



# Affective Dimensions of Translation Tasks: Reducing Anxiety in EFL Learning

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**Abstract**— Foreign language anxiety is still one of the biggest emotional barriers in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In the past, translation exercises have been assumed to be cognitively challenging tasks, but more recent studies show that, if designed with care, certain translation tasks can be used to alleviate the anxiety of learners and to promote psychological safety in language classrooms. This research analyzes the ways in which selective translation exercises could help to alleviate the anxiety of EFL learners while also improving learners' language skills. By conducting a broad analysis of the literature and analysing several hare and qualitative studies, this work investigates learners' emotional reactions to various forms of translation work and attempts to define the translation exercise features that encourage low anxiety. The research shows that learners' anxiety is decreased substantially, alongside more positive emotional responses towards the target language, while performing certain culturally and contextually bound translation tasks, particularly when used with group work. This work offers suggestions to teachers on the use of translation exercises designed to decrease anxiety and improve learner emotional responses in EFL classrooms, ultimately seeking to improve the language teaching and learning in EFL context which lacks emotional and psychological considerations.



**Keywords**— Foreign language anxiety, translation tasks, EFL learning, psychological safey, affective factors, emotional responses

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the affective factors in the acquisition of a second language have received a great deal of attention in applied linguistics. Among those factors, foreign language anxiety has gained a reputation of being one of the most pervasive and debilitating obstacles in mastering a language. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) have fully elucidated foreign language anxiety as a fully fledged self-perception, deeply embedded in a belief, a feeling, and a behavior syndrome attuned to the learning of language as a classroom task. We, as a world, are experiencing the consequences of Horwitz et al. (1986) and their followers where millions of EFL learners are challenged with foreign language anxiety, rising above their linguistic and academic achievements.

Language teaching methods have, in general, been 'problematic' in the consideration of ignoring the emotional

aspects of learning and as such the teaching of the language in question stems from the relatively logical structures of the language. However, limb, or spirit of applied linguistics has gained recognition as a critical, if not the most important, component of the learning process. MacIntyre, 2014 and Dewaele et al 2014, alongside Gregerson (2021) have also pointed that out in their recent work. Of particular interest is anxiety, and how it relates to language, as anxiety is religion and crucible of bad language as it performs a reciprocal relationship: cycle of anxiety and bad performance that is debilitating (Young 1991, Aida 1994).

At the grammar-translation approach and the later neglected communicative approach, translation tasks attracted little interest and appreciation. However, most models of language pedagogy nowadays portray the translation activity in a more positive light. Research shows that such translation activities serve a number of pedagogical aims,

such as fostering metalinguistic awareness, cross-cultural awareness, and even critical thinking (Cook, 2010; Leonardi, 2010; Witte, Harden, & Ramos de Oliveira Harden, 2009). In addition, while still emerging, some evidence suggests that in some cases, translation tasks may lower anxiety by providing more familiar cognitive outline and less the uncertainty that most communicative tasks tend to invoke (Liao, 2006; Carreres, 2006).

Research regarding the role tasks of translation serve to foster psychological safety within language learning environments is still in its formative phase. Psychological safety is the 'shared belief that team members will not be penalized or humiliated for voicing their opinions or for taking interpersonal risks' (Edmondson, 1999). In recent years, psychological safety has emerged as one of the key components that enhance learning and performance around the globe in different educational systems. In the context of language learning, psychological safety permits learners to use the language in its spoken form without the risk of being self-conscious. This, in turn, promotes natural acquisition processes (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

The aim of the current research is to examine affective aspects of translation tasks in the EFL context, and more specifically, how some selective translation tasks mitigate learner anxiety and foster psychological safety. This study focuses on emotional reaction to different types of translation tasks and attempts to determine task features and instructional methods that yield positive affective results without compromising educational objectives.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety: Theoretical Foundations

Few issues in psychology have proven to be more problematic than that of foreign-language anxiety, which Horwitz et al. (1986) defined as anxiety associated with foreign language learning contexts. The construct has communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation at its core (Horwitz et al., 1986). Research has verified that foreign language anxiety is as widely ubiquitous as it is detrimental to learning, regardless of the particular contexts and cultures involved (Aida, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, 1999; Liu and Jackson, 2008).

In the case of MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), the contemplation of anxiety over language learning was enriched by the conceptualization that such anxiety is chronic, as well as acute, and thus modifies the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning of a learner. Their anxiety-attention thesis posits that anxiety has the capacity to interfere with the attention, memory, and processing of information, and thus the learning of a language. In Young

(1991) the language anxiety was classified into six forms: personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, beliefs of the instructor about the language teaching, instructor-learner interaction, language teaching methodology employed in the classroom, and language evaluation.

More recent studies have deepened knowledge regarding foreign language anxiety and its connection to other emotions like motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate (Dewaele, 2007; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998; Zheng, 2008). In the same vein, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) offered the construct of foreign language enjoyment as a positive emotion that balances out anxiety and argued that maximum enjoyment and minimum anxiety are the two fundamental goals of effective language teaching.

### 2.2 Translation in Language Learning: Pedagogical Perspectives

Within the scholarly fields of pedagogy and foreign language acquisition, the handling of the translation and its value to the teaching of foreign languages has greatly shifted over time. Largely, the grammar-translation method has had its place in instructional practice for long periods, particularly with the enduring grammar-translation approach. However, sociolinguistic through direct purposes methods and the communicative method approaches of translation for lesson activities has certainly been proven to lack efficacy (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Translation, in the opinion of the pragmatists of translation theory, has had a revitalization and been rehabilitated in the last few decades with supporting advancements in theoretical applied linguistics and empirical scholarship validating its application in pedagogy (Cook, 2010; Malmkjaer, 1998).

The translation pedagogy that shifts to contemporary models has catered mostly for primary arguments that dismissal of translation activities is able to spur multiple competences. Leonardi (2010) claimed that the shift of paradigm from linguistics to translations as primary metalinguistic tasks at the level of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic strata of discourses augurs paradigm shifts in languages. Witte in 2009 and even lately have shown that translation tasks do elevate higher order thinking outcomes through critical thinking as learners work with meaning, form, and culture translation.

The work with learners has been cited for instrumental development of operational types to which pedagogical translation has been proven over time. Culture lacks the ability to see thought. Kramsch 1993 has shown that translation is the as a mediation of culture because to so, translation requires the transition from one culture as systems to the other cultural systems with world views.

Hence, learners become the mediator of intercultural relations of which she has been able to achieve mastery over by refining the understanding of both cultures. (Byram, 1997).

### 2.3 Affective Dimensions of Translation Tasks

Even though interest in pedagogical translation continues to grow, the affective dimensions of translation tasks in the context of language learning remain unexamined by many scholars. Existing literature demonstrates that learners' emotions concerning translation activities are shaped by the nature of the translation task, its cultural relevance, and how the task is taught (Liao 2006; Carreres 2006).

Liao (2006) is the first to study the attitudes of EFL learners toward translation tasks. From the research, students, in general, had positive attitudes concerning translation tasks, especially if the tasks had a learning and cultural value to the students. Participants claimed that translation tasks alleviated anxiety by framing how students approached the target language in a more familiar cognitive configuration.

In her study on translation as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of Spanish as a second language, Carreres (2006) points out that well-designed translation tasks can positively influence a learner's motivation and engagement. This research reinforced how task design that emphasized authenticity and cultural relevance shaped emotions toward the task. Participants reported that translation activities helped them to access their knowledge and culture, leading to lower levels of anxiety and a sense of inadequacy that surfaced in a target-only language approach.

### 2.4 Psychological Safety in Language Learning

The idea of psychological safety originated within organizational psychology (Edmondson, 1999) but has recently developed within educational research as well as in context of foreign language acquisition. Psychological safety occurs in an environment when an individual is able to take interpersonal risks, offer their opinions, ask questions, make mistakes, and face other consequences without ridicule (Edmondson, 1999).

In acquisition of foreign language, psychological safety is fundamental as acquisition of any new language requires risk and vulnerability (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Learners must attempt to make correct sentences, wrong utterances, and utter gaps in their language. The absence of psychological safety causes learners to use avoidance strategies which impedes their linguistic development (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2021).

The shift in research focus to exploring psychological safety in foreign language learning context pinpointed numerous significant components of nurturing environments. These components include, but are not limited to, teacher

interpersonal and instructional styles, learner interpersonal relations, evaluation and grading, and technics of lesson construction (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). It has been established that learners' willingness to communicate, their active participation, and their learning gains, are markedly higher in these environments (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2018).

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

In this case, the methodology of the research was a literature review. To aid this literature review, structured studies examining the ties between translation activities and emotions in EFL were analyzed. This research has a qualitative character in that it attempts to pull together fragmented information and create coherent patterns from them across multiple studies and contexts.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Selection Criteria

The literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published from 1986 and 2024. The following databases were systematically searched: ERIC, PsycINFO, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts, the MLA International Bibliography, and the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts. The search included the phrases "foreign language anxiety," "translation tasks," "EFL learning," "psychological safety," and the "affective factors" and "emotional responses".

The studies were selected and prioritized on the basis that they:

- Focused on the emotional aspects of language learning, specifically on anxiety
- Focused on translation tasks in EFL/ESL settings
- Provided empirical evidence responsive to the emotional aspects of translation
- Focused on the psychological aspects of the learning of language
- Published in peer-reviewed journals that are academically reputable.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The chosen literature was subjected to thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis process consisted of the following steps:

- Reading the data repeatedly and becoming familiar with the area.
- Coding of the data.
- Identifying themes from the codes.

- Checking and adjusting the themes.
- Describing the themes and citing them as final.
- The final step is producing the report.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Theme 1: Translation Tasks as Anxiety-Reducing Mechanisms

The analysis shows that certain features of translation tasks can help alleviate foreign language anxiety of EFL learners.

Numerous researchers have shown that translation tasks provide learners with cognitive scaffolding that allows them to cope with the complexity of processing the target language (Liao, 2006; Carreres, 2006; Vermes, 2010).

The reducing of anxiety in learners during translation tasks seem to derive from multiple ways. To begin with, translation tasks provide learners with the opportunity to use their native language skills positively, as opposed to the more traditional view of being a handicap. This is part of the growing understanding of multilingualism and the benefits that can be derived from language crossover (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2001). When learners have access to a wide range of vocabulary and structures, their anxiety about the task and a concomitant self-doubt of their linguistic capabilities is greatly diminished as they feel more confident

Furthermore, learners have remarked that translation tasks offer more readily definable parameters and indicators of success compared to other forms of more open-ended and free-flowing communicative activities. In the work of González Davies (2004), learners expressed that they appreciate the definitional boundaries of translation tasks, where learners are asked to generate a specific translation of a text, and that this text can be appraised and analyzed according to certain criteria. This lack of obscurity minimizes the ambiguity that tends to increase anxiety to learners of a language (Young, 1991).

Third, translation activities can be structured to move from familiarity to obstructions, as a means to aid the learners in the development of their confidence. Malmkjær (1998) suggests that learners gain linguistic competence while their emotional stability gets protected because of emotional equilibrium. Learners often feel more at ease while doing translation activities that start with easier tasks that revolve around their culture and progressively introduce complexity.

##### 4.2 Theme 2: Cultural Relevance and Emotional Engagement

An important outcome of several studies stems from the need for relevance to culture to shape emotional reactions

to translation tasks. Research has established that emotionally positive responses to translation tasks accompanied by less anxiety and stress stems from the familiarity of the culture, in comparison to materials that are culture neutral (Liao, 2006; Carreres, 2006; Katan, 2009).

Kramersch (1993) attempts to clarify this in terms of cultural mediation theory by positing that any act of translation involves a cultural 'crossing' of some sort. When students are exposed to cultural materials that they recognize, they are able to access cultural knowledge that is relevant and therefore help their linguistic processing, and in the process conserve cognitive load, thus anxiety. On the other hand, the absence of culture raises the linguistic as well as cultural processing, thus anxiety.

The anxiety benefits of the translation tasks that are relevant to the culture extend to include the emotional benefits that include the counter effect of being more motivated and highly engaged. Carreres' (2006) study participants claim that they feel appreciated and respected as a person who has relevant knowledge to contribute when they engage in translation activities that pertain to their culture. This sense of validation appears to counter feelings of linguistic inadequacy that commonly arise in foreign language contexts.

Moreover, translation activities that cater to the culture of the learners can help connect their life experiences to the content of the target language. This seems to be particularly crucial for adult learners, who perhaps find it harder to relate to standard textbook content that is aimed, older or is from a different culture, than their own. (Duff, 2001).

##### 4.3 Theme 3: Collaborative Translation and Peer Support

According to research evidence, the practice of collaborative translation has the potential to enhance psychological safety and reduce anxiety.

In their research, Kiraly (2000) and Gonzalez Davies (2004) assert that group translation activities provide cognitive and emotional assistance to participants by sharing the workload.

Anxiety seems to be reduced by collaborative translation in several ways. It first reduces the pressure or the fear of performing poorly by sharing multiple roles in completing a whole task.

In class, learners are able to perform at their best and be helped in their weak areas of a task when the task is broken down. In this regard, the environment is perceived as safer and more supportive (Pica, 1994).

Collaborative translation offers opportunities for peer-to-peer scaffolding allowing more competent learners to assist their struggling counterparts.



Translation activities, as documented by Swain and Lapkin (2001), provide a productive avenue for learners to engage with each other while still maintaining a positive emotional climate. In their research, learners are willing to approach peers to ask for clarification and assistance more readily than they would with the teacher.

Finally, group activities in translation can help create a shared sense of responsibility and support, which in turn enhances psychological safety. When learners focus on a shared goal, they build links that cross even the individual activities.

These positive peers relationships seem to be especially relevant in reducing anxiety in language learning. (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Task Design Features that Promote Positive Affect**

The analysis reveals different particular elements of the design of tasks that may trigger positive emotions while undertaking translation activities. These elements bear the principles of effective design of tasks and translation activities.

Authenticity of the tasks seems to be one of the most important aspects that foster positive emotions. Translation tasks that mirror the actual translation tasks tend to engage learners more and cause less anxiety than imaginary academic tasks (González Davies, 2004). Engaging tasks enable learners to appreciate the significance of and thus engage in translation tasks, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation and resistance.

Progressive complexity is another important design feature. Good translation tasks start from known and easy content and gradually step up the linguistic and cultural complexity of the content. This let learners gain and develop confidence and skills over time and avoid the overwhelming anxiety that may result from tasks that are wholly out of reach (Krashen, 1985).

Choice and self-regulation in the task also seem to result in positive emotions. Ushioda (2001) found that learners have more favorable attitudes towards translation tasks to which they engage in more self-guided content choice, design of procedures, and presentation styles. This self-regulation appears to result in more positive feelings of self-efficacy and reduced anxiety from external appraisal.

Well-defined grading categories alongside effective feedback strategies are vital to sustaining positive feelings related to particular course activities. In particular, when learners appreciate the methods by which their work will be assessed, and when feedback targets descriptions instead of trying to teacher-student binary, anxiety and the willingness to learn multiply (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

## **V. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Curriculum Integration Strategies**

According to the results of the research, several strategies can be used to ensure the creation and application of translation tasks aimed to reduce anxiety in the EFL curriculum.

First, translation activities should be integrated gradually, starting with very short texts that are culturally familiar to the learners and which correspond to their interests and experiences. With increased confidence and competence, tasks can start incorporating increasingly complex linguistic features along with cultural content that will be less immediate to students.

Second, translation activities must be tied directly to broad curricular objectives and learning goals. If students understand how translation tasks will contribute to their general language development, they are more likely to collaborate and become less apprehensive about the relevance and value of tasks.

Thirdly, a variety of kinds of translation exercises needs to be employed to generate interest and cater to various learning styles. Such examples can be literary translation, technical translation, audiovisual translation, and creative adaptation exercises. This variety enables all students to find translation exercises that are interesting and specific to their interests.

### **5.2 Instructor Training and Support**

The success of reducing anxiety during translation activities depends on proper instructor preparation and continuous support.

Professional development programs ought to address both the technical aspects of pedagogy as translation as well as the affective aspects of task implementation.

Instructors must be trained on how to identify and address language learning anxiety during translation activities. This encompasses how anxiety is expressed by different learners and how to devise frameworks of support and intervention when the latter is warranted.

In addition, instructors must be trained on how to foster a psychologically safe learning environment where learners can take chances and try new things. This includes clarifying targets, effective praise, and appropriate responses toward learners' responses to errors and challenges.

### **5.3 Assessment and Feedback Practices**

Assessments aimed at progress rather than the final outcome are shown to be the most effective in lowering anxiety and promoting learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Considerable value can be added to the assessment of translation tasks through self-assessment and peer assessment. They enable learners to exercise their evaluative skills and be less reliant on the teacher which in some cases is a source of anxiety.

Feedback is part of the learning process and should be given in a constructive manner focusing on the solutions rather than the problems. This maintains a positive shield of affect while also providing efficient knowledge.

## VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### 6.1 Research Limitations

The current study is limited in scope owing to its use of secondary data which might not capture the range of EFL learning environments across the globe. Much of the literature has been produced within particular cultural and organizational contexts which may restrict the applicability of the results across other settings.

Moreover, the primary importance of decreasing anxiety should not diminish the other factors associated with the learning of a language. Further research should assess the impact of translation tasks on a learner's motivation, self-efficacy, and enjoyment, as these elements are also fundamental in determining the learning outcomes.

### 6.2 Future Research Directions

There are many areas that require more in-depth study. First, doing experimental studies that aim to measure and compare the affective outcomes from different types of translation tasks could shed light on design elements that may enhance anxiety mitigation.

Second, affect studies in translation-based language learning are still in their infancy. More research is especially needed on the developmental aspects, as in how learners come to feel about translation tasks as time goes on.

Third, examining how cross-cultural frameworks shape emotional experiences with translation tasks may contribute to the development of culturally aware teaching.

Finally, translation-based learning and teaching becomes an interesting area. Particularly, several studies leave gaps as to the tension between anxiety and outcome has been overlooked. Such studies may highlight the emerging importance of positive feelings on learning outcomes, particularly fluency.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study explores the emotional aspects of the EFL learning process and the potential for translation activities designed with care to ease learner anxiety and increase psychological safety. This research found that translation

activities can serve as anxiety-reducing techniques as long as they are culturally relevant and well-designed, and as long as they involve some collaborative work.

It is not enough to focus solely on what learners are doing cognitively; what emotions are tied to the language learning process is equally important. Translation activities offer great possibilities to address affective factors as they promote the development of language and communication, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking.

For practitioners who wish to enhance the emotional dimension of their students' experience in language learning, the incorporation of thoughtful translation exercises seems to be a valid approach. It is critical to note, however, that this is only the first step; much more deliberate work is needed with the tasks, instructors, and assessments of academic and well-being outcomes in order to be more positive and protective towards learners.

Beyond translation pedagogy, this has important implications for the role of affect in second language acquisition. As the field continues to acknowledge the profound emotional dimension of learning, translation activities can be important in a set of strategies to enhance the inclusivity, safety, and efficacy of language learning.

The focus of further research should continue untangling the web of task structure, cultural contexts, and emotions while balancing the creation of anxiety-reducing translation activities that are ready for use in different EFL situations. In this way, the profession of teaching languages will advance in developing the dual-cognitive emotional supportive learning strategies.

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