

Collaborative Project-based Learning: A Must in Translation Classrooms for EFL Learners

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Abstract

Strategic sub-competence is considered as a key component in translation competence. It is the one that guarantees the efficiency of translation since it represents problem-recognition and strategies used for problem-solving in a translation process [1]. The objectives of the study were to develop a collaborative project-based learning module for translation training in a language degree program and to investigate its effect on the development of strategic sub-competence for translation training in a language degree program. This study employed one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants were 21 Thai EFL undergraduate students, majoring or minoring in English. Translation tests, translation projects, Learner's Diaries, and semi-structured interviews were employed to evaluate the effect of the learning module. After the 15-week learning module, the results revealed that the students' overall translation abilities improved with statistical significance. Additionally, the students' abilities to identify and solve text-related problems, one of the abilities in strategic sub-competence, significantly improved as well. The findings also indicated that the quality of their translations also improved through the process of collaboration. These results suggested that the collaborative project-based learning approach should be implemented in translation classrooms since it can support EFL students in the process of sharing ideas and learning from each other in collaborative learning environments.

Keywords: collaborative learning, translation classrooms, translation projects, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Developing students' translation competence is a fundamental objective of translation training so that the students are prepared to produce quality translation as part of their jobs. Scholars in translation studies have affirmed that competence in the two languages concerned is only one part of translation competence necessary for production of quality translation. To be more specific, among translation sub-competencies, one element being emphasized and investigated is translators' ability to identify translation problems and make decisions to apply appropriate strategies to solve them [2] - [6]. This competence, namely 'strategic sub-competence', is also the one that guarantees the efficiency of the translation [1], [7].

An alternative approach to translation training implemented in translation classrooms in tertiary education is 'collaborative project-based learning' [8] - [10], an integration of the collaborative learning and the project-based learning approaches, with the underlying theory of social constructivism. Research in translation classrooms has confirmed that when collaborative translation projects are implemented using authentic tasks relating to the professional world of translators, students in translation degree programs are motivated and fully

engaged in their learning [11]. Such a project also proved to have encouraged translation students to take responsibility of their own learning [12] – [14] and enhanced their overall translation abilities [15] - [16].

However, in the context of English degree programs, studies have been done on development of students' translation competence in translation classrooms by explaining recurring patterns of translation errors [17], exploring effectiveness of collaborative task-based learning [18], or investigating the use of portfolio assessment [19]. In Thai EFL students' learning contexts, only a few studies were conducted in translation classrooms, and the objectives were to analyze recurring patterns of English-Thai or Thai-English translation errors [20] - [21], or to investigate the effects of the collaborative task-based approach on the improvement of students' overall translation abilities [22].

It is noted that previous research does not take into account the students' strategic sub-competence. Also, the collaborative project-based learning approach that has been proved successful for students in translation programs has never been implemented in EFL learners' translation classrooms. Hence, it is worth investigating the development of EFL students' strategic sub-competence in translation training using the collaborative project-based learning approach. The developed learning module in this study, namely 'Collaborative Project-based Learning Module' (CLPM), was designed to enhance EFL learners' strategic sub-competence in their translation classrooms.

The research questions of this study were:

1. What are the effects of the implementation of the Collaborative Project-based Learning Module for translation training on the development of EFL learners' overall translation abilities?
2. What are the effects of the implementation of the Collaborative Project-based Learning Module for translation training on the development of EFL learners' abilities to identify and solve text-related problems?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Sub-competence

The term 'translation competence' is one of the term generally accepted and employed in research by scholars in the field of translation studies and translation pedagogy [1], [7], [5], [23]. The concept can be explained by breaking down into interrelated sub-competencies. According to PACTE Group [1], [7], among the five sub-competencies, strategic sub-competence is the one needed to be further investigated since it occupies a dominant position in translation process. It monitors and evaluates the translation process, detect translation problems, and apply strategies to solve them. Also, it compensates for shortcoming in other sub-competencies. Therefore, in order to enhance one's problem-solving and decision-making skills in translation, strategic sub-competence is one of the key elements to be developed. This study, therefore, aimed at developing students' strategic sub-competence by exploring their abilities to identify and solve one of the categories of translation problems, which is text-related problem.

'Text-related problem' refers to objective transfer tasks every translator has to deal with, due to the differences between the source language and the target language [24], such as the use of personal pronouns in English and Thai or structures of noun phrases in the two languages. As novice translators, the students need to be aware of the problems that might occur in their translation. Also, when they identify an element in the source text as a text-related problem, they need to justify their decisions and propose a translation as a way to solve the problem in order to make sure they understand the problem correctly.

2.2. Collaborative Project-based Learning Approach

Collaborative project-based learning approach has been implemented in a variety of learning contexts in higher education. This student-centered approach promotes abilities of critical thinking, problem-solving, and team-working during the process of self-directed learning. In translation training, Kiraly [8] proposed a model of authentic collaborative translation projects and clearly demonstrated how to implement the projects in translation

degree programs at the graduate level. It was reported that the students were engaged and highly motivated to take responsibilities of their own learning [25], [11], [16]. Mitchel-Schuitevoerder [13] employed the collaborative projects in a graduate program in translation and reported to prepare them to the professional world of translation. At the undergraduate level, Galan-Manas [15] implemented a collaborative project for undergraduate students in a translation degree program by setting more detailed steps to match with the students' level of knowledge and experience. The collaborative project-based learning approach has been adapted in various classroom settings and proved to enhance the students' overall translation competence and the quality of their work.

A learning tool that is commonly integrated in project work is a learning diary. Fox [26] and Rico [23] explain that diaries can be effectively used to keep record of how the students went about their translations, what problems they have found, how they solve the problems, and what reasoning behind the decisions made for producing the final draft translation.

3. Research Design

The participants were all the undergraduate students majoring or minoring in English who enrolled in the Business Translation Course at a university in Bangkok. The total number of participants was 21. They were in their third or fourth year.

The learning module, 'Collaborative Project-based Learning Module' (CLPM), was developed. The expected outcome is to enhance students' strategic sub-competence in the context of translation classrooms for Thai EFL students majoring or minoring English taking a business translation course as an elective. The CLPM is a 15-week learning module consisting of two sub-modules, Module A and Module B.

Module A is the 'Training session', lasting 9 weeks and aiming at preparing the students to have knowledge and skills necessary for a translation project in Module B. In the Training session, the students learned about translation knowledge and practiced all the skills necessary for the collaborative project, such as analysing translation problems, translating short texts, and editing. There was also a class session for discussing what to do and not to do in collaborative group work. All the knowledge and skills they learned were designed to prepare them to be ready for the translation project in Module B.

Module B is the 'Collaborative Translation Project', a small group English-Thai translation of a business article, designed for the students to collaborate with each other in conducting the project. It was implemented from week 10-15. It is a translation project assigned to a small group of students (3-4 students per group). The project is English-Thai translation of a business article about business management, and the translated text is supposed to be for a publication in GM, a Thai business magazine.

The project consists of three main stages. The details can be explained as follows:

Stage 1: Planning

- *Source text selection*: Each group of students chooses a source text of their interest from the provided list. Business texts are provided by the teacher for each group to choose, based on their interests.
- *Work planning* and text analysis: Students work as a group to plan the project, specifying work allocation, steps, and timeframe. They also do text analysis as a preparation for translation.
- *Presentation#1*: Each group presents the text analysis and working plan.

Stage 2: Translating and collaborative editing

- *Individual translation draft*: Each student individually translates one part of the source text.
- *Learner's diary*: Each student completes the diary based on the guiding questions.
- *Collaborative editing*: Each team compiles individual translation drafts into a single piece of translation. The students revise and edit their work, using Self-editing and self-assessment form.

- *Group's first draft translation*: The first draft of the group is ready for peer-editing process. This draft is a product of the collaborative editing.

Stage 3: Peer-editing, revising, and presentation

- *Peer editing*: The editing is reciprocal. Two groups are paired up in advance. Peer-editing and Peer-assessment form is used as a guideline.
- *Responsive feedback*: Students discuss, negotiate ideas, and justify their work in the editing process. Editor groups and translator groups discuss comments and ideas in the editing process.
- *Group's final draft translation*: Each group revises their own work, using feedback from the peer-editing process.
- *Learner's diary*: Each student completes the diary based on the guiding questions.
- *Presentation#2*: Each group presents translation problems and analysis of their work process.
- *Teacher evaluation*: The teacher evaluates students' final draft translation and their group presentation.

Data were collected by using four instruments. The details of each instrument are as follows:

1. *Translation pretest and posttest*: the tests were used to obtain the information about students' translation competence regarding their overall translation abilities and their strategic sub-competence.
2. *Translation drafts*: the three translation drafts included (1) each student's draft, (2) each group's first draft, and (3) each group's final draft. .
3. *Learner's diary*: the diaries were the recording of each student's analysis of text-related problems and reflection on what and how the work was done during the project.
4. *Semi-structured interviews*: six students as representatives from each group were individually interviewed to obtain the data on collaboration and interactions among the students.

Data was collected by administering the pretest at the beginning of the CLPM, and at the end of the CLPM, the posttest was administered and the interviews were conducted. During the project, the three translation drafts and the three diaries were submitted after they finished each draft. For quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics of percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used. For qualitative data analysis, the diaries and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using content analysis, data transcribing, coding, and analyzing.

4. Findings

4.1 The students' overall translation abilities

Data on the students' overall translation abilities was elicited from the translation pretest and posttest. Although it is not the main objective of this study, this set of data can be used to explain how the students improved after taking the CLPM. The test task is an English-Thai translation of an excerpt of a business article, "UK Dairy Industry in Crisis". The total score of this part is 15, and the number of test takers is 21. The findings are illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 1: Translation Pretest and Posttest Scores (Part 1)

	N	Mean	SD	P
Pretest	21	6.57	2.574	.000*
Posttest	21	8.75	2.289	

* $p < 0.05$

As displayed in Table 1, the students improved their overall translation abilities at significant level 0.05. This indicates the students' significant improvement on their overall translation abilities after attending the fifteen-week CLPM.

4.2 The students' abilities to identify and solve text-related problems

4.2.1 Data collected from the pretest and the posttest

The results of the pretest and posttest were also used to investigate the effects of the CLPM on developing the students' abilities to identify and solve text-related problems. The lexical problems and the convention-related problems were tested in Part 1, and the syntactic problems were tested in Part 2. The results of the tests are presented below.

In Part 1 of the test, the task was a translation of the passage 'UK Dairy Industry in Crisis'. The source text passage includes two instances of the lexical problems (word meaning in context) and two instances of the convention-related problems (transcribing proper name). The results of the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 2 and 3.

TABLE 2: Pretest and posttest mean scores of lexical problems

Test item no.	ST instances	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	P
1	(dairy) farmers	.43	.71	.030*
2	firm	.43	.76	.016*

* $p < 0.05$ ST = source text

Table 2 shows the two items involving lexical problem or 'word meaning in context' that were tested. The two words, '(dairy) farmer' and 'firm', have multiple meanings, so the students needed to choose an appropriate meaning of each word in the context for their translation.

TABLE 3: Pretest and posttest mean scores of convention-related problems

Test item no.	ST instances	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	P
1	Derbyshire	.62	.95	.016*
2	Essex	.62	.95	.016*

* $p < 0.05$ ST = source text

Table 3 presents the two items of the convention-related problems, or the subcategory of 'transcribing proper name', that were tested in Part 1 of the test, so the students needed to transcribe the given proper names.

Data from Table 2 and Table 3 reveals that the students significantly improved their abilities to solve lexical problems and convention-related problems at significant level 0.05. It seems fair to suggest that the students made progress in their abilities to analyze and solve the lexical problems and the convention-related problems after taking the CLPM.

In Part 2 of the test, the test task is the analysis of syntactic problems in an English source text, "5 Important Things That Make Workers Quit". The total score for this part is 45, and the number of test takers is 21. The pretest and posttest scores are presented in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4: Translation Pretest and Posttest Scores (Part 2)

	N	Mean	SD	P
Pretest	21	15.43	7.756	.002*
Posttest	21	20.95	8.114	

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4 reveals that the students improved their abilities to analyze and solve syntactic problems at significant level 0.05. Thus, this indicates the students' significant improvement on their abilities to identify and solve syntactic problems after attending the learning module.

In sum, the findings from this part regarding the students' abilities to identify and solve text-related problems in the translation pretest and posttest reveal that the students made a significant progress on analyzing

and solving text-related problems after attending the CLPM for 15 weeks. Nevertheless, the posttest scores can only reflect the students' abilities to perform a single task as an end-product translation by comparing it to a single task at the beginning, or the pretest. Supporting evidence is still needed, so the following part of the results is to explore how the students made a progress during the process of the Collaborative Translation Project.

4.2.2 Data collected from the translation project

As mentioned earlier, the ability to identify text-related problems is only a step in dealing with the problems since translators need to have abilities to solve the problems as well. Hence, this study also analyzed if the students could solve the problems they identified. If any text-related problem is marked as a 'correct problem', the Thai translation of the problem will be marked as an 'appropriate solution' or an 'inappropriate solution' by the researcher.

The number of 'correct problems' and 'appropriate solutions' at each of the three stages in three translation drafts, from the beginning to the end of the project, were analyzed as shown in the table below.

TABLE 5 Numbers and percentages of correct problems and appropriate solutions in three Learner's Diaries

	Diary-1 (51 answered items)		Diary-2 (48 answered items)		Diary-3 (51 answered items)	
	Correct problems	Appropriate Solutions	Correct problems	Appropriate solutions	Correct problems	Appropriate solutions
Numbers of items	33	27	33	26	36	30
Percentages	64.71%	81.82%	68.75%	78.79%	70.59%	83.33%

Note. The total number of answered items in each diary varied because not all the students submitted all three diaries.

Table 5 illustrates the numbers and percentages of text-related problems that all the students could identify correctly in each diary. In Diary-1, all the answered items were 51 and the percentage of items that were analyzed correctly was 33, which was equivalent to 64.71%. In Diary-2, all the answered items were 48 and the number of items that were analyzed correctly was 33, which was equivalent to 68.75%. In Diary-3, all the answered items were 51 and the number of items that were analyzed correctly was 36, which was equivalent to 70.59%. Along with the problem analysis, the students also solved each listed problem by translating it, and the results reveal that the percentages of the appropriate solutions of the correct problems in each diary were 81.82%, 78.79%, and 83.33% respectively. Figure 2 depicts the percentages of correct problems and appropriate solutions in each diary.

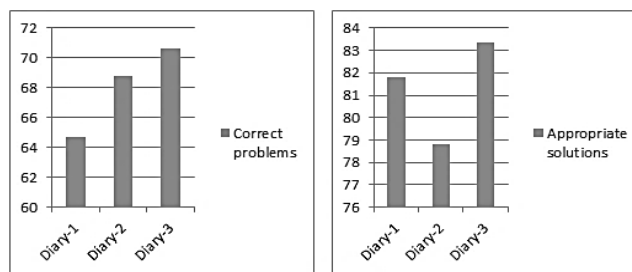


Fig. 2 Percentages of correct problems and appropriate solutions in each diary

As follows from the figure shown above, the percentage of correct problem identification and the percentage of appropriate solution from Diary-1 to Diary-2 and Diary-3 gradually increased. The percentages of appropriate solutions fluctuated; however, there was a positive tendency and the average percentage was at the satisfactory level (approximately 80%). Thus, it can be explained that there was a gradual progress in the student's abilities to identify problems, from the beginning to the end of the project.

To understand more about the types of text-related problems and the students' abilities to solve those problems, the problems listed in each diary were categorized and presented in the following table, together with the number and percentage of appropriate solutions of correct problems.

TABLE 6 Categories of text-related problems and appropriate solutions in three Learner's Diaries

Categories of problems	Sub categories of problems	Diary-1 (51 answered items)		Diary-2 (48 answered items)		Diary-3 (51 answered items)	
		Correct problem:	Appropriate solutions	Correct problems	Appropriate solutions	Correct problems	Appropriate solutions
Lexical	1. Word meaning in context	12	8 (66.67%)	14	8 (57.14%)	14	11 (78.57%)
	Syntactic	1. Word order in a NP	-	-	2	2 (100%)	1
2. Impersonal pronoun 'it'		1	1 (100%)	1	1 (100%)	2	2 (100%)
3. 3 rd - person pronoun & possessive adjective		3	3 (100%)	2	2 (100%)	3	3 (100%)
4. Verb tense		1	1 (100%)	-	-	-	-
5. Passive construction		-	-	1	1 (100%)	1	1 (100%)
6. Derived sentence		-	-	1	1 (100%)	-	-
7. Other forms of structure		-	-	1	1 (100%)	1	1 (100%)
Convention-related	1. Punctuation mark	5	5 (100%)	3	3 (100%)	1	1 (100%)
	2. Marking of plurality	3	3 (100%)	3	3 (100%)	4	4 (100%)
	3. Transcribing proper name	8	6 (75%)	5	4 (80%)	9	6 (66.67%)
Total number of problems and solutions		33	27 (81.81%)	33	26 (78.79%)	36	30 (83.33%)

As can be seen from Table 6, all three main categories of text-related problems, namely lexical problems, syntactic problems, and convention-related problems, were identified by the students in their diaries. To be more specific, the subcategories of the problems listed in all the diaries are varied, but it is clearly seen that the highest number of problems the students mentioned in all three diaries is the problem of 'word meaning in context', which is in the category of lexical problems. The second highest one is the problem of 'transcribing proper name', which is in the category of convention-related problems.

A closer look at the data from Table 6 reveals that the percentages of the appropriate solutions in most subcategories were at 100%, so it means that most problems that could be identified correctly could be solved successfully at that stage. The only two problems, the problems of 'word meaning in context' and the 'transcribing proper name', were the two types of problems that could not be solved successfully at the rate of 100%. The percentages of 'word meaning in context' problems that could be solved were at 66.67%, 57.14%, and 78.57%. The percentages of 'transcribing proper name' problems that could be solved were at 75%, 80%, and 66.67%.

In sum, these two types of problems, which are 'word meaning in context' and 'transcribing proper name', were mentioned most in all diaries, and most of these two problems could be solved by the students, but some still could not.

Considering the abilities to solve the problems, or finding appropriate solutions of the problems, it can be found that the problems of 'word meaning in context' and 'transcribing proper name' could not be solved at the stage of identifying. On the contrary, the other problems, such as the problems of 'word order in a noun phrase', 'impersonal pronoun-it', '3rd-person pronoun and possessive adjective', 'passive construction', 'punctuation mark' and 'marking of plurality' could be solved at the stage of identifying.

As explained at the beginning of this section, this set of data was used to explore not only the abilities at each stage of translation, but also the abilities throughout the entire process of translation. Therefore, the following is to demonstrate how successfully the students could solve the problems that they listed at the beginning of the project. Those problems were also analyzed and tracked by the researcher in order to see if they could be solved in the final draft, the draft that was produced after the process of collaborative editing and peer editing. The details are illustrated in the following table.

TABLE 7 Numbers and percentages of text-related problems listed in Diary-1

Text-related problems in Diary-1 (33 instances)				
Numbers of items and percentages	With appropriate solutions in the individual translation draft	With inappropriate solutions in the individual translation draft		
		27 (81.82%)	6 (18.18%)	Problems that could be solved in the final draft
			Problems that could not be solved in the final draft	3 (50%)

Table 7 illustrates the numbers and percentages of text-related problems that were correctly identified and explained when the students were doing the individual translation draft. It has been found that out of 33 text-related problems, 27 problems (81.82%) could be solved appropriately in the individual translations, the draft that they did individually. The rest of the problems, with a total of 6 problems (18.18%), were tracked by observing if those problems could be solved in the later drafts, that is, the group's first draft and the group's final draft. The results show that, from the 6 problems that could not be solved in the individual translation, 3 of them (50%) could be solved in the final draft at the end of the project and the other 3 (50%) could not. The three text-related problems that could be solved and the three text-related problems that could not be solved are the same in their types and numbers: two problems of 'word meaning in context' and one of 'transcribing proper name'.

Additionally, data from the interview transcripts has confirmed the data from the Learner's Diaries and the translation drafts in the previous section. The students mentioned that they benefited from the collaboration within their groups and among their groups because both the collaborative editing and peer editing helped them learn what they misunderstood or overlooked about the comprehension and re-expression of some elements in the source text. Also, the students reported that they learned how to exchange ideas with others in the process of editing.

5. Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, the results reveal that the students developed their overall translation abilities and their strategic sub-competence after attending the 15-week CLPM. The translation pretest and posttest scores indicate that both their overall translation abilities and their abilities to identify and solve text-related problems were significantly improved. This set of data could be considered as an individual effort to complete a translation task. However, the interpretation of the scores can only serve the purpose of evaluating translation performance at a single stage as an end product. As scholars, such as Fox [25] and Galan-Manas [15], who are in favour of process research in translation pedagogy state, it is vital to understand the translation process, or how assigned texts have been translated.

Hence, there was an attempt to supplement the data from the test scores. The other two sets of data were collected to explore what the students experienced during the process of the Collaborative Translation Project in the period of six weeks. Data from the Learner's Diaries and translation drafts indicates that there was an improvement regarding their abilities to identify the problems. Their abilities to solve the problems fluctuated, but there was a positive tendency and the percentages were at the satisfactory level. The problems that could be solved were the ones with specific language forms and systematic ways of solving them, such as the problems of 'passive construction' and the problem of 'impersonal pronoun-it'. On the contrary, there were two problems

that could not be solved even at the end of the project: the problem of ‘word meaning in context’ and the problem of ‘transcribing proper name’. It can be explained that solving these two problems requires not only linguistic competence, but also a relatively high level of decision-making skills. In addition, to choose appropriate word meanings in contexts sometimes needs knowledge about the world in general or in specific areas, and to transcribe a proper name also needs researching skills. Another set of data from the Learner’s Diaries and the interviews shows that the project enhanced the students’ abilities to comprehend and re-express source text elements owing to the opportunities to share ideas and collaborate with each other during the process of translation.

The benefits of the collaborative project-based learning on developing translation abilities in the present study concur with other studies that proved to have enhanced students’ overall translation competence [15], [13], [16]. Also, the data yielded in this study provides convincing evidence that teamwork in collaborative learning was beneficial for enhancing translation performance and the quality of their work, which was the translation of a business article. The results are consistent with previous studies that explored other genres of translation tasks, such as specific-technical translation [15], university website translation [13], or documentary subtitle translation [11]. More importantly, this study shows that the students could solve the text-related problems by discussing and sharing ideas during the editing process. These results are in agreement with other studies by researchers, such as Galan Manas [15] and Kiraly [11], who confirm that when a well-designed collaborative project is assigned, students have a potential to perform tasks and solve translation problems in their own ways using team decision-making skills, with an attempt to achieve a mutual goal, which is to produce quality work.

In terms of identifying and solving text-related problems, EFL students with limited abilities of English and translation might find it too complicated to interpret words with multiple meanings or to transcribe unfamiliar proper names in the English source text. Therefore, it is suggested that a training session design to equip the students with knowledge and skills necessary for carrying out a translation project should place more importance on the use of translation resources. Researching skills, which is one of the abilities in strategic sub-competence, can compensate for deficiency of the students’ language competence and knowledge of specialized subjects. Also, it is recommended that one way to train students to be more competent in dealing with such difficulties is to design activities that encourage them to analyze their own weaknesses during the process of translation, possibly in a form of diaries. As Fox [25] and Rico [23] suggest, keeping diaries is beneficial as it offers the students opportunities to analyze and reflect on their own performances. In doing so, the students can learn to perform self-monitoring and gain more awareness in their own translation and language use.

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