Student and Instructor Perceptions of Online Translators

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Second language writers in Composition

  - “Strategies for linguistic containment”
  - Myth of linguistic homogeneity

- Tardy (2011) encourages composition programs to have written statements informed by the actual practices of students and instructors at a particular institution.

- Nam and Beckett (2011) found second language writers were often reluctant to utilize peers or other people as a resource due to their “their cultural and their linguistic insecurity.”
What are online translators?

Google Translate

Babel Fish
Second language writers in Composition

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Online translators

- Useful learning tool
  - Garcia & Pena, 2011
  - Niño, 2009
  - Williams, 2006

- Plagiarism
  - Harris, 2011
  - Somers, Gaspari, & Niño 2005
Research questions

- What motivates second language writers to utilize online translators for composition?
- How do students and instructors talk about the use of online translators?
- What are the ideologies that underlie this talk?
## Student participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>First language</th>
<th>ESL section?</th>
<th>Years at MSU</th>
<th>Composition courses taken</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magnolia</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comp. 1</td>
<td>Korean, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Basic, Comp. 1, Comp. 2</td>
<td>English, Hindi, Punjabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Kim</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comp. 1</td>
<td>Korean, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena Cox</td>
<td>Flemish</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comp. 1</td>
<td>Flemish, English, French, Latin, German, Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Instructor participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne Craig</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>English, limited French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livvie</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>English, Moderate Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English, Basic French and Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Semi-structured interviews

- Student topics included
  - the writing process
  - use of the first language during writing
  - perceptions of online translators
  - descriptions of how they use online translators
  - opinions on the permissibility of online translators
Semi-structured interviews

- Instructor topics
  - past experiences with second language writers
  - recommended resources for second language writers
  - opinions on the permissibility of online translation
  - perceptions of how they believe students use online translators
Coding-student

- Stories about use
  - By the participant
  - By participants’ peers

- Talk of the permissibility of online translators
Coding-instructor

- Examples of policies
- Justification of policies
- Stories about students’ using online translators
Students

- Students presented use of online translators by peers
- Presented their own use
- How they related their use to policies or authority
Students constructing the other: “I really laugh at him”

1. Kate Kim: And then some people are not really good at English - they just using Google Translator in Korean essay first first and then they translate it in-
2. Caroline: The whole essay??
3. Kate Kim: Yeah they just submit it and <laughs> and of course professor angry because they're really messy
4. Caroline: Yeah
5. Kate Kim: Has that happened at Mississippi State?
6. Caroline: No of course not in Korea
7. Kate Kim: In Korea uh it's not a really credit subject
8. Caroline: Yeah
9. Kate Kim: it's not really credit lecture but if they took some kind of class?
10. Caroline: And they- I saw some guy using that one but I really laugh at him
Students constructing the other: “I didn’t approve of that”

1 Caroline: Do you know other people who use it [translators]?  
2 Helena Cox: **We all do it** in- in like um I remember when um uh we have to take French anyway in Belgium because it's one of the m- uh the languages in our nation.  
3  
4 Caroline: Right.  
5 Helena Cox: And um the- the **scientists** uh in our class because we had a class of lots of people- science people,  
6 Uh they **they aren't that fond of French** and they would just- just type the- the Flemish uh text in it and they would just translate it to French by uh using Google Translate <laughs>.  
7  
8 Caroline: And they would turn that in as their homework?  
9 Helena Cox: Well some of them did.  
10 And that was- I- I **didn't approve of that** but it's- it's their choice. <laughs>
Students representing their own use: using online translators to read

1 Amanda: When I'm **reading** and it doesn't make sense to me,
2 And even I put it in dictionary and I can't understand what it means,
3
4 Caroline: Right.
5 Amanda: And that time Google Translate helps me. **It can pop up with my-my mother tongue.**
Students representing their own use: manipulating the text

Kate Kim:
1 Oh yeah I **have to change it a little bit** because <laughs> sometimes it
2 show up really a **make sense sentence.**

Helena Cox:
1 Helena Cox: Yeah I mean sometimes it does but if you- if you want to trust it for
2 complex sentence it's- it's better to **just translate the words itself,**
3 Caroline: Right.
4 Helena Cox: And then- **do it yourself.**
1 Caroline: Do you think here teachers- what do you think teachers here would
2 Think about it?
3 At Mississippi Stat-
4 Helena: I don't think they would approve of it because I noticed uh, the
5 Focus on plagiarism,
6 It's: tremendous.

1 Helena: Uh the punishments that you can get,
2 It's scaring me.
3 Caroline: Yes.
4 Helena: I don't want to do anything wrong so.
1. Caroline: Um so what do you think your comp teacher- how do you think she feels about- Google Translate or
2. Kate Kim: Oh: maybe she will not believe that, right?
3. Caroline: She will not what??
4. Kate Kim: She will not trust it. She will not trust it?..
5. Caroline: Would she be ok with it if you did?
6. Kate Kim: Oh: Mm:
7. Caroline: I'm not sure about Americans can . check is it from Google Translator or not.
Student use & authority: words versus thoughts

1 Magnolia: Because when I write- when I use the Google Translation?
2 It’s just like using whole sentence from the internet,
3 Caroline: yeah.
4 Magnolia: So it doesn't really- is my own words or sentence.
5 Caroline: I-yeah.

1 Amanda: I told her that I wrote paper but my English is not that much clear so I
2 used that Google Translate and other stuff,
3 Caroline: And she said that’s good?
4 Amanda: She was like yeah if it's helping you that's good.
5 Caroline: Yeah.
6 Amanda: Yeah.
7 Caroline: Yeah.
8 Amanda: It's-it's-she was like as far as you're using your thoughts it's good.
Instructor themes

- discussions about the instructor’s inexperience or lack of preparation to work with second language writers in general

- a willingness to work with students who do engage in this literacy practice through out-of-class discussions and permitting limited use

- negative attitudes surrounding the latter
Anne Craig:
1  I've also had one student who asked me if it was ok to run through it
2  And ... <sighs> I have to remember the policy—
3  This was the first semester I taught so I wasn't sure what to do exactly.

Ellen:
1  Caroline:  Um so did you feel prepared to deal with second language writers,
2  Did you know about language acquisition?
3  Ellen:  No. I wasn't .. I definitely wasn't with my first uh my basic student prepared.
Examples of policies

Excerpt 1
1  Caroline: So when you think about these services like Google Translate, just off the top of your head where would you think that would fit into this writing process?
2  Anne Craig: The writing process?
3  Caroline: Yes.
4  Anne Craig: I could see ... maybe typing up your first draft, putting it into Google Translate, kinda like what I did with my /????/ student, Translating it into that language make sure everything translated to your language- to your ideas.
5  Anne Craig: And then moving back and forth.
6  Caroline: Ok.

Excerpt 2
1  Caroline: So it's kinda like maybe editing the output,
2  Anne Craig: Yes.
3  C: What comes out,
4  Anne Craig: Yes,
5  [they can use it to-]
6  Caroline: [and that makes it more] acceptable?
7  Anne Craig: Yes the um the analogy would be like they're using that to build the bones, Right,
8  Caroline: And polishing it up the skin,
9  Anne Craig: And their editing abilities.
Examples of policies: Qualifying use

Excerpt 1 - Livvie
1 But I think once they are integrated into like a Comp. 1 or Comp. 2 class
2 I don't feel like they should be relying on those.

Excerpt 2
1 Caroline: Um so is there a type of ... if somebody did it would you have
2 problem with it-
3 Would it- you know?
4 Livvie: No I don't think I would have a problem with it,
5 Caroline: You just wouldn't recommend ?
6 Livvie: I would recommend tutoring.
Examples of policies: translating instructions

1. Caroline: Um do you think there's an appropriate time that second language writers could use these services?
2. Ellen: I think so I think um in particular maybe translating assignments?
3. Caroline: Like the instructions?
4. Ellen: Just to-
5. Caroline: The instructions and even if they're having trouble um maybe with certain concepts.
6. Ellen: Ok ok.
7. Ellen: But it's never appropriate to use it for a whole assignment.
Language of prohibition:
“it’s not reflecting their knowledge”

1 Anne Craig: Because then it doesn't sound like the student's voice,
2 Caroline: Ok.
3 Anne Craig: It doesn't sound like them.
4 It doesn't reflect their knowledge of the issue.
5 Caroline: Ok,
6 Anne Craig: Just like an ESL student.
7 Caroline: Right.
8 Anne Craig: Where if they used translator but don't smooth things out or if words are different it's not reflecting their knowledge of the English language.
1 Livvie: Um but most of the time with ESL students what I find is that they wanna take that extra time to **do it the right way**.
2 Right.
3 Caroline: So I feel like a lot of times they’re trying to use English instead of translating.
Language of prohibition:
“it does feel like cheating”

1 Anne Craig: Because you do have that option of like feeling like you're cheating,
2 Caroline: Yeah,
3 Anne Craig: Almost,
4 And-and on some levels it would be.
5 Caroline: Yeah.
6 Anne Craig: Definitely,
7 If you're supposed to be doing it with your own ideas then it does feel
8 Like cheating if you're translating or something.
Recommendations

- Conversation
  - Teacher to teacher
  - Student to teacher
- Classroom discussion of digital composing practices
- Classroom contract
Conclusion and implications

- Online translators as a private and less risky form of language socialization
- Students socializing instructors


