

Simen Klausen

Bachelor's thesis

An investigation into the usage of translation in English textbooks used in Norwegian schools after the 2020 Curriculum.

June 2022

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1. Introduction

Translation as a tool for language acquisition has had a varying degree of prominence. From being the dominant form before the twentieth century to becoming “viewed with suspicion by language teachers and many” (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p. 569). This frowning upon the role of translation in education is an example of the contested nature surrounding which technique is best suited for learners to learn a new language. This frowning upon the role of translation is challenged by some academics such as Guy Cook (2010), who writes that “There are powerful forces in favor of translation, and have made monoculturalism insecure..” (p.156). This shift started in the early 21st century, and the Norwegian government updated the curriculum in 2020, which opens an opportunity to explore the role that translation has in the curriculum now. For this the studying of the new English textbooks for different grades is suitable. It is reasonable to assume that the content of the textbooks influence the way English is taught in many classrooms in Norway, and therefore the role that translation is given in these textbooks can say something about how translation is used in the classrooms. The central question that this text will answer is: how much focus is given to translation as a tool for learning a second language in the Norwegian English textbooks, and does the degree of translation change once the student progresses through the grades and become more proficient?

The context for this investigation is twofold, with the comeback of translation in the last twenty years in foreign language acquisition circles, which will be explained in the next part, being the first reason while the new curriculum from 2020 is the second. The new curriculum (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019) has a possibility of having been influenced by the new trend mentioned earlier, in which this investigation will try to find out.

2.

A. Translation in education

What do we mean when we talk about translation? The common understanding of the word is that one transfers meaning from one language to another. However, this is in many ways a simplified and problematic term, as there are often cases of meaning being lost between different languages. What is lost can be words or sounds which do not exist in other languages, which is often inevitable to a degree. Among the goals in translation is to reach as high possible level of equivalence as possible, with meaning from one language being transferred to another to create an equivalent meaning (Cook 2010, p. 55-56). Making equivalent translations require the learning of linguistic, grammar and cultural differences

between languages, which are valuable tools when learning another language. In other words, translation between texts can teach us valuable lessons about the relationship between our known languages and the language we are learning, especially in regard to the differences between grammar and sentence structures, which can often differ between languages.

Translation has been used as a tool for language learning to a great degree the past centuries. Originally foreign language teaching was focused on learning Latin and Greek, with the grammar-translation method creating the standard way that these languages was learned. The backlash against the grammar-translation method resulted in translation largely being abandoned, with the audio-visual method of translation becoming more popular in the later parts of the 20th century. In the past twenty years translation has once again been considered a valuable part of learning a new language (Pintado 2018, p. 220). This gives some context to the considerations that curriculum makers have made in the past, with the general trend of viewing translation in a more favourable light in the recent few decades creating a new context for the curriculum makers in 2020.

Grammar-translation method is among the most influential ways English has been taught historically but has largely fallen out of fashion. The grammar-translation method can be understood as language tool where new vocabulary is translated from the L1 (First language) to the L2 (second language), together with grammar explained in the L1 with sentences that will provide translation tasks for the students in order to work on memorising the grammar (Cook, G. 1998, p. 117). The roots of this way of learning a second language can be traced back to antiquity (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p. 563), and have dominated language learning until it became criticised during the late 19th century in what is known as the reform movement. Critics of the grammar-translation method argued that oral and phonetics development provides a better alternative to learning L2, with higher emphasis placed on the communicative models of language learning listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p. 564). This developed into the Direct Approach which became the primary approach to teaching foreign languages, and although it seems that grammar-translation would disappear from the classroom, it is still found in many textbooks (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p. 565).

Grammar-translation is not the only way that translation can be used in teaching, and translation is still viewed as a technique that can help students with learning a foreign language. The usage of translation is often not taught to the teachers that themselves will teach foreign language to their students, however translation is still serving a role as an academic field that produces theories and approaches to teaching (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p.

569-570). It is therefore important to not discredit translation even though the principles of the Direct Approach seems to be in opposition to translation.

As explained earlier, the Direct Approach emphasises that language is best taught in a monolingual manner, with only the L2 being spoken and taught in, without actively using the L1. This has not led to a flawless language learning process, and cognitive psychology has shown that the brain to a large degree utilise L1 when trying to understand L2 (Cook 2010, p. 92-95). This combined with other studies in the areas of applied linguistics and language learning has led a to translation having had a resurgence in the last twenty years. Guy Cook (2010) argue that translation has many advantages and should be to a larger degree seen as an effective way of learning a new foreign language (Cook 2010, p. 85). Among the arguments he presents is the recognition that language is learned bilingually and not only in a monolingual manner. This is evidenced in the fact that student ends up using code-switching actively in foreign language learning, and there is evidence that this is having a positive effect on the student's learning outcome (Cook 2010, p. 46-49). The fact that there are arguments for the inclusion of the L1 in foreign language classrooms are not an automatic argument for translation to become apparent again. There are practical applications of including translation into the classroom to consider, with translation being helpful with certain parts of foreign language learning as will be shown (Cook 2010, p. 52-53).

What this might mean in practice is that different types of translation tasks can be done in different ways to facilitate learning of L2. Among these activities are teaching of vocabulary. The differences between languages can be explored when trying to learn new words, and student usually end up using their L1 when trying to understand new vocabulary anyway. This is because conceptualising new vocabulary in L2, for example teaching the word knitting, is more difficult for the teacher than just including the L1 equivalent of said object (Cook 2010, p. 140-142). Another activity that can be used in the classroom is discussion of translation issues, with focus on metalinguistics and comparing grammar. Given that student usually end up code-switching and looking for equivalence in other languages, discussing the differences and loopholes when comparing languages and translating between them can be a valuable inclusion of translation into the classroom (Cook 2010, p.142-143). This is a relevant topic to teach students as there are many modern tools which can translate texts, but often manage to miss important grammar rules and sentence structuring.

B. Method

The research has been conducted by close reading the following textbooks:

- *link 4 Engelsk for barnetrinnet Workbook*, published 2020 and aimed for 4th grade
- *link 4 Engelsk for barnetrinnet Textbook*, published 2020 and aimed for 4th grade
- *enter 10*, published 2020 and aimed for 10th grade
- *enter 8-10 basic skills*, published 2020 and aimed for 8th-10th grade
- *Skills Engelsk VG1 Frisør, Blomster, Interiør og Eksponeringsdesign Håndverk, Design og Produktutvikling*, published 2020 and aimed for 11th grade student in vocationally programs for hairstyling and various forms for design.
- *E1 : fellesfaget engelsk, vg1 : studieforberedende utdanningsprogram*, published 2020 and aimed for 11th grade in general studies.

The goal was to find examples of translation being used in different tasks throughout the books. The main method employed in this study was content analysis, a common method used in textbook analysis (Weninger 2018, p. 6). The content, meaning tasks which used translation, was quantified, and analysed, with the analysis being linked to the research question of what this says about the role of translation in English lessons in Norwegian schools. The value of using textbook analysis is that the role of textbooks in the classroom is often great in that it influences how the teacher teaches the subject, with the priorities in the books reflecting the general priorities which is given to certain methods and subjects.

The research will mainly focus on textbooks from the higher grades, 10th grade and 11th grade. Therefore, I only include the 4th grade textbook to provide a limited scope in how translation is used lower grades. Two books from the 11th grade has been examined, however that is only to get see the differences between general studies and vocational studies. Another thing to note is that translations of words given in the textbooks the same way they are given in dictionaries, will not be counted as they themselves are not examples of translation being actively used in tasks to learn English. They are recognised as being examples of L1 being incorporated into L2 teaching, but not in the active task of translating as a learning method.

C. Analysis

Table 1 – Overview of the quantity of tasks

Categories	Books	Online translation	Sentence building/transalting words	Spesific grammar rules	Total number of tasks
	link 4Workbook		1		<u>1</u>
	link 4 Textbook		1		<u>1</u>
	enter 10	2	4	2	<u>8</u>
	enter 8-10		6	1	<u>7</u>
	Skills Engelsk VG1....	1	12 (words 19)	8	<u>40</u>
	E1 : fellesfaget engelsk, vg1....		2		<u>2</u>

4th grade

For 4th grade the book *link 4 Engelsk for barnetrinnet Textbook* (Mezzetti et. al. 2020a), with its accompanying workbook *link 4 Engelsk for barnetrinnet Workbook* (Mezzetti et. al. 2020b), have been analysed. The initial findings are that there is not a great deal usage of translation between Norwegian and English. There are only three tasks in the textbook, in the start of chapter two, which deal with the issues of comparison between Norwegian and English, with focus on vocabulary in both language which stems from the old Norse language (Mezzetti et. al. 2020a, p. 24-27). In the workbook there is one tasks which is related to the pages in the textbook, however the tasks are about identifying words in Norwegian and English which is imported from other language (Mezzetti et. al. 2020b, p. 19). These tasks do not deal with the matter of translation in of themselves, they do however illustrate some points where the book focuses on the bilingual aspect of language learning. There is another task in chapter 4 of the workbook where Norwegian is used, in a code quiz where the student is supposed to answer which of three options are right, with three of the questions being about the Norwegian translation of certain English words and concepts. These concepts (Mezzetti et. al. 2020b, p. 43) are:

Table 2

What is kick the can in Norwegian?	A boksen går B gjemsel C kanonball
What is hide and seek in Norwegian?	D Gjemsel E stikkball F hoppe paradis
What is “cone” in Norwegian?	M kjege N kone O fengsel

Otherwise, the book is written completely in English, with the majority of the tasks being on sentence structuring and grammar.

10th grade

For 10th grade the textbook *enter 10* (Diskin & Winsvold 2020) and an accompanying workbook *enter 8-10 Basic skills* (Diskin et al. 2020) have been analysed. In the textbook there is eleven tasks which contain elements of translation and seven tasks in the workbook. The tasks containing elements of translation in the two books can be divided into three general categories; understanding grammar by translating to another language, understanding the differences in sentence structuring and words by translating to another language and understanding how online translators work by translating yourself and comparing the results to that of an online translator. An example of each these categories:

Table 3

<p>3.5 Digital skills. Can you trust an online translator?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Write these sentences into an online translator that translates them into Norwegian or another language that you know well. Are the translations idiomatic in the other language? <i>I knew he'd played right into our hands.</i> <i>He has a very good sense of self</i> Use the suggested translation from task a in another online translator and translate the sentences back into English. Compare the results to the original sentences. Use these experiments <u>in order to</u> write the best idiomatic translation. If there is a difficult phrase in a text, which strategies can you use instead of translating word for word?

This example (Diskin & Winsvold 2020, p. 23) illustrates the tasks about the use of online translators, of which there are two tasks in the textbook.

Table 4

<p>3 Vocabulary. What is the difference between the <u>words</u> <i>imagination</i> and <i>fantasy</i>?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Write down what you believe the two words to mean. Look up a definition of each word in a dictionary Translate “use your imagination” into Norwegian. Write a sentence using <i>imagination</i> and another using <i>fantasy</i>. Write a riddle or poem using <i>fantasy</i>.

This example (Diskin & Winsvold 2020, p. 153) illustrates the tasks about the use of translation for understanding sentence building and words in English and other languages, of which there are four in the textbook and six in the workbook.

Table 5

25 Writing. The blue words in the blog are hyperlinks. Write explanations for at least three of these phrasal verbs. The explanation should include a translation into Norwegian or another language that you know well, an English definition and two example sentences using the phrasal verb. You can use an online dictionary to help you.

This task (Diskin & Winsvold 2020, p. 19) illustrate how translation is used in some tasks to teach grammar, of which there are two tasks in the textbook and one in the workbook.

11th grade Vocational Studies

For 11th grade, the book *Skills Engelsk VG1 Frisør, Blomster, Interiør og Eksponeringsdesign Håndverk, Design og Produktutvikling* (Lokøy et al. 2020) and have been analysed. The initial findings are that there are forty different tasks in the book that use translation. The tasks in the book are organised into the categories of read and understand, practise, listen, speak, write, and explore. The translation tasks all fall under the category of practice, with the main focus often being on learning the English words for relevant vocational terms. The amount of translation tasks is greater in the start, with a mix of translation of paragraphs, sentences, and vocational-specific words. These tasks do fall into the category of online translations, using translation to understand grammar and sentence building. What is also of interest in this book is the fact that almost half of the translation tasks in the book concern the topic of translating words, mostly terminology related to the vocational field this book is designed for. Example of these different categories are as follow:

Table 6

1.51 Use an online translation program, e.g. Google Translate. First translate a and b into Norwegian, then translate c and d into English.

a “I like fried eggs.” Do you agree with the translation?

b “Let’s call it a day and hit the hay.” Did it still work? Explain.

c “Han var ikke høy i hatten.» Did it work the other way? What is the problem here?

d “Reinsdyra spiser lav på vidda.» What went wrong here?

This example (Lokøy et al. 2020, p. 39) serves much of the same function as the translation task focusing on online translation from the 10th grade book. There is only one task in the book which feature this type of translation task.

Table 7

8.52 Fill in the missing words in the lines from the poem. Translate into Norwegian.	
a	you only leave home when _____ won't let you _____.
b	Who would choose _____ and nights in the _____ of a truck.
c	make a _____ camp a home for a _____ or _____ <u>or</u> _____.
d	and you are _____ on the _____ side
e	unless home _____ you to the _____.

This example (Lokøy et al. 2020, p. 376) serves much of the same function as the translation task focusing on sentence structuring as in the 10th grade book. There are a total of twelve tasks such as this in the book in total.

Table 8

3.15 Match the English words with the correct Norwegian translation.	
A eyebrow	1 <u>kjeve</u>
B eyelid	2 <u>pekefinger</u>
C earlobe	3 <u>øvebryn</u>
D cheekbone	4 <u>ankel</u>
E nostril	5 <u>hårfeste</u>
F lip	6 tommel
G jaw	7 øreflip
H hairline	8 <u>øvelokk</u>
I index finger	9 <u>håndledd</u>
J thumb	10 <u>nesebor</u>
K wrist	11 leppe
L ankle	12 kinnben

This example (Lokøy et al. 2020, p. 97) illustrate the most common sort of translation tasks found in the book, where the student is finding out what the English and Norwegian equivalent of terminology is. Most translation tasks are in this category, at nineteen in total.

Table 9

Imperative
We use the imperative form of the verb to give orders and instructions . The imperative form in English is the same as the infinitive form of the verb.
Lift the boxes carefully.
Shut up and go to bed!
20 Translate into English
a Gi meg blyanten og si meg hva jeg skal skrive
b Kjør forsiktig og vær høflig
c Spis mer vitaminer og lev sunt
d Unngå forurensing og resirkuler glass og papir

This example (Lokøy et al. 2020, p. 408) on the former page serves much of the same function as the translation task focusing on grammar rules from the 10th grade book, with the grammatical focus here being on the imperative form of verbs. There are eight of these tasks in total, and most of them are found in the back of the book where grammar rules are in focus.

11th grade General Studies

To get a wider understanding for all the students in the 11th grade, the inclusion of the English book used by those in general studies has been added. As a result of this *EI : fellesfaget engelsk, vgl : studieforberedende utdanningsprogram* (Birkeland et al. 2020) has also been analysed to see if there are any differences in the English textbooks used by vocational courses and general courses in 11th grade. The differences are apparent, as only two tasks in this book have elements of translation in them. The two tasks both deal with the issues of sentence structure in English and Norwegian, and the main educational aim of the task is to teach student the differences and similarities between the multiple languages they speak or/and study.

The first task (Birkeland et. al. 2020, p. 78) is:

Table 10

- 5 Pick one of the extracts, probably in the language that you are currently learning as a foreign language, and
- find all words or nouns that are similar to English or Norwegian
 - translate the whole text into English
 - compare your version with that of a classmate who has picked the same language
 - compare your version with the original English version on Skolestudio
 - reflect on what you found easy and difficult when reading and translating

The second task (Birkeland et. al. 2020, p. 219) is:

Table 11

- Here is a list of other proverbs in English. Translate them and find their equivalent in Norwegian
- New brooms sweep clean
 - Old brooms know the corners of the house
 - A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
 - A stitch in time saves nine
 - Finders keepers, losers weepers
 - Ignorance is bliss
 - From pillar to post

D. Discussion

The results of this small study that have been conducted, can tell us that translation indeed has a role in the English textbooks, even among older student in the last year of their English learning. The most striking feature however is the large disparity of translation tasks in the English book for 11th grade students in vocational courses, even compared to the book by the same publisher aimed at 11th grade students in general studies. And although textbooks do not necessarily shed light on the whole story of what goes on in the classroom, given the teachers autonomy (Lixian & Cortazzi 2011, p. 565), it is still valuable to understand the space translation is given in the textbooks.

In the case of the 4th grade textbook, only one part of one chapter had a task regarding the similarities between Norwegian and English, and in the workbook two tasks can be said to contain elements of translation, with one of them being linked to the textbook chapter. These two textbooks do not alone reveal if the general education in English in fourth grade is based on a monolingual strategy. Beginner learners will need to use their L1 to be introduced to and understand the new language they try to learn, however there are differences for different age groups, with young learners having other predicaments for learning languages. Young learners have an easier time adapting to new language situations, with fewer barriers to obtain an understanding of languages Stimulating for children's adaptability to new languages means that the English subject should at a young age focus much attention on creating an environment where children to a great degree use are exposed to the language in question, not necessarily through translation but through working with the language as much as possible. Form-focused translation activities should be avoided, and different learning strategies need to be in place for the age group (Cook 2010, p. 133-134). It is not necessarily the case for all student, and older learners have much more to gain from translation tasks and activities in comparison to younger learners .

In the case of the 10th grade books we see that there are more examples of translation tasks actively being used, in multiple different ways. The two tasks that teach students about online translation is a thing that separates this book from the rest, expect for the vocational textbook, and it is reasonable to assume that this is to teach the student about a tool they inevitably will end up using in some way or another. These tasks that focus on online translating can be seen as an activity where online translations are used to highlight the differences between the language's structure and meaning, much like the suggestions of Cook mentioned earlier. The most common type of translating tasks is translating sentences and words into Norwegian, which is across all the books the most standard task present. What this

could tell us about how translation is used for the 10th grade is that the tasks are designed for the student to learn the differences between how sentences are constructed in the Norwegian language and the English language, while also focusing on issues of online translation to further make students aware of awkward differences when bad translating is done. Although there are about eighteen task which contain elements of translation, the majority of the tasks use other methods of teaching English to the students.

The 11th grade English textbook for students in general studies contained only two examples of tasks which had elements of translation in them. The translation tasks which is present in the book both concern the issues of differences in words and sentences in Norwegian and English, with the first task also including a possible third language. The second task concern the differences between proverbs in Norwegian and English, where the word equivalent is used. The goal of the task is to illustrate the differences between proverbs in Norwegian and English, where translation as a method is natural to use as the issue of equivalence is central to both the task and translation as a tool. The book however cannot be said to frequently use tasks which concern the issues of translation, even though there is related vocabulary which is translated from English to Norwegian to accompany all the texts. This makes the book an example of bilingual language learning, where translation is not used much actively even though frequent use of the L1 is in form of dictionary explanations. The noticeable difference here is between the general studies and vocational studies, where the differences in translation task is big. This is noticeable, given that these are students who both are part of the same grade but not the same course.

The 11th grade English textbook for vocational students is the book that has the highest number of tasks which contained elements of translation. The first example focusing on online translation can be said to serve the same function as the similar task in the 10th grade book. There is a far deal of tasks which revolve around grammar rules and sentence structuring, which again is comparable to what we saw in the 10th grade book. The number is much greater than the general studies, which might suggest that the textbook writers see translation as a better tool for teaching English to those in vocational studies. This might stem from the fact that vocational studies are focused more on a practical approach to language learning, where the aim is to make the tasks feel relevant and problem-solving oriented (Fenner & Skulstad 2018, p. 312). This can be illustrated by the fact that the most numerous tasks that use translation is the vocabulary tasks, where the student is translating and using the relevant vocabulary for their trade.

The curriculum in English for vocational studies do differ in aims compared to those

from general studies, with a higher emphasis on being relevant for the trade they are training for. The curriculum states that among the competence aims for the vocational students is: “listen to, understand and use terminology appropriate for the trade, both orally and in writing, in work situations” (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019). The important part here is “terminology appropriate for the trade”, which can be seen in the word translation tasks where the aim is to teach the terminology appropriate for the trade. Mentioned earlier is that among the strengths in translation as a teaching method is that it is easier to conceptualise new vocabulary by translating the equivalent from the L1 to L2. This might be an explanation as to why there are so many translation tasks which feature pure vocabulary translation between terminology which is appropriate for the trade.

This argumentation can also be found in English didactics literature as well, with translation being mentioned as a good tool for learning new technical vocabulary. Fenner & Skulstad (2018) mention that an important aim in vocational studies is to develop the students register, with high focus on learning new technical vocabulary (326). The L1 should be included in order to make it easier for the student to learn the new technical vocabulary, relying on the given context will not be sufficient in of itself (Fenner & Skulstad 2018, p. 326-327). It is reasonable to assume that the textbook writers imagined that translation is the preferred method of teaching this new technical vocabulary for the vocational studies, while imagining that it wouldn't be necessary for the general studies given the differences in competence aims.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the focus given to translation as a tool for second language learning vary between the books and grades. While the 4th grade and 10th grade general studies had almost no task which utilised translation, a higher number was found in the 10th grade and 11th grade vocational studies. The most significant find however, was the difference being the different priority given to translation between a high priority in the vocational studies and low priority being given in general studies. The reason for this may be the different aims of the two courses, with translation maybe satisfying the aims for the vocational studies more. What this can tell us about the degree of translation as student becomes older is that translation indeed stay relevant for the older students, with much depending on the study program they choose past 10th grade. It should be noted that this limited research can not aim to make a general statement about the state of translation in Norwegian classroom, however it can say something about the usage of translation in the given textbooks analysed.

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