

# The Attitude of Elementary School Students Toward Translating in EFL Class

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**Mentor rada:  
prof. dr. sc. Lovorka Zergollern-Miletić**

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## **Summary**

This paper covers the topic of translation in primary school ESL classes and students' attitudes towards it. Translation in language learning classes is sometimes a controversial topic. The first association to translation in language learning classes can be the grammar-translation method, which used to be the dominant method of teaching languages. Because of that, an aversion toward translation in ESL classes has spread among English teachers. However, translation activities used in ESL classes can be much more than the grammar-translation method, as long as the teachers adjust them to their students' age and proficiency. Opinions on using translation in English classes are divided, which is what motivated this research. The aim of this paper was to research the attitudes of primary school students towards translation as well as their proficiency in it. The research was conducted in a primary school in Zagreb. 42 sixth-grade students participated in the research. The research consisted of two short translation tasks, one from Croatian into English and one from English into Croatian. After completing the translation tasks, the students answered a questionnaire. The students were mostly more successful in the translation of the English text, but they also found it to be more difficult. However, the opinions on what was more difficult were quite divided. While the total number of achieved points was higher for the translation of the English text, the students acquired more points for vocabulary in the translation of the Croatian text. More students expressed a positive attitude towards translation and those students achieved better results than the ones who expressed a negative attitude. However, without further research, it is difficult to conclude what is the cause and what is the result.

*Keywords: translation, teaching methodology, teaching languages, language competences*

## **Sažetak**

Ovaj rad bavi se prevođenjem i učeničkim stavovima prema prevođenju na nastavi engleskog u osnovnoj školi. Prevođenje u nastavi jezika ponekad je kontroverzna tema. Pri spomenu prevođenja u nastavi jezika, nekima prva asocijacija može biti metoda prevođenja gramatike, koja je nekoć bila najzastupljeniji način poučavanja jezika. Zbog toga se kod nekih učitelja stvorila averzija prema prevođenju na nastavi engleskog jezika. No, aktivnosti koje uključuju prevođenje u nastavi engleskog mogu biti puno opširnije i zanimljivije od metode prevođenja gramatike. Najbitnije je da učitelji aktivnosti prilagode dobi, znanju i sposobnostima svojih učenika. Mišljenja o korištenju prevođenja u nastavi engleskog veoma su podijeljena, što je jedan od čimbenika koji su motivirali ovo istraživanje. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti stavove osnovnoškolskih učenika prema prevođenju. Cilj je također bio istražiti njihovu vještinu prevođenja. Istraživanje je provedeno u jednoj zagrebačkoj školi. U istraživanju su sudjelovala 42 učenika. Istraživanje se sastoji od dva kratka teksta koja su učenici trebali prevesti; jedan s hrvatskog na engleski i drugi s engleskog na hrvatski. Nakon prevođenja, učenici su ispunili kratku anketu. Učenici su većinom bili uspješniji u prevođenju engleskog teksta. Istovremeno, u anketi su taj zadatak proglasili težim. No, mišljenja o tome koji je smjer i koji su dijelovi bili kompliciraniji, veoma su podijeljena. Učenici su postigli veći broj bodova za prijevod engleskog teksta. Za vokabular su postigli više bodova u prijevodu hrvatskog teksta. Više studenata izrazilo je pozitivni stav nego negativni. Učenici koji su izrazili pozitivne stavove bili su i uspješniji u prijevodu. No, bez daljnjeg istraživanja teško je razabrati uzrok od posljedice.

*Ključne riječi: prevođenje, metodika, poučavanje jezika, jezične vještine*

## **Content**

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## **Introduction**

### *Translation*

Translation is “the process of changing something that is written or spoken into another language” (Hornby, 2010). There are many uses for or circumstances of translation. In this globalised world, translation has become a tool often necessary for everyday communication, whether we translate something for ourselves or our friends and family (Popovic, 2001), whether we translate something orally or in writing. Being able to translate something can thus broaden our possibilities for living in multicultural surroundings, as well as improve and simplify the lives of those around us. A question that gets posed is when to introduce translation in education. Nowadays, it is not uncommon for young children to translate even things such as important documents for their parents, especially in immigrant families. Therefore, it is essential to introduce translation in primary education rather than ignore it (Belpoliti & Plascencia, 2013).

### *Translation in Language Learning*

This thesis will focus on translation in language learning. Anybody who knows two languages can serve as a translator in a given situation. Non-professionals mostly take on the role of a translator in informal situations when they encounter speakers of different languages who might not understand each other. They “mediate, through interpretation and translation, between speakers of the two languages concerned who cannot communicate directly” (Council of Europe, 2001, p.43). Students can also become translators while learning a language. The attitude towards using translation in language class has changed a lot through the years and is still changing, and different teachers have different attitudes towards it. Today, the teachers who choose to incorporate translation in their English classes do it in various ways and in various amounts. However, until the second half of the twentieth century, learning languages through translation was the norm (Malmkjær, 1998). This was mainly done using the grammar-translation method.

### *Grammar-Translation Method*

The grammar-translation method had been used since 1793, but it “received a boost in England in 1858 when a system of public examinations was established, controlled by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge” (Malmkjær, 1998, p.3). The grammar-translation

method predominantly consists of, as the name implies, learning grammatical rules and applying them by translating a text. This method was originally developed with teaching classical languages, Greek and Latin, in mind which is very noticeable in the method itself (Malmkjær, 1998). This method is still commonly used for teaching Greek and Latin (MZOŠ, 2019), but it is not completely eradicated from English classes either. Even today, in some schools, languages are taught in such a way that next to each new word or phrase, students need to write the translation of the word or phrase in their notebook. Nevertheless, many teachers are steering away from including so much translation in their classes, with some of them even going to the polar opposite and completely avoiding it or treating it as a “necessary evil” when teaching younger or less proficient students. Tsagari and Floros (2013) mention “a conflation of the use of L1 with translation” as one of the reasons for the decline in using translation as a teaching and assessment tool. This means that many teachers only link the usage of translation in language classes with excessive use of L1. This is connected to another reason they list: “fallacious interpretations of the translation task as the common attempt of finding lexical and structural correspondences among L1 and L2,” which is linked to the grammar-translation method. From being the most common and favoured method of language teaching, the grammar-translation method had become somewhat of a villain. Simultaneously and related to that phenomenon, any usage of L1 in language teaching classes has also become frowned upon. This explains the conflations and fallacious interpretations that Tsagari and Floros (2013) described and the fear of one being accused of using excessive, if not any, L1 in their language classes.

### *Translation in Grammar, Metaphors and Metonymy*

Using translation in class does not necessarily imply obeying the grammar-translation method. Translation can be used in language classes in other ways, not necessarily as the only way of learning new words and phrases. “If properly designed, translation activities can be successfully applied at all levels and ages” (Popovic, 2001, p.3). Sentences in different languages do not only differ in the words that are used. Sentence structure may differ quite noticeably between two sentences even if they have the same meaning. A simple example is *Anu voli Iva*, which has to be inverted to *Iva loves Ana* in English to make sense. If not careful, one might translate that as *Ana loves Iva* which, while grammatically correct, does not have an identical meaning. Thus, to learn how to properly translate a sentence from one language to



another, the translator also has to be familiar with grammatical structures in both languages. This is an element which might present itself as especially problematic for younger students, as can be seen later in this paper. This might be expected as they are still learning basic grammatical rules of both their first and second language all throughout primary school (MZOŠ, 2019). Also, seemingly similar phrases in two languages can have completely different culturally implied meanings and “a message can be fully understood only if embedded in the context of the culture underlying it” (Bratož & Kocbek, 2013, p.137). This does not necessarily even have to be a phrase, as even the usage of a single word can differ significantly between two languages. Even if a word is seemingly the same as one from another language, the meaning and the way it is used can be significantly different. One example is the word *professor*. In English, professors are found teaching in universities. However, as Bratož and Kocbek point out, all secondary school teachers and some primary school teachers are also referred to as professors in Slovenian (Slo. profesor). The same is true for Croatian. Despite the difference in meaning not being significant, the difference in the culturally implied meaning is important. This is because addressing someone as a professor instead of a teacher is seen as a sign of respect, as professors are hierarchically positioned higher than teachers. Bratož & Kocbek mention that metaphors and metonymy can also be problematic for language learners. This is because some metaphors are present in both languages, which could trick the learner into thinking that other similar metaphors are also shared when they are really not. An example of a metaphor present in both English and Slovenian (as well as Croatian) is *the leg of a table*. However, a seemingly similar metaphor, *the hand of a clock* is not a part of neither Slovenian nor Croatian language. Because of this, it is also important to include activities which will introduce language learners to metaphors and metonymies common in the language they are learning.

### *The Direction of Translation*

An important distinction of types of translation is based on the direction of the translation. A text can be translated from L1 (language one) to L2 (language two), the person's mother tongue to their second language, or from L2 to L1. L2 translation or the translation from one's L1 into their L2 has gotten different names, such as “service”, “inverse” or “retour” translation, all of which have a negative connotation. (Pavlović, 2019). In professional translation, L2 to L1 is often preferred, as a person is thought to be more competent in

translating into their L1 than from their L1. However, as many translators are highly educated as well as equally proficient in both of the languages taking part in the translation, that is not necessarily true. L2 translation is especially important for speakers of languages of low diffusion, languages with a small number of speakers, such as Croatian. (Hlavac & Majhut (ed.), 2019). Translation from L2 to L1 is believed to be less demanding (Pavlović, 2019). In the context of school, students usually encounter both directions of translation, as they often have to actively think about translating their thoughts before being able to express them in their L2, often accompanied by the famous question *Teacher, how do you say....* At the same time, they translate the content from their language textbooks to understand them more easily. Translation from L2 into L1 is even mentioned in the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001) as a way of learning from written texts. The literature on how exactly teachers use translation in their classes, and which direction of translation is more dominant, is unfortunately lacking.

#### *Types of Translation Activities in ESL (English as a Second Language) Classes*

When talking about using translation in language classes, the grammar-translation method is often the first association. Because of that, translation is often perceived as a negative and unwanted thing in educational contexts. However, there are many ways to make translation more interesting as well as more educational as a part of a language learning class.

It is important to note how diverse all of our students are. We know that different students benefit from different teaching styles and activities. With that in mind, it is clear that not all students will respond equally to translation, but analytically oriented learners are likely to find it a useful aid to language learning (Popovic, 2001).

As ideas for practising oral translation, Stibbard mentions one student reading aloud in the foreign language after which a second student summarises it in their first language. Another option he mentions is a teacher presenting a short story in the foreign language to the class after which the students should work together to orally summarise the story in their L1 (Stibbard, 1998).

Popovic (2001) highlights that entire classes should be dedicated to translation only with highly motivated classes. When such classes are organised, students should work in pairs or groups which would give them an opportunity to brainstorm together, compare and test their ideas. However, we can include shorter activities related to translation more often in class.

These activities should not all be plain translations. Activities which will prepare students for translation can be included in other language learning activities related to any other language skill and in any part of the lesson. This would make translation-related activities more approachable to both teachers and students. However, translation activities should not end after students translate a text. Post translation activities should be organised as well. These would focus on students rewriting and evaluating their own and their peers' translations. It is important to also include discussions which would encourage the students to ponder the interaction between the L1 and the L2 which happens during translation as well as generally during the process of language learning (Popovic, 2001).

With somewhat older students, such as teens, we can include more short translation tasks simply because of their writing proficiency. An example of a task appropriate for teenage learners is a translation of shorter columns from teen magazines or web pages that the students are familiar with. This can be made even easier if these columns have an equivalent in the students' L1 (Beecroft, 2013).

### *Translation With Young Learners*

As was mentioned above, especially with massive migrations and young children taking on the role of translator or interpreter for their parents (Belpoliti & Plascencia, 2013), it is essential to start introducing translation in ESL classes at an early age. This introduces the question of what the main purpose of using translation with young learners is. Translation in primary education is not used to produce professional translators, but to improve the student's knowledge of English (Kaloh, 2017; Popovic, 2001). The objective of professional translation is to inform the reader about the contents of the original text. On the other hand, in schools, the process of translation begins and ends with the teacher. Translation is also often used as a form of testing the students' knowledge. In that case, the objective of translation is to inform the teacher about the students' knowledge (Klaudy, 1996). Because of that, it should also be approached in a different way than the classes which educate future professional translators. However, this can be challenging as, to date, the literature concerning the education of professional translators far outnumbers that dealing with teaching translation to young learners. While translation is considered to be among the more advanced language skills, a prepared teacher who knows methodology and their classes well can use translation with younger students as well (Popovic, 2001). The Croatian National Curriculum (2019), however, does not

even mention translation until secondary education and the same is true for the old curriculum as well (MZOŠ, 2006).

Translation is not, as many students believe, a process of simply “replacing a sequence of words in one language by a sequence of words in another language”, but the “transfer of content from one culture to another”. Thus, students are not only required to possess language knowledge and a rich vocabulary but an understanding of the language and culture as well (Klein-Braley & Franklin, 1998). For younger students, it is important to include activities related to cultural aspects familiar to them. Examples of these are stories, literary characters and holidays (Bratož & Kocbek, 2013).

### **Research aims and questions**

This research aims at investigating primary school students' attitudes toward translating from English to Croatian and from Croatian to English as well as investigating their proficiency in translating. Specific aims are to research:

1. Whether the students use translation in their ESL classes.
2. Which direction of translation they encounter more often.
3. Which direction of translation the students would be more successful in.
4. Which aspects of translation would be the most difficult ones for the students.

Three hypotheses derive from these aims:

H1: Translation from L2 into L1 is used more often than L1 to L2.

H2: The students are going to be more successful in the direction of translation that is practised more often in class.

H3: The students who have a positive attitude towards translation will also be more successful in translation.

## Methods

### *Sample*

Forty-two primary school students participated in this research. They all came from one school in Zagreb but from two different classes. All of the students were, at the moment of participating in this research, in sixth grade. This means that most students were in their sixth year of learning English, even though it might be possible that some attended English lessons in kindergarten and preschool as well. All of the students' L1 was Croatian. Before participating in the research, the students had to bring the consent form, signed by one of their parents. The researcher made sure the students knew that participating in the research was not compulsory, would not be graded and that their teacher would not have access to their translations and questionnaires.

### *Instruments and Procedure*

To demonstrate their translating skills, the students had to translate one short text consisting of four sentences or eighteen words from Croatian to English, and another one consisting of two sentences or twenty-three words from English to Croatian (Appendix B). The Croatian text was taken from a popular Croatian children's book (Pilic, 2016), while the English one was taken from a sixth-grade English textbook that these students did not use (Kirin, I., & Uremović, M., 2020). Following the translation task, there was a short questionnaire regarding their previous experiences and attitudes towards translating. (Appendix C) The students worked individually and had as much time as they needed, but all of them finished within fifteen minutes.

#### The Croatian text - original

Mama mi je kupila nove cipele. Dobio sam novu majicu. Imam nove knjige. I teke su mi nove.

#### The Croatian text - translated

Mum bought me new shoes. I got a new shirt. I have new books. My notebooks are new, too.

## The English text

Learning can be easy - if we work together! All of us are different, and we are all strong in certain areas and subjects.

## The English text - translated (the author's version)

Učenje može biti jednostavno - ako radimo zajedno! Svi smo mi različiti i svi smo jaki u određenim područjima i predmetima.

The students had to translate the sentences listed above. Points were assigned to their translations based on the grading scheme presented in Table 1. Some of the grading criteria were adapted based on the students' translations; such as sentence structure being a separate category. Another factor that was adapted is the number of mistakes allowed for achieving a certain number of points.

**Table 1**

### *Translation Grading Scheme*

---

1. Task achievement	0) The text was not translated. 1) The text was partially translated. 2) The text was completely translated.
2. Vocabulary	0) The text lost its original meaning. 1) The student had some mistakes but the text still kept its original meaning. 2) The student made one or two mistakes. 3) The text was translated correctly.
3. Grammar	1) The student made four or more grammatical mistakes. 2) The student made two or three grammatical mistakes. 3) The student made only one mistake. 4) There were no grammatical mistakes.

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4. Spelling

- 1) The student made five or more spelling mistakes.
- 2) The student made between two and four spelling mistakes.
- 3) The student made only one spelling mistake.
- 4) There were no spelling mistakes.

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5. Sentence structure

- 0) The text does not adhere to sentence structure rules of the target language
  - 1) The text mostly adheres to the sentence structure rules.
  - 2) The text adheres to the sentence structure rules of the target language
-



## Results

### *Points*

As will be visible in Table 2, in the questionnaire the majority or 69.05% of students said that, in class, they often translate in writing. Even more students said they often translate orally, 76.19% of them. Most students from both classes agreed that they more often translate from English into Croatian. 40.48% of students overall found the translation from English into Croatian to be the more difficult one. 6B class was much more divided on which direction was more difficult, with only 28.57% of them agreeing with the 6C class that the translation from English into Croatian was more difficult, while 38.10% of them found the translation from Croatian into English to be more challenging, and 33.33% found both directions to be equally difficult. The most difficult aspect for most of the students, exactly 50.00% of them, was finding the necessary vocabulary. The exact numbers can be seen in Table 2. In total, six students chose the *other* option. Two of those students said that they did not have any difficulties, two said that everything was equally difficult, and two said that they did not understand only one word or phrase. The only problem that the students expressed orally while translating was a Croatian word that they did not recognise: *teka* (a colloquial word for notebook). Students from both classes had this problem.

**Table 2**

### *Questionnaire Responses*

			6B		6C		total
			n	%	n	%	%
1. In English class we translate in writing	a) often		13	61.90	16	76.19	69.05
	b) sometimes		5	23.81	4	19.05	21.43
	c) rarely		3	14.29	1	4.76	9.52
2. In English class we translate orally	a) often		15	71.43	17	80.95	76.19
	b) sometimes		5	23.81	2	9.52	16.67
	c) rarely		1	4.76	2	9.52	7.14

		6B		6C		total
		n	%	n	%	%
3. In English class we more often translate	a) from English into Croatian	12	57.14	18	85.71	71.43
	b) from Croatian into English	2	9.52	0	0.00	4.76
	c) equally	7	33.33	3	14.29	23.81
	d) we do not translate	0	0.00	0	0.00	0.00
4. It was more difficult for me to translate	a) from English into Croatian	6	28.57	11	52.38	40.48
	b) from Croatian into English	8	38.10	5	23.81	30.95
	c) equally	7	33.33	5	23.81	28.57
5. I found it challenging to	a) think of the correct words I needed	8	38.10	13	61.90	50.00
	b) correctly spell some words	6	28.57	5	23.81	26.19
	c) determine the correct order of words in a sentence	1	4.76	1	4.76	4.76
	d) other:	4	19.05	2	9.52	14.29

In Table 3 we can find the average number of points that the students scored for their translations, divided into categories.

**Table 3**

*Translation Analysis*

		max number of points	mean, $\mu$	
			6B	6C
Croatian - English	Task achievement	2	1.9	1.8
	Vocabulary	3	2.0	2.3
	Grammar	4	2.1	2.7
	Spelling	4	3.0	3.4
	Sentence structure	2	1.0	1.1
	Total	15	10.0	11.3
English - Croatian	Task achievement	2	1.7	1.9
	Vocabulary	3	1.7	1.8
	Grammar	4	2.5	2.7
	Spelling	4	3.5	3.6
	Sentence structure	2	1.2	1.6
	Total	15	10.7	11.6
Total		30	20.7	22.9

**Table 4***The Mean ( $\mu$ ) and Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the Students' Results*

		mean, $\mu$	standard deviation, $\sigma$
Croatian - English	Task achievement	1.8	0.4
	Vocabulary	2.2	0.9
	Grammar	2.4	1.2
	Spelling	3.2	1.0
	Sentence structure	1.0	0.5
	Total	10.7	3.2
English - Croatian	Task achievement	1.8	0.6
	Vocabulary	1.7	1.0
	Grammar	2.6	0.8
	Spelling	3.5	0.9
	Sentence structure	1.4	0.7
	Total	11.1	3.2
	Total	21.8	5.9

The mean and standard deviation of all of the students' results can be found in Table 4. On average, the students achieved more points for their translations from English into Croatian, than from Croatian into English. This is true for both classes, even though students from the 6C class earned more points on both translations.

**Table 5***Number of Students Who Achieved a Certain Number of Points*

		points				
		0	1	2	3	4
Croatian - English	Task achievement	0	7	35	-	-
	Vocabulary	3	6	14	19	-
	Grammar	-	13	10	8	11
	Spelling	-	5	3	12	22
	Sentence structure	5	30	7	-	-
English - Croatian	Task achievement	3	2	37	-	-
	Vocabulary	6	9	17	10	-
	Grammar	-	5	9	25	3
	Spelling	-	3	2	6	31
	Sentence structure	5	15	22	-	-

In total, three students did not translate the English text. All of the students translated the Croatian text, but seven of them did it only partially. The students found vocabulary to be one of the more difficult aspects of translating, as they mentioned in the questionnaire which can be seen in Table 2. Perhaps surprisingly, they earned more points for vocabulary in the translation from Croatian into English. This might be because they did not understand some of the words in the English source text. One example of such a word is *certain*, which two students pointed out as unfamiliar in the questionnaire.

Unsurprisingly, the students got more points in grammar for the translation from English into Croatian. However, it is interesting that only three students got the maximum number of points (four points) for that translation, while 11 of them got the maximum number of points for grammar in the translation from Croatian into English.

The students earned more points for spelling on the translation from English into Croatian, with 31 students earning the maximum of four points.

The students earned more points for sentence structure in the translation from English into Croatian, with 22 of them earning the maximum of two points.

The highest number of total points that a student achieved is 29. No students scored 30 points, but two got 29 points. The lowest number of points one single student achieved is five points. It should be noted that this student did not translate the English text and only partially translated the Croatian one. More details on how many points the students scored in each category can be found in Table 5. The most common total number of points was 26, achieved by eight students, followed by 23 points, achieved by six students. The average number of points (mean,  $\mu$ ) for all the tasks can be found in Table 4.

### *Common Mistakes*

Concerning vocabulary, the students' most common mistakes were using singular instead of plural nouns, leaving words out and not translating some words. The students used various approaches for unknown words or words they could not recall. While some just left blank space or "...", some copied the word in the original form from the text they were translating. One student could not remember the word *shoes* so they instead wrote *foot things*. This was the only such attempt in their translations of the Croatian text but such attempts were more common in their translations into Croatian, most commonly while translating *certain places*. However, while the student who wrote *foot things* understood the meaning and probably just had a problem with recalling the word *shoes*, many students did not understand *certain places* and therefore made attempts with translations such as *centru pažnje* (limelight), which was probably based purely on the form.

The students had some more problems with grammar. Some grammatical mistakes they made in their English texts are using incorrect past tense forms, using *a* before plural nouns and not using it before singular ones. In their Croatian texts, they mostly had problems with using commas in the correct places. Even though this should fall under punctuation, as the grading scheme that was used does not have punctuation as a separate category (see Table 1), it was graded as grammar.

The students made a lot of spelling mistakes. The English words that they had the most problems with were *shoes*, *T-shirt* and *bought*. These were very common and repeated mistakes.

Some students also made mistakes which might be attributed to the fact that they were rushing. Some such mistakes are writing *nex* instead of *new* and writing *short* instead of *shirt*.

There were fewer mistakes related to sentence structure. Most were made in English. Their most common mistake was completely copying the word order of the Croatian text. They also copied the sentence structure of the English text and used it in their Croatian translations. Another very common mistake was redundantly repeating words. This was present only in their translations of the English text.

### *Students' Attitudes*

In the questionnaire, 14 students expressed their opinions about the translation task they just finished. Their feedback was predominantly positive as can be seen in Table 6. 11 students left positive feedback while three students left negative feedback.

**Table 6**

*Students' Feedback Regarding Their Attitudes*

	<i>n</i>	mean, $\mu^a$	standard deviation, $\sigma^b$
positive comments	11	23.7	3.77
negative comments	3	13.3	5.85

<sup>a</sup> mean ( $\mu$ ) of the total results of the students who left comments

<sup>b</sup> standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the total results of the students who left comments

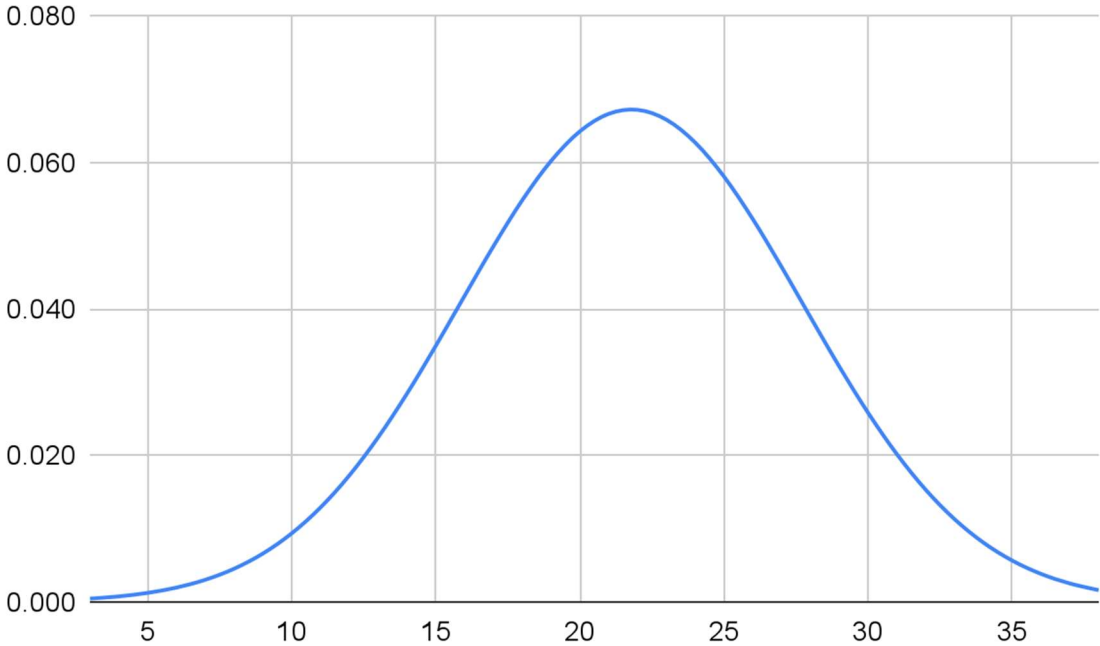
### *Distribution of the Students' Results*

The students' final results, when summed up, can be presented by a bell curve, as can be seen in Figure 1. From Table 4 we can see that the mean ( $\mu$ ) of total results is 21.8 and the standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) is 5.9. 73.81% of the data is within one standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the mean ( $\mu$ ), 95.24% of data is within two standard deviations ( $\sigma$ ) of the mean ( $\mu$ ), and 100% of the data is within three standard deviations ( $\sigma$ ) of the mean ( $\mu$ ). In other words, out of 42 students, 31 students achieved between 15.85 and 27.72 points, 40 students achieved between 9.91 and 33.66 (or the maximum 30 points) and all of the students achieved between 3.98 and

39.60 (or the maximum 30 points). Therefore, we can say that the students' results can be recognized as a normal distribution.

**Figure 1**

*Normal Distribution of the Students' Results*





## Discussion

From the moment of introducing the research, the students seemed excited about it. This could be perceived as a positive attitude towards translation but it is more likely to be a positive attitude towards anything out of the ordinary happening in class. The verbal and physical reactions to the translation tasks were diverse. Some students right away expressed their opinion that they are not good at English and that their translations would therefore not be good. One student even wrote that as a comment in the questionnaire. That student did indeed have one of the weaker results of the translation from Croatian into English and did not even partially translate the English text. This is somewhat surprising as L1 translation is usually perceived as the easier direction of translation (Popovic, 2001). It is also unexpected as 71.43% of the students agreed that, in class, they more often translate from English into Croatian. However, as can be seen in Table 2, the students were very divided when asked which translation task was more difficult for them. Despite overall 40.48% of students agreeing that they found the translation from English into Croatian to be the more difficult one, the opinions among the two classes vary significantly. 52.38% of students from 6C agreed that the translation from English into Croatian was more difficult, while 38.10% of students from 6B found the translation from Croatian into English to be more difficult, and only 28.57% of students from 6B agreed with the students from 6C. Despite these opinions, both classes overall performed slightly better in the translation from English into Croatian. The only part for which they on average got more points in the translation from Croatian into English is vocabulary - for which the mean ( $\mu$ ) is 2.2 while in the translation from English into Croatian the mean ( $\mu$ ) is 1.7. The mean ( $\mu$ ) for task achievement is the same for both translation tasks - 1.8.

### “Test”

Other students, however, said how easy the task was, and eight of them even wrote that as their comment in the questionnaire. One student wrote that they liked the *test*. Another student wrote that the *test* was difficult but also interesting. This could all be perceived as a positive attitude towards translation. It is interesting however that both of these students regarded the research and the translation task as a *test* in their comments, despite being reminded multiple times that the research was not a test. It might be expected that referring to this task as a *test* would form negative connotations for the students, but both of these students expressed positive feelings about the task. Therefore, *test* was probably just the easiest way and

the first word that came to the students' mind while describing it since tests are so common and familiar to them.

### *Level of Difficulty of the Translation Task*

As Weatherby suggests, the texts used for teaching students translation should be realistic texts as well as texts with a degree of difficulty which is appropriate for the students' age and proficiency (Weatherby, 1998). This research used sentences from such texts. The English text was taken from an ESL textbook which is used in Croatian schools, but not in these classes. The Croatian text was taken from a popular Croatian children's book that the students might even be familiar with. Even though the texts were authentic and age-appropriate, some might argue that it was more difficult for students to translate since these sentences were taken out of context which a longer text might have provided. Some even demand that all extracts which students have to translate have to be contextualised (Anderman, 1998). However, as the research was conducted during a portion of a regular class, because of time limitations students could not have gotten longer texts.

One possible reason why the students found the Croatian text so easy to translate could be because the vocabulary used in it is very familiar to them and the structure of the sentences is very simple. The Croatian text was four sentences long and the English one was only two sentences long. However, the sentences in the Croatian text are much shorter and the English sentences are more complex. All of the vocabulary used in the Croatian text is expected to be simple for sixth-grade students as, according to the Croatian National Curriculum for ESL, they learned about school supplies in the first grade, and learned about clothes in the second grade (MZOŠ, 2019). This also explains why they earned more points on vocabulary in the translation from Croatian into English than the other way around. Even though both texts should be simple and easily understandable for the students, one should have in mind that, as was mentioned above, the vocabulary used in the Croatian text is on the second-grade level, while the English text was taken directly from a textbook for sixth grade (Kirin, I., & Uremović, M., 2020).

### *Difficulties the Students Encountered*

As was aforementioned, *certain* was the only word that possibly none of the students knew. They did not recognise *teke* either but their teacher helped them by telling them the formal Croatian word for it - *bilježnice*. 13 students altogether completely left out the translation

for *certain places*. The most common incorrect translation of *certain places* was *određenim mjestima*, which is the correct literal translation but does not make sense contextually.

However, grammatically the texts are on the same level of difficulty, as can be seen from the number of points that the students on average got for grammar, which can be found in Table 4. This is because, even though the Croatian sentences are very short, some of them use the past tense which proved to be problematic for some of the students. The most common grammatical problem was the past form *bought*, which only 16 students wrote correctly. 12 students used *buy* instead of *bought*, two used *was buy*, three used *is buy* and three used *buyed*. Most of the other students just misspelt *bought*.

### *Distribution of the Results*

While three students translated the Croatian text completely correctly, none of the students translated the English one completely correctly. However, six of them lost only one point - mostly for minor spelling mistakes. Overall, 83.33% or 35 students earned more than 50% of the points, 64.29% or 27 of them earned more than 75% of the points and 16.67% or 7 students earned more than 90% of the points. The students' results can be presented by the normal distribution or bell curve, as can be seen in *Figure 1*.

### *Attitudes the Students Expressed*

We can notice both from the questionnaire as well as the students' results that this is certainly not their first encounter with translation. They were aware that they translate relatively often which means it is probably not just an activity they glide over from time to time in class. As can be seen in Table 2, they more often translate from English into Croatian. This is in accordance with perhaps the simplest and most common way of using translation in class - explaining new vocabulary and concepts in the students' L1.

Overall, there was more positive feedback from the students than negative. More precisely, only three students expressed negative attitudes in the questionnaire. In contrast, a total of eleven students expressed a positive attitude as can be seen in Table 6. The comments which were counted as the negative ones all expressed how difficult they found the task and how badly they think they did. The comments counted as positive mostly described the task as easy. The comment which said that the *test* was difficult but also interesting was counted as a positive comment for this purpose. In total, 14 comments is not a lot but as that question was

optional, it is not surprising that so few students wrote their feedback. However, when expressing one's opinion is not compulsory, it could be argued that only those with more intense feelings express their opinions and therefore these comments are invaluable. It should be noted that some students left their opinions as an answer to the fifth question under d (see Table 2). Those comments were also counted for this purpose unless a student left their comment in both places. As can be seen in Table 6, there is a correlation between what kind of attitude the students expressed and how well they performed in the translation task. On average, ( $\mu$ ) the students who expressed a positive attitude achieved a result of 23.7 points, which is higher than the average result of the whole group which is 21.8, as can be seen in Table 4. In contrast, the students who expressed a negative attitude on average achieved a result of 13.3. There is only one outlier in the group of students who expressed a negative attitude who achieved 20 points as a final result, but even with their result included, the mean is significantly lower than the one of the group who expressed positive attitudes. Firstly, it is good to see that a larger number of students have a positive attitude towards translation. It would be worth researching whether and in what way students' attitudes toward translation differ from their attitudes toward other language skills as well as English as a language and subject in general. It is of course a question whether these students' attitudes are positive because they are good at English and translation or whether they put more effort into translation and English as a subject because of their positive attitudes towards it. Whatever the answer is, there is certainly a correlation.

### *The Hypothesis*

The first hypothesis was that translation from L2 into L1 is used more often than L1 to L2. This was confirmed by the students in the questionnaire. 71.43% of them said that they more often translate from English into Croatian than in the other direction.

The other hypothesis was that the students were going to be more successful in the direction of translation that is practised more often in class. This hypothesis was also confirmed. The mean ( $\mu$ ) of total points for the translation of the English text was 11.1 compared to the mean of total points for the translation of the Croatian text which was 10.7. Therefore, the students were more successful while translating from English into Croatian. As was mentioned, the difference between the results was not extreme and the students achieved more points for vocabulary in the translation from Croatian into English. It is interesting that, despite being slightly more successful in the translation of the English text, they also expressed the opinion

that that direction of translation was also more difficult. However, only 40.48 of the students agreed with this opinion.

The third hypothesis was that the students who had a positive attitude towards translation would also be more successful in translation. This was also confirmed with 11 students expressing a positive attitude and three expressing a negative attitude. The mean ( $\mu$ ) of the total results of the students who expressed a positive opinion was 23.7 while the mean of the total results of the students who expressed a negative opinion was 13.3. This is a significant difference. However, based on this information alone, we cannot conclude whether the students had a positive attitude because of their success and proficiency in translating or whether they perhaps put in more effort and did the translation tasks better because they already had a positive attitude towards translation and perhaps learning English in general.

## Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate the attitudes of primary school students towards translation in ESL classes, their proficiency in translating as well as the correlation between their attitudes and proficiency. The research was conducted in two classes in a primary school, where 42 students had to translate one short Croatian text into English and one short English text into Croatian. After finishing the translation task, the students had to answer a short questionnaire about their experience with translating.

Three hypotheses were proposed. The first hypothesis was that translation from L2, in this case English, into L1, or Croatian, is used more often in ESL classes than translation from L2 into L1. This hypothesis was confirmed. The second hypothesis was that the students would be more successful in the direction of translation which is practised more often in class. In this case, we have established that that direction is from English to Croatian. This hypothesis was also confirmed. However, the difference between the success in the two translation tasks is not big. The third hypothesis was that the students who had a positive attitude towards translation would also be more successful in their translation tasks. The third hypothesis was also confirmed. The students who expressed a positive opinion scored significantly higher than the students who expressed a negative opinion. This research has established that the students predominantly had a positive attitude towards translation. It is interesting to note that, despite the second hypothesis being confirmed as the students scored higher for the translation of the English text, 40.48% of students found that translation task to be the more difficult one. One possible reason for this might be the grammar which is somewhat more complicated in the English text compared to the Croatian one, along with the sentences being longer.

This research can serve as an incentive for further research. Research on the usage of translation in primary schools is lacking, in Croatia as well as globally. Further research should be conducted on a bigger sample, including students of different ages and from different schools. This could also give us an insight into how different teachers and schools use translation as a teaching aid and how it impacts the students' general English knowledge as well as their translation skills. Interviewing students could also be helpful for finding out more about their attitudes towards translation compared to other activities they usually encounter in their English classes. However, as interviews might be difficult to organise and conduct, especially with different schools, more thorough questionnaires would also be a good alternative. It would also be useful to conduct interviews with the teachers and in this way find out how they include

translation in their classes, as well as their own attitude towards it along with any observations they might have about the students' reactions to and interactions with translation.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### The Student Handout - Page 1

Dragi učenici,

molim vas da izdvojite nekoliko minuta za popunjavanje ovog upitnika i na taj način doprinesete istraživanju koje se provodi u svrhu izrade diplomskog rada.

Istraživanje provodi Dunja Markovinović, studentica 5. godine Učiteljskog fakultetu u Zagrebu, pod mentorstvom izv. prof. dr. sc. Lovorke Zergollern-Miletić.

Da, da, moramo ostaviti 'izv. prof.' jer tako je bilo na upitniku. Ispričavam se.

Anketom se ispituju mišljenja i stavovi učenika o prevođenju na nastavi engleskog jezika.

Dobiveni podaci su povjerljivi i služit će isključivo u znanstvene svrhe. Upitnik je u potpunosti anoniman, a sudjelovanje u istraživanju je dobrovoljno!

Za sve nejasnoće i moguća pitanja možete se javiti na mail [markovinovic.dunja@gmail.com](mailto:markovinovic.dunja@gmail.com).

Unaprijed vam zahvaljujem na sudjelovanju!

## Appendix B

### The Student Handout with the Translation Task - Page 2

1. Molim te prevedi ove rečenice na engleski jezik:

Mama mi je kupila nove cipele. Dobio sam novu majicu. Imam nove knjige. I teke su mi nove.

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2. Molim te prevedi ove rečenice na hrvatski jezik:

Learning can be easy - if we work together! All of us are different, and we are all strong in certain areas and subjects.

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## Appendix C

### The Student Handout with the Questionnaire - Page 3

#### Upitnik o dojmu

1. Na satu engleskog pismeno prevodimo
  - a. Često
  - b. Ponekad
  - c. Rijetko
  
2. Na satu engleskog usmeno prevodimo
  - a. Često
  - b. Ponekad
  - c. Rijetko
  
3. Na satu engleskog češće prevodimo
  - a. S engleskog na hrvatski
  - b. S hrvatskog na engleski
  - c. Podjednako
  - d. Ne prevodimo
  
4. Teže mi je bilo prevesti
  - a. S engleskog na hrvatski
  - b. S hrvatskog na engleski
  - c. Podjednako
  
5. Zahtjevno mi je bilo
  - a. Sjetiti se riječi koje su mi trebale za prijevod
  - b. Pravilno napisati neke riječi
  - c. Odrediti redoslijed riječi u rečenici
  - d. Drugo: \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Komentar (ako nešto želiš dodati):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Izjava o izvornosti rada**

Izjavljujem da je moj diplomski rad izvorni rezultat mojeg rada te da se u izradi istoga nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih koji su u njemu navedeni.

Dunja Markovinić