

Lost in Translation: Thinking in First Language and Writing in Target Language.

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The role of first language in target language writing is a topic discussed in Teaching English as a Second Language. The objective of this study is to explore how to overcome the problem of direct transfer of first language to target language, paying attention to the meaning of vocabulary using prefixes in writing sentences. The theoretical framework is the morphological awareness, the ability to reflect on and manipulate the morpheme - the smallest unit of meaning in words in developing English vocabulary. This study was conducted as an action research with qualitative and quantitative data. The sample was thirty undergraduates following English medium lectures, with a low proficiency level in English. A questionnaire was administered along with a Pre-test. Pre-test results showed that the undergraduates had a poor knowledge of sentence formation using prefixes. After teaching prefixes they were tested on sentence formation using prefixes and feedback was given. The process was followed five times using different prefixes. A post-test was administered and semi structured interviews were conducted to ascertain their background. The Post test results indicated a significant improvement. Interviews with them revealed they constructed sentences in the first language and word to word translation into the target language, ignoring the grammar rules of the target language. The study discovered the limited vocabulary and insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules and structures hinder formation of grammatically correct meaningful sentences. The findings also indicated that most of the undergraduates did not have the morphological knowledge which helps in analysing words and writing grammatically correct sentences. In conclusion, the findings imply a need to give more emphasis to increase morphological knowledge and meanings of vocabulary as well as teaching the importance of correct translations showing the difference between the SVO order of the first language and the target language spending more time on focusing on the error prone areas.

Keywords: English, First language, Target language, Transfer, Vocabulary