stages in task-based learning, namely pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. In the first stage, the pre-task stage, the teacher introduces the topic and teaches some words or phrases in order to give students a better understanding of the task instructions. In the second stage, namely the task-cycle stage, the learners are required to use the target language in performing the task. In the third stage, the language focus stage, the teacher and the learners discuss the language used. In this stage, the learners are required to make self-reflection to get a better understanding for making corrections in the next task.

In the field of translation study, Silva and Fernandes (2016) propose a translation task-based activity that focuses on cultural-specific items. The translation task consisted of three different types of text, namely literal text, receipt, and poem. All of the texts involve food items. Based on the research, they show that giving translation tasks in group discussion is a more valuable activity than giving the task individually. Group discussion activities can enable the students to reflect upon and verbalize the translation process. In turn, the students can improve their translation competence. In addition, they also state that from the translation pedagogical perspective, the use of language in discussion could utilize both L1 and L2 as tools to develop translation competence. It is logically acceptable because translation training will have some discussions on at least two different languages. Thus, group discussion activity is adopted in this research because it is in line with the focus of this research, in which the EFL students are encouraged to improve their awareness of the translation theory that they have had in the discussions with their peers.

Method

This research is the continuation of the research done by Suyasa *et al*. (2022). As stated before, they had shown the relation between translation processes done by 27 EFL students and their translation results, which in turn came up with the conclusion that the awareness of translation process theory, shown in their questionnaire answers, plays an important role in the production of an appropriate target text. In this study, those participants who showed unawareness of translation theory were given an explanation of translation theories, especially the translation process model proposed by Bell (1991) as cited by Suyasa *et al.* (2022), and translation procedures by Newmark (1988) through the adoption of task-based teaching method. After that, those participants were given the same translation tests in order to find out the effectiveness of the task-based teaching method in improving the students' awareness of translation theories and the improvement of the student's

competence in translating English texts into Indonesian texts. The participants in this study were 19 students out of 27 students who participated in the previous study. Those were the participants who did not do appropriate cognitive processes during the translation practice in the previous study.

In this study, the participants were trained for eight meetings. Each meeting was conducted once a week for 100 minutes. In the first meeting, they were explained about the translation theories, especially the model of translation process proposed by Bell (1991). The second week was used to introduce translation procedures proposed by Newmark (1988) to the participants. In the third and the fourth meetings, they were given an analysis task. In this case, they were divided into groups consisting of three students. They were asked to conduct syntaxis, semantic, and pragmatic analyses on an English text in each meeting. Then, one of the groups presented the results of their analyses in front of the class followed by a discussion by the all participants in the class. The goal of this task is to stimulate the participants to reveal the semantic representation of the texts given before translating the text into the target language. In the fifth and sixth meetings, they were asked to translate the texts given in the previous meetings. They were encouraged to conduct the analysis phase and synthesis phase during the translation practice. In addition, they were also encouraged to use translation procedures in the synthesis phase. After accomplishing the translation task, they were asked to present the results of their translation in front of the class and to state the reason for their translation based on the phases they had done.

The texts given in delivering task-based activities were extracted from the same source and the same unit as the texts given in the test conducted by Suyasa *et al*. (2022), namely texts provided in the 27 impressions of the English course book by Alexander (1975/2012). The choice of the texts was based on the explanation from the book, namely texts in the same unit put forward some similar difficulties. Thus, it was assumed that the texts used for delivering task-based activities would have some similar characteristics to the texts used for the translation test. The first text in delivering task-based activities was the fourth text in unit one. The text talks about the uncommon ability of a girl in the Soviet Union. The second text was the fifth text in unit one. The text talks about gorillas. All of the texts are informative texts. Meanwhile, the texts used for the test in this study were the same texts used in the previous study by Suyasa *et al.* (2022), namely the first and the second texts in unit one. So that, the improvement of cognitive processes and translation competence could be described.

In relation to the cognitive processes during translation practice, the questionnaire used by Suyasa *et al.* (2022) was adopted in this study with some additional questions to get better information. There were six open questions in the questionnaire. Thus, the questions in the questionnaire in this study involved questions related to (1) the first activity they did after they had received the source text; (2) the problems faced during the translation process; (3) the means they used to solve the problems; (4) the identification of the coherence in the source text; (5) the identification of potential readers of their translation; (6) the translation procedures they used during translation practice. The answers to the questionnaire of every participant were analyzed based on the translation process model proposed by Bell (1991) and then compared to their previous answer. So, the development of the student's cognitive processes during translation practice was able to be described.

The focus of this study, however, is not the way and the process of task-based activities in the class, but the cognitive processes of the participants during translation practice after they have known translation theories. Thus, the data in this study were collected in the last two weeks, namely in the seventh and the eighth meetings respectively. In each period, the participants were given a translation test and a questionnaire respectively. Their answers to the questionnaire were analyzed in order to find out their cognitive processes during translation practice based on Bell's cognitive process model. The results of their translation were analyzed to provide the triangulation to the answers to the questionnaire. In addition, the analyzed translation results were also compared to the

translation results of the previous study in order to show the improvement of their translation competence.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

The results of the analyses can be seen in Table 1. The first column shows the total number of the participants. The second column until the seventh column shows the cognitive processes of the participants before the application of task-based activity. It is divided into two phases, namely analysis and synthesis phases. The analysis phase is divided again into three smaller phases, namely syntactic analysis, semantic analysis, and pragmatic analysis. In the same way, the synthesis phase is divided again into smaller phases, namely pragmatic synthesis, semantic synthesis, and syntactic synthesis. As stated before, the data in the second until the seventh column are extracted from the previous study by Suyasa *et al.* (2022). The symbol '-' is used to show that there was nothing happening in the participants' cognitive process during the translation practice. Whereas, the symbol '√' is used to show that a specific phase happened in the cognitive process of the participants during the translation practice. The eighth column to the thirteenth column shows the cognitive processes of the participants after they have known translation theories through task-based activities.

Table 1
Participants' Cognitive Processes During Translation Practice

	Before task-based activities						After task-based activities					
Participants	Analysis			Synthesis			Analysis			Synthesis		
	Syn.	Sem.	Prag.	Prag.	Sem.	Syn.	Syn.	Sem.	Prag.	Prag.	Sem.	Syn.
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
2	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
3	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
4	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
5	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
7	-	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
8	√	√	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
9	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
10	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
11	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	-
12	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
13	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
14	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
15	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
16	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
17	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
18	√	√	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√
19	√	-	-	-	-	-	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 1 shows that all participants were able to develop their awareness of translation theories. Their cognitive processes during the translation practice after they had had some knowledge of translation theories showed some improvement. The answers of the first question in the questionnaire showed that all participants reported that they had read the whole text before they translated the text. The answers to the second question in the questionnaire showed that all participants had done some syntactic analyses in that they reported some problems above the word level. It implies that they had parsed some sentences during translation practice. The answers to the third question in the questionnaire showed that all participants reported that they used a monolingual dictionary. It implies that they had done some semantic analyses to some extent. The answers to the fourth question showed that all participants had identified the coherence of the source text. It implies that they had done some pragmatic analyses. Based on the answers to the first and the fourth questions in the questionnaire, all participants showed that they started to activate their cognitive process of analysis phase during the translation practice.

In terms of the synthesis phase, the answers to the fifth question in the questionnaire showed that all participants had had some consideration related to the potential readers of their translation. It indicated that the pragmatic synthesis started working in their cognitive process. The answers to the sixth question showed that most participants had applied some translation procedures during the translation practice. This indicated that semantic synthesis had been initiated in their cognitive process during translation practice. In addition, some procedures applied on the clause or sentence level showed that the participant had done syntactic synthesis to some extent. In this case, the sift in the level of a particular phrase, namely a noun phrase, was not considered as syntactic synthesis. The change of structure in such phrases should happen automatically because of the different rule that governs the noun phrase structures in English and Indonesian language (see Newmark, 1988).

Discussions

As seen in Table 1, there are six participants who showed improvement in the cognitive process related to syntactic analysis. It was proved by their answers to question number two in the questionnaire. They reported some problems above the word level, namely phrases and clauses with correct structures. It implied that they had succeeded to parse the translation units in the source text to some extent. Thus, it is reasonable to consider that they have done syntactic analysis. The judgment of whether the participants had done this type of cognitive process during the translation practice was not only based on the analysis results of their answers to the questions in the questionnaire but also built upon the analyses conducted on their translation products. It can be seen in Table 2 in the following.

Table 2
Translation Example by the Participant 6

Source Text	Previous Translation	After Task-based
Spiders are not insects, as many people think, nor even related to them. One can tell the difference almost at a glance for a spider always has eight legs and an insect never more than six.	*Laba-laba bukanlah serangga, seperti yang banyak orang pikirkan, bahkan tidak berhubungan dengan serangga. Orang bisa mengatakan perbedaan hampir pada pandangan sekilas, untuk laba-laba selalu memiliki delapan kaki dan*	*Laba-laba bukanlah serangga, seperti yang banyak orang kira, bahkan tidak ada hubungannya. Seseorang bisa mengatakan perbedaannya dengan cepat, karena laba-laba selalu memiliki delapan kaki dan*

	serangga tidak pernah lebih dari enam kaki	*serangga tidak pernah lebih dari enam kaki.*

It is seen from Table 2 that before the participants had been introduced to the translation theories, he translated the conjunction 'for' in the source text with the word '*untuk*' in the target text. Actually, the word in the target text is the equivalence of the preposition 'for' in English. So, this mistranslation showed that the participants had not done syntactic analysis before he translated the source text. After the application of task-based activities, however, he translated such a word with '*karena*' in the target text. This word is the precise equivalence of the conjunction 'for' in the Indonesian language. This phenomenon is in line with Bell's (1991) statement in which, the syntactic analysis can be used as the input for doing semantic analysis. After the application of task-based activities, the participant was able to determine the word class of 'for' in the target text, so he could choose the correct equivalence in the target text. Thus, the results of his translation is in line with his answers in the questionnaire for the second question. In addition, it implies that the misjudgment of the word class of a specific word used in a source text could lead a translator to incorrect semantic analysis, which in turn could yield inappropriate translation.

In relation to semantic analysis, all participants reported that they used a monolingual dictionary. As stated by Suyasa *et al.* (2022), the use of a monolingual dictionary could lead the participants to find out the definition of the words or phrases used in the source text not the equivalence of the words or phrases, which in many cases could lead the user to inappropriate translation results, provided in a bilingual dictionary. In other words, the use of monolingual dictionaries during translation practice could enforce the cognitive process of the users in terms of semantic analysis. However, the semantic analysis of the cognitive process of the participants by using monolingual dictionaries will not guarantee perfect translation results. As seen from the participants' translation results, some mistakes related to translation as science (see Newmark, 1988) still happened. However, by using monolingual dictionaries they were able to yield better translation results. It was seen from the frequency of mistakes in terms of translation as science. Their translation results after the application of the task-based teaching method showed fewer mistakes than their translation results before. Thus, it is reasonable to consider that the participants began to activate their cognitive process in terms of semantic analysis consciously during a translation practice after they had been taught translation theories through task-based activities.

In pragmatic analysis, all participants showed some development in their cognitive process. In this case, they reported that they paid attention to the use of pronouns in the source texts. They tried to find the antecedents of the pronouns. It was also supported by their translation products. One example of their translation products can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Translation Example by the Participant 1

Source Text	Previous Translation	After Task-based Activities
These legends are useful because <u>they</u> can tell us something about migrations of people who lived long ago, but none could write down what <u>they</u> did.	*Legenda-legenda ini sangat berguna karena <u>mereka</u> bisa memberikan kita informasi tentang migrasi manusia purba, tetapi sayangnya tidak ada yang bisa*	*Legenda-legenda ini sangat berguna karena <u>legenda-legenda tersebut</u> dapat memberikan kita informasi tentang perpindahan manusia zaman dahulu, walaupun tidak ada yang dapat*

	menceritakan bagaimana <u>mereka</u> bermigrasi.	*menuliskan bagaimana <u>mereka</u> bermigrasi.*

Based on Table 3, it appears that the two words 'they' in the source text were translated differently by the participant after he had known translation theories given through task-based activities. This showed that he had begun to realize that the antecedents of the two words 'they' in the source texts were different. Whereas, in the previous study, it appears that the two words 'they' in the source text were translated with the same form, namely *'mereka'* in the target text. The word made readers need some effort to understand the antecedents. It is because in the Indonesian language, the word *'mereka'* usually refers to persons, not inanimate objects. In short, the translation results after the application of task-based activities are easier to understand. In other words, the cognitive process of the participant in relation to pragmatic analysis had begun to come up to some extent as he showed the coherence of the text clearly.

Further, Table 1 also shows some developments in the cognitive processes of the participants in the synthesis phase. In pragmatic synthesis, all participants reported that they were thinking of the potential readers of their translation products based on their guesses of the potential readers of the source text during translation practice. This showed that they no longer thought that translation practice was only a task given by a lecturer. In other words, they started to think that potential readers of their translated texts might have different educational backgrounds and ages compared to the lecturer. This implies that they started to understand a particular purpose in translating a text. In addition, by thinking of the potential readers of the source text, a translator is pushed to provide some variations. Then s/he could choose a particular translation based on the potential readers in her or his mind. If the potential readers of the source text and target text are equal, the language style can follow the language style in the source text. However, if it is different, a translator must be able to adjust it according to potential readers of the target text. It is the adjustment based on pragmatic consideration, and it is involved in pragmatic synthesis. Thus, based on the answers of the participants to the fifth question on the questionnaire given during translation practice, it could be said that this thinking process began to exist in the participants' cognition during translation practice after they acquired translation theories given through task-based activities. In short, this shows that they have started to activate pragmatic synthesis in their cognition during translation practice.

In semantic synthesis, all participants reported that they checked some common words usually used in a particular context using a monolingual dictionary and Google search machine. Some of them also reported that they tried to read all of the definitions provided in the dictionary they used and then chose one of the definitions based on the context. If they still did not understand or were not certain about the reference of a particular word or phrase in the source text, they tried to find out the information using Google search machine and sometimes using images provided by Google. Those kinds of answers by the participants were also supported by their translation results. For example, in the previous study, the phrase 'ancient men' was translated into '*lelaki modern'* by some participants. The translation refers to a specific gender in the target language, namely 'male', whereas the source text uses the word 'men' to refer to both male and female. After the application of task-based activities, however, the participants were successful in translating the phrase into *'manusia modern'* which can include semantic features (see Kreidler, 1998) of the phrase in the source text.

Another example showed that some participants were able to apply antonym procedure (cf. Newmark, 1988) in the target text. It can be seen from Table 4. It appears in the previous translation that the target text by the participants conveys a different meaning from the source text. The use of the past form of the word 'lived' in the source text was translated literally in the target text. It made the meaning different. In the source text, the past form used shows that the event has completely happened in the past, whereas, in the target text the meaning entails an event which has incompletely

happened and it is still lasting now, namely 'the first people like us are still alive now'. After the application of task-based activities, however, the participant was able to translate the sentence appropriately in the target text by using the antonym procedure, namely translating the word 'live' into '*tiada'* instead of '*hidup'*. The word '*tiada'* includes the semantic feature of the meaning of the source text.

Table 4
Translation by Participants 14

Source Text	Previous Translation	After Task-based Activities
But the first people who were like ourselves lived so long ago that even their sagas, if they had any, are forgotten.	*Tetapi orang pertama yang seperti kita hidup sejak dahulu kala sehingga kisah-kisah mereka, jika ada, di lupakan.*	*Tetapi orang pertama yang mirip dengan kita sudah tiada sejak dahulu kala sehingga kisah-kisah mereka, jika ada, sudah terlupakan.*

In the syntactic synthesis, it is seen that there were four participants who showed no development in the syntactic synthesis. Nonetheless, the other participants showed some development in their cognitive process in terms of syntactic synthesis during translation practice. Some participants reported that they had used the transposition procedure proposed by Newmark (1988). As this procedure deals with the structure of the languages involved in the translation practice, the use of this structure shows that there will be some syntactic synthesis in her or his cognitive process during translation practice. The answers to the questionnaire by the participants were also clearly supported by their translation. One of the examples can be seen from the translation by participant number 4, in which he changed the position of a particular grammatical word in a sentence. In this case, he changed the position of the coordinating conjunction 'however' in the sentence 'Fortunately, however, ancient men made tools of stone, especially flint, because this is easier to shape than other kinds' to the beginning of the sentence in the target text. The position of the conjunction in the initial sentence is governed clearly in the Indonesian language (see Alwi, *et al.*, 2003). Thus, it is reasonable to state that most participants have started to activate syntactic synthesis in their cognitive process during translation practice. Thus, all of the cognitive processes shown by the participants during the translation practice indicated that they had begun to consider that translation was not just the activity of changing the source language into the target language.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions that have been presented, there are three points that can be stated here. First, the EFL students, who did not do appropriate cognitive processes during the translation in the previous study, showed some development in their cognitive processes after they had been taught the translation theory using the task-based method. Second, after they had been taught translation process theory through task-based activities, the two phases, namely the analysis and synthesis phases, in the translation model proposed by Bell (1998) were active in the participants' cognition during the translation practice. However, there were four out of twenty-one participants who could not activate all phases during the translation practice. Finally, the development of participants' cognitive processes is in line with the improvement of their translation competence. In short, it can be stated that the task-based teaching method can have a positive effect in improving EFL students' translation competence.

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