



The Role of Critical Thinking in the Undergraduate Translation Training Programs

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Received: 23-11-2021, Accepted: 10-09-2022

ABSTRACT

Linking critical thinking to translation training programs has not happened before. But as Rainbolt and Dwyer (2012) mention characteristics of a critical thinker, we find that translators should become good critical thinkers because they need to recognize bias and prejudice in the text, evaluate arguments, know the power of history, recognize their own ignorance, make precise distinctions and not jump to conclusions. This study measured the extent the translation programs train good critical thinkers. Three groups of males and females are participated in this study. The first group included eighty students of translation and architecture who just registered in the program and did not receive the training. The second one included those at the end of the first year and the third one is the students of the second year. The findings are presented and some suggestions are made. This study emphasizes that the environment should be organized in such a way that makes learners actively engaged in classroom learning and, on the other hand, curriculum and classroom teaching should include effective use of critical thinking activities.

KEYWORDS: Critical Thinking; Translation Training Program; Classroom Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Translation studies program in Iran tries to cover a wide range of skills, from teaching morphology to translation of different text types. Translating as a fifth aspect of language competence, this is why Carr (1990) calls for teaching higher order thinking abilities. He thinks that there should be a space for teaching students how to think critically, analyze, compare and evaluate. Research on critical thinking indicates the close role of thinking in constructing the meaning. Understanding text deeply entails construction of meaning through concoction and interpretation of the author's ideas. Kurland (2000) says that reading comprises a problem-solving process which requires cognition. He claims that "we do not simply read the words; we read ideas, thoughts that spring from the relationships of various assertions" (p. 2).

Translation needs a good deal of comprehension of the source text. So, the translator should be able to extract the meaning and reproduce it in another language. The focus of translation training programs should not only be on teaching translating techniques but also teaching how to think. This is reflected in Schafersman (1991); however, he regrets that most educational curriculums fail to achieve this goal. This study tried to find out whether Iranian four-year undergraduate translation program is successful in training good critical thinkers. As cited by Schafersman (1991), Raymond S. Nickerson (1987) mention that an authority on critical thinking, looks a good critical thinker in terms of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and habitual ways of behaving. Some of the characteristics of a good critical thinker which is probably evident in a good translator are:

S/he uses evidence skillfully and impartially, organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently, distinguishes between logically valid and invalid inferences, suspends judgment in the absence of sufficient evidence to support a decision, attempts to anticipate the probable consequences of alternative actions, understands the idea of degrees of belief, and sees similarities and analogies that are not superficially apparent (cited in Schafersman, 1991, p 4).



Critical Thinking Community (2009) emphasizes the significant role of critical thinking skills at the university level for implementing intellectual tools by which students appropriately self-evaluate their thinking. The importance of critical thinking is ignored in most of teaching curriculum. Amini and Fazli Nejad (2000) assessed the critical thinking skills of the students of the general practitioners of the medical school of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences; the findings of this study showed that students were weak in using critical thinking skills (16). Other researchers also, investigate the effects of active strategic teaching model (ASTM), on creative and critical thinking skills of architecture students. the result showed that using ASTM led to develop the critical and creative thinking skills as one of the main missions of architectural education and finally they outperformed those who didn't receive this teaching model (Asefi and Imani, 2018). Thus, this study seeks to find out whether Iranian four-year undergraduate translation program train good critical thinkers.

Therefore, this study answers the following research question:

-Does the translation program in Iran train good critical thinkers?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Critical thinking is a growing concept in second language learning and has received more attention in recent years. Moon believes that critical thinking should be the core principle of educations specially at higher levels. Beyer (1995) asserts that critical thinking is criteria to judge the quality of something, which is translation in this study.

Critical thinking has been defined based on its different goals, the philosophical, cognitive, affective and psychological perspectives. The cognitive aspect includes knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. This includes the recall or recognition of specific facts, procedural patterns, and concepts that serve in the development of intellectual abilities and skills (Bloom, 1956). Bloom (1956) lists seven levels of thinking: memorization, translation, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which are hierarchical and they get more progressively sophisticated. Critical thinking is defined as the use of cognitive skills or strategies to augment the probability of a desirable outcome. In addition, critical thinking involves evaluating reasoning and those factors involved in decision making. Critical thinking is necessary in listening and reading and its absence also affects the assumed pleasantness in people's every day interaction (Zarei & Haghgoo, 2012).

Hodge (2012) concludes that applying his short critical thinking exercises to the curriculum enhanced the students' way of thinking. Moreover, he believes that such exercises increased a) willingness of students to critically engage with unfamiliar texts b) willingness of students to critique the current curriculum content. In terms of language teaching, writing and reading skills in particular, using inferential and provocative question are helpful (Bolori & Naghipoor, 2013). For instance, Cook (1991) urges learners in talking about the texts they read. Likewise, Elder and Paul (2004) equate critical thinking to close reading and point out that learning well after reading well. They emphasize constant questioning in the process of reading.

The Critical Thinking Community (2009) claims that critical thinking skills are necessary abilities at the university level for implementing intellectual tools by which students appropriately self-evaluate their thinking. Having utilized critical thinking, learners can use intellectual tools which are principles and concepts that help them to analyze, synthesize, assess and solve problems. In sum, critical thinking skills lead to self-improvement in thinking by using intellectual tools which assess thinking. There are various techniques and exercises to use critical thinking in classrooms. Caroselli (2009) lists 50 activities. She explained them in three categories: Quick Thinking, Creative Thinking, and Analytical Thinking. The examples of Quick Thinking are 'brainstorming' 'perceptual shift'. Creative Thinking exercises were designed for those competent learners who lack self-confidence and think they should not be expected to come up with critical thinking answers. Analytical Thinking, based on the scientific approach of defining a problem, enable learners to overcome a problem.

METHODOLOGY

The intended plan of this study is to measure the effectiveness of translation programs on improving student's critical thinking. For this purpose, a questionnaire of critical thinking was administered to two groups of translation university students and the result was obtained. The participants, instruments, design and procedure are discussed below.



PARTICIPANTS

In this study, 80 students of translation studies and architectures were selected from the Islamic Azad University-Tonekabon Branch. They were all senior students. They were 50 females and 30 males, their age ranged from 21 to 28.

INSTRUMENTS

The materials used for this study include the translation of the critical thinking questionnaire of Honey (2004). This 30-items questionnaire assesses critical thinking skills. These five abilities are:

- Deductive reasoning
- Analysis
- Inductive reasoning
- Evaluation
- Inference

To calculate reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers applied the SPSS. The index was about 0.86 which was considered acceptable.

SCORING

Every item was followed by 5 alternatives: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. For each item, only one alternative could be selected. Every scale was given a value in order to calculate the numerical value of test results, as following: Never= 1 rarely=2 sometimes=3 often= 4 always= 5 then, scores were calculated by adding the values of the responses. The scores ranged from 30 to 150. It took about 20 minutes; however, there was no time limitation. The criterion for dividing the subjects to high and low group was based on the questionnaire. Score '90' was considered as the criterion. Below 90 was considered as low and above it as high.

DESIGN

Because the researchers had no control over the learners and no treatment was applied in this study, an ex-facto design or so-called causal comparative was selected. Critical thinking was considered as the dependent variable and BA. Programs were the independent variables.

PROCEDURE

In order to assess the critical thinking of the students, four groups of students were compared. Forty students of translation studies and architecture who just registered for their BA degree were selected randomly. They were given a 30-item questionnaire of critical thinking. The same procedure was followed to evaluate the critical thinking of the senior students of the very fields to observe the probable changes that may be due to the content of the programs.

The only instrument used by the researchers in this research was the translation of Honey's critical thinking questionnaire. The highest possible score in this questionnaire was 150 and the lowest one was 30. The description of the participants' descriptive data on critical thinking, is illustrated in the tables 1,2,3 and 4.

Table 1. Data collected from newly registered students of Architecture on critical thinking questionnaire

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>St deviation</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>
20	93.1429	93. 500	26.4822	43	142

Table 2. Data collected from newly registered students of Translation Studies on critical thinking questionnaire

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>St deviation</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>
20	95.1542	94. 500	27.5832	46	143



Although students of translation studies seem to have performed better, it is not significant at the level of $p < .05$. It can be said that there is no significant difference between the two groups at the beginning of their study. Moreover T -observed 0.6 is much lower than t -critical 1.73.

Table 3. Description of the data collected from senior students of Architecture on critical thinking questionnaire

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>St deviation</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>
20	109.500	106.00	46.00	51	140

Table 4. Description of the data collected from senior students of Architecture on critical thinking questionnaire

<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>St deviation</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>
20	135.500	128.00	65.00	55	144

The test comparison of group means of the second set of groups show the t -observed 1.5 which is higher than $t_{critical}$ 1.73 therefore; there is a significant difference between the experimental groups (translation studies group) and the control groups (Architecture). The results of the study show that the null hypothesis of the research was rejected.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Critical thinking as a growing concept can have a significant influence on current traditional methods of teaching and improvement of the educational systems. In this study the critical thinking questionnaire of Honey (2004) was administered to three groups of students to measure the extent the translation programs train good critical thinkers. The results indicated the significant effect of translation program on student's critical thinking. One of the major reasons why the translation students outperformed the architecture ones can be the reading courses at the beginning of the study program and different translation tasks that foster critical thinking. That is in line with what Kurland (2000) claims, reading comprises a problem-solving process which requires cognition. He claims that "we do not simply read the words; we read ideas, thoughts that spring from the relationships of various assertions" (p. 2). On the other hand, the translation tasks usually include discussion, solving problems raised by cultural conflicts. Looking at Caroselli (2009) lists of critical thinking activities, it can be concluded that these are the most common tasks between translation and critical thinking. However, teaching thinking to translation trainees who are nonnative speakers according to Atkinson (1997) would be full of cultural problems.

Not only has the result of present study indicated the better outcome of translation students in critical thinking test, but also Bolori and Naghipoor (2013) found the positive relationship between critical thinking and the performance of students on translation tests. Good critical thinking led to better performance on translation test. However, there is a great need for systematic teaching of critical thinking alongside teaching reading in the beginning of the program. The results of the study may be related to the teaching methodology of professors at IAU of Tonekabon. Therefore, to generalize this result and reach a high level of reliability to confirm the related outcome, more observations in different universities are required.

The further research on the relation of critical thinking and meaning to improve learners' competence in language teaching is worth doing. Workshops for students and/or in-service training of university lecturers and professors can be of great help. Masduqi (2006) believes foreign language learning and critical thinking are complementary since understanding and communication are important in these two fields.

This study is limited by the number participants. Because the majority of the students were female, further research is needed to be done on the effect of gender on the performance of the students. Moreover, to be



more specific, the same students who were tested in term one should be tested on critical thinking, however, such an observation takes three to four years.

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