

EXPLORING THE USE OF TRANSLATOR APPLICATIONS: DO THEY IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' SKILLS?

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Abstract

Translator application is a software program created to assist users in translating text, speech, or other forms of communication between different languages. Along with the increasing need to communicate with different languages, translator applications are popular, frequently used and constantly evolving. The appearance of translator application would make a certain effect on English language skills whether it is positive or negative. This study aims to investigate the use of translator applications whether they improve students' English skills or not. This research used qualitative case study with semi-structured interview method as its instrument. Two participants who were undergraduate students from non-English Department were invited to give their perceptions related to the raised issue. This research found that the participants used several translator applications such as Google Translate, Grammarly, DeepL, Speak and Translate, Yandex Translate and Babylon Translator. The participants had different perceptions towards the effect of translator application on English skills. While the first participants believed that translator applications can improve his English skills since they provide assistance in grammar, the other participant concurred that translation applications inhibited learners' ability to think and express themselves directly in English. This research article further explored the disadvantages of using the translator application completed with the strategy to maximize the advantages of these application.

Keywords: *Students' Perceptions, Translator Application, Advantages, Disadvantages, English skills*

Introduction

The advancement of technology has many positive impacts for every sector including in the field of education. The positive impact that we can currently feel is the ease of accessing information. This makes it easier for us as a young generation to learn and carry out other activities in education (Maulida, 2016). But like two side of the coins, the advancement of technology also has negative impacts.

Nowadays, English language skills have a very important role in life since English is an international language. Regarding to the use of English as a language, Paul Thompson wrote

'Good English is English that efficiently works as a medium of communication and self-expression. To do this, English must be clear, unambiguous, comprehensive, and expressive. This is most evident where there is a certain level of education, which in turn is most evident in places of affluence'. (Mcarthur, 1987).

English as a language plays a role as a tool to connect between the speaker and the interlocutor. In this case, it can be explained that language in the form of systemized sounds has a substitute role for speakers to express their ideas which are then responded to by the interlocutors so that good communication is established (Noermanzah, 2019).

Translation has a function as a way to share information, stories, experiences, and most importantly, knowledge. Translation is a medium that can help people to gain knowledge or information. Nowadays, a lot of writings with English as the source language have been translated into target languages in various countries, including Indonesia. The translations vary from non-academic writings (literature) to academic writings such as education, science, medicine, history, technology, law, politics, art, religion, business & economics, biography, and autobiography (Fitria, 2018).

In this digital era, the use of translator applications is frequently used because translator applications are very easy to use and can be installed in phone. To get the benefits such as the

improvement of English language skills, translator application should be used wisely. There are many cases that students do not get their English improved since they depend on translator applications only. This study aims to explore the use of translator applications towards students' English skills improvement.

Using translator apps can help language learners and travellers who need to communicate in a foreign language. Translation apps like Google Translate, iTranslate, and Microsoft Translator can translate phrases into dozens of languages and offer features like audio translations, phrasebooks, and offline capability. In addition, translation applications like Google translator And Parrot offer photo translation, which can help translate printed materials such as signs and menus. Other translation apps like Translator with Speech and SayHi Translate offers voice recognition and text-to-speech functionality, allowing users to carry on a conversation with someone in a foreign language. These apps can help users learn new phrases and vocabulary so that they can communicate more effectively with native speakers. Some translation apps like Yandex and Google Translate also offer audio to accompany translations, which can be particularly useful for language learners since it can enhance students' speaking and listening skills. However, it is important to note that relying solely on translation apps may not be the most effective way to improve English skills as it is also important to practice speaking and listening skills directly with native speakers.

Meanwhile, for students, translation apps can be used to improve English language skills in several ways. For example, translation apps like Speakly and Google Translate can be used to learn new vocabulary and practice translation skills. Some language learning apps like Speakly also focus on speaking, listening, reading, and writing practice to help students improve their language skills. Overall, translation apps can be a useful tool for students to improve their English language skills, however direct practice with peers is still needed to fully develop their language proficiency.

Translation apps can also be integrated into classroom instruction for English language learners in several ways. For example, translation apps like Microsoft Translator can be used to support accessible classroom learning with live captioning, cross-language understanding, and even multilingual casual conversation. Additionally, translation apps can facilitate communication between teachers and students, especially if the teacher does not speak the student's home language. Translation can also be used as a pedagogy for a multilingual, multicultural approach to language teaching in which both L1 and L2 are supported in the classroom. Some translation apps like Speak and Translate can also be used to improve students' multilingualism and multiculturalism, literacy and critical thinking, and linguistic skills. Overall, translation apps can be a useful tool for supporting English Language Learners' (ELLs) learning needs.

With varying levels of English competence, translation applications can improve communication for ELLs (Yi and Choi, 2015). When a teacher does not speak the child's native tongue, they function as an aid in communication between the two parties (Prince, 2017). Greater communication opportunities may lead teachers to reassess ELLs and see them as more capable. These applications support instructors in valuing students' first language and helping students' gain proficiency in both their first language and English when used as a component of an anti-bias curriculum.

Apps for translation also strengthen the bond between educators and students. For instance, after the language barrier is overcome, teachers who are unfamiliar with ELLs may better appreciate how brilliant and talented these students are. Additionally, teachers can modify their lessons. ELLs' comprehension of the material, engagement, motivation, communication, and feeling of self-esteem can all enhance if teachers and students can communicate effectively.

To guarantee a good connection between the student and instructor while using translation apps, it is helpful to adhere to the standards that were first set for working with

interpreters. For instance, teachers should speak to the students directly rather than via the interpreter and maintain eye contact (Robertson, 2007). Teachers should put an iPad (or another m-learning device) between themselves and the student while using one, but they should avoid staring at it or holding it up to their mouths while speaking. The use of contractions, filler words like "um" or "like," and slang phrases should be avoided by teachers. When a person has a particular dialect, having an accurate pronunciation might help the software translate more effectively. Speaking slowly frequently indeed disrupts the language's natural rhythm, yet slowing down, speaking evenly, and pausing regularly is vital. This provides the software enough time to translate (Robertson, 2007). Furthermore, speaking loudly often enables the app to separate the user's voice from background noise that could otherwise obstruct translation.

Students also need to be taught how to use the app, just like instructors do. When using the app for the first time, pre-schoolers often speak very quietly or shout into it, but school-aged kids usually speak normally—possibly because they have more experience using mobile devices. Children will also take a lot longer to stare at the person instead of the object. When using the app, children may have entire conversations without making eye contact; instead, they may only chat and respond to one another while gazing down at the tablet. Additionally, some translation applications demand the speaker to keep the microphone button down while speaking. This is challenging for younger kids to remember, therefore utilizing an app that does not need is advantageous for them. The usage of translation applications will get simpler for kids over time, just as it has been simpler for instructors to do so.

Methodology

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview method. The use of this approach was carried out to make a more systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts, nature, and relationship of the problems studied (Susanti, 2017). The research used a qualitative approach so that the incoming data could be more credible and in-depth when obtained from sources. The data taken in this study was direct primary data in the form of respondents' thoughts about the effect of using the translator application. While the sources of data brought were sources and documents that are appropriate and could support the information needed in research. The sampling technique of this study used probability sampling with the simple random sampling method. Probability sampling is a sampling technique that provides equal opportunities or opportunities for each element of the population to be selected as a sample. Simple random sampling means that the sampling of the population was done randomly, regardless of the strata in the population (Susanti, 2017). This sampling method was chosen to simplify and speed up sampling. So that research could be done feasibly and quickly.

The research subjects were active students of Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur with a non-English major especially. The selection of this subject was intended so that data can be obtained easily. The research was carried out in mid-May 2023 at Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jawa Timur. Semi-structured interview was used as a research instrument. The interview method is the process of obtaining information for research purposes utilizing question and answer while face-to-face between the interviewer and the respondent or resource person (Susanti, 2017). This semi-structured interview conducted aimed to obtain data with certainty because the list and flow of questions have been made systematically. The resource people were given questions related to the research material. Then the data in the form of answers received were analyzed in-depth by making comparisons between other sources and supporting documents.

Findings and Discussions

Findings

The data collected produced several results related to the subject matter. The qualitative data were obtained by the authors by interviewing the respondents. In the explanation of the findings, the respondent's name would be blurred with initial only to maintain privacy. The results of qualitative data research were aimed at getting in-depth information about students' perception of translator applications in improving English skills. Two respondents were interviewed in this study. Two of them were the students of UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur. The results of the interviews showed that there were some similarities as well as differences at the same time in each of the respondents.

Translator Application Used

There are many translator applications used by the students. The authors would like to know what translator application is the most used by the respondents.

"I am using Google Translate. The reason is that I do not need to download it in the playstore. But of course, you need other applications like Grammarly and DeepL because you can modify the sentences again. So we can still learn to understand grammar or vocab. I also use Speak and Translate, Yandex Translate, and the last one is Babylon Translator." -(J).

J stated that he was always using Google Translate as his main translator application because he did not have to download an application. Besides Google Translate, there were other translator applications that he used such as Grammarly, DeepL, Speak and Translate, Yandex Translate, and Babylon Translator because he can modify the sentences and learn the grammar or vocab.

"Even though I disagree with the use of translator app, it cannot be denied that I also use the app even though it is not too frequent. The application that I agree to be used frequently is only Grammarly. Grammarly is not only a translation app but it can also improve grammar since it gives me direct grammar correction. That's why I say I can learn grammar from it. Not just using it." -(K)

Despite K's disagreement about the translator application, she was still using it anyway. She mainly used Grammarly because it was not just a translator application, but it also could fix grammar and he could learn from it.

From the explanation by both respondents, it could be concluded that the respondents use various translator applications such as Google Translate, DeepL, Grammarly, Speak and Translate, Yandex Translate, and Babylon Translator. They also recognized that they could feel the benefits of the translator applications such as learning the language and the structure. An application called Grammarly is not only used for translation, but also could correct grammatical errors.

Perceptions on Translator Applications

There were different perceptions between the respondents towards their thoughts of using translator applications. The first respondent gave a positive response while the second gave different opinion.

"By using a translator application, it can help individuals understand unfamiliar words or phrases in real time. By having access to translations, learners can bridge the language gap and comprehend texts or conversations that might otherwise be challenging. This can enhance their overall comprehension and confidence in using English."-(J)

J said that the translator application has some positive effects. It could help individuals understand unfamiliar words or phrases in real-time, learners could bridge the language gap and comprehended texts or conversations. He also believed that it could enhance his overall comprehension and confidence in using English.

"Contrary to popular belief, I believe that using a translator application may have limited effectiveness in improving English language skills. While it

can provide quick translations, it often fails to capture the nuances, idiomatic expressions, and cultural context that are crucial to language proficiency. Relying too heavily on a translator application can hinder a learner's ability to think and express themselves directly in English, resulting in a lack of fluency and natural language usage.”-(K).

Meanwhile K had a different opinion about the translator application. She believed that using a translator application might have limited effectiveness in improving English language skills. She also said that relying too heavily on a translator application can hinder a learner's ability to think and express themselves directly in English, resulting in a lack of fluency and natural language usage.

From the respondents' explanation, it can be concluded that there were different opinions between two respondents. Translator applications have positive effects in terms of facilitating the students to communicate in target language, bridge language barrier, and introduce new words or phrases. However, relying too much on translator applications could also give negative effects such as unable to think and express directly in English resulting in a lack of fluency and natural language usage. While it could help students, it also could prevent individuals in improving their English language skills.

The Side Effects of Translator Application

The use of a translator application has several side effects as explained above by K. During the interview, questions about side effects began to be asked more deeply to make the respondents could explain more about the examples and their impacts.

“While translator applications can be helpful, it is also important for learners to actively engage with the language, practice speaking and writing, and gradually reduce dependence on translation tools. Additionally, translator applications may not always provide accurate or contextually appropriate translations, which could lead to misunderstandings or errors in communication.”-(J).

J explained that there were a few drawbacks to consider by using the translator applications. He said that relying too heavily on a translator application may hinder the development of independent language skills. To actively engage with the language, practice speaking and writing, and gradually reduce dependence on translation tools were very important for learners. He continued that translator applications may not always provide accurate or contextually appropriate translations, which could lead to misunderstandings or errors in communication.

“One of the main drawbacks is the risk of becoming overly dependent on the application. Language learning requires active engagement, practice, and critical thinking. By relying on a translator application, learners may not develop essential skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and the ability to express thoughts independently. Moreover, translations provided by the application may not always be accurate, leading to misunderstandings or incorrect usage of language.”-(K)

K described one of the main drawbacks as the risk of becoming overly dependent on the application. She stated that ELLs need to be involved in active engagement, practice, and critical thinking. So, by relying on a translator application, learners may not develop essential skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and the ability to express thoughts independently. He also added the facts about translations such as the application may not always be accurate, leading to misunderstandings or incorrect usage of language.

It could be concluded that there were many side effects of using the translator applications. The risk of becoming overly dependent on the application is one of the main drawbacks. Relying too much on the applications could make the user more useless when there were no translator

applications they could use. They may not develop essential skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and the ability to express thoughts independently.

How To Overcome The Side Effects

After knowing the positive and negative thoughts and the side effects of using translator applications, the authors would want to know about the respondents' perceptions about the solutions for this problem.

“To be balanced, learners can use translator applications as a supplemental tool rather than a main tool. They can utilize them to check the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases, but then make an effort to internalize that knowledge by using the new vocabulary in their sentences or discussing it with others.”-(J).

J explained learners should use the translator applications as a supplemental tool rather than a main tool. He added that they could utilize it to check the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases, but then make an effort to internalize that knowledge by using the new vocabulary in their sentences or discussing it with others.

“There are several more effective approaches to improving English language skills. Firstly, immersing oneself in an English-speaking environment, either through interacting with native speakers, watching movies or TV shows, or reading books in English, can greatly enhance language proficiency. Secondly, engaging in language exchange programs or joining conversation groups where English is the primary language of communication can provide valuable practice and feedback. Finally, actively practicing writing, speaking, and listening skills without relying on translations can help develop fluency and confidence in using the English language.”-(K)

Almost similar to J, K stated several effective approaches to improve English language skills. First, immersing individuals in an English-speaking environment. Second, engaging in language exchange programs or joining conversation groups where English is the primary language of communication can provide valuable practice and feedback. The last, actively practicing writing, speaking, and listening skills without relying on translations can help develop fluency and confidence in using the English language.

“With the advancement of translation technology, language learning is likely to become more accessible and convenient. Translator applications may evolve to provide more accurate and nuanced translations, which could aid learners in understanding complex texts or complicated ones. However, it will still be crucial for individuals to focus on actively practicing the language and engaging in authentic conversations to develop fluency and understanding that go beyond what translation tools can provide.” -(J)

J also added about the thoughts of the translator applications that may evolve to provide more accurate and nuanced translations, which could aid learners in understanding complex texts or complicated ones. He stated that with the advancement of translation technology, language learning is likely to become more accessible and convenient. Furthermore, he also explained that it is still crucial for individuals to actively practicing the language and engaging in authentic conversations to develop fluency and understanding that go beyond what translation tools can provide.

In conclusion, learners should use translator applications as a supplemental tool rather than a main tool. They have to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment, join conversation groups where English is the primary language of communication, and actively practice writing, speaking, and listening skills without relying on translations can help develop fluency and confidence in using the English language.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained, fact shows that using translator applications gave both positive and negative effects. From the interview result, the respondents explained that using translator applications could make learning new languages faster. However, it also gives the side effects like addictions or relying too much on translator applications. One of the respondents stated that using translator applications could help individuals understand unfamiliar words or phrases in real-time, learners could bridge the language gap and comprehend texts or conversations, and could enhance their overall comprehension and confidence in using English. This statement was in line with Alzatma and Khader's investigation (2020) which found that using translator applications could help students to improve their English-speaking skills. A study by Ogundokun et al (2021) also mentioned the quickness translator applications could help the students learn the target language since they can help students to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases.

The respondents also stated the side effects of using translator applications. One of them said that translations provided by the application may not always be accurate, leading to misunderstandings or incorrect usage of language. This was the same as Mahardika's research (Mahardika, 2017), he found that the translator application was not always give the correct answer. The other side effect was relying too heavily on a translator application could hinder the development of independent language skills. Learners have to develop essential skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and the ability to express thoughts independently (Bashir, Marriam, Muhammad Azeem, 2016). Spelling and grammar were very challenging for learners (Medvedev, 2016). To develops such skill, it is suggested to not relying on and using a translator application in a frequent time.

From the respondent's perspective, learners should not rely too much on translator applications. To overcome the side effects, learners should use translator applications as supplemental tool rather than a main tool. The respondents also stated that learners could utilize translator applications to check the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases, but then make an effort to internalize that knowledge by using the new vocabulary in their sentences or discussing it with others. The results fit with Dzakiyyah's claims (2021) and Nishanthi's research (2018) about the importance of English and explain how to not rely too much on translator applications.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the effect of using translator applications on improving English skills can be both positive and negative. Translator applications can provide immediate translations, which can help understand the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. They can also assist in translating entire sentences or paragraphs, aiding in the comprehension of English texts. One positive effect of using translator applications is the enhancement of vocabulary. By looking up unfamiliar words or phrases, learners can expand their knowledge and improve their understanding of English. Moreover, translators can help students with grammar, allowing users to construct more accurate sentences. However, there are limitations to relying solely on translator applications. The accuracy of translations can vary, and these applications may not always provide contextually appropriate translations. As a result, learners may develop a dependency on these tools and struggle to develop their language skills. Additionally, translator applications do not assist with pronunciation or speaking skills, which are important aspects of English language skills.

To mitigate the negative effects and maximize the benefits, it is crucial to use translator applications as a supplementary tool rather than a primary source of learning. Learners should actively engage with the translated content, comparing it with authentic English sources and seeking clarification from teachers or native speakers. Regular practice through reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities is essential for language development.

From the results of research conducted by researchers, it can be concluded that while translator applications can be beneficial in improving English skills, they should be used considerably. They can enhance students expanding vocabulary, understanding texts, and improving grammar. However, they should not replace traditional language learning methods or discourage learners from actively engaging with the language. By using translator applications as a supportive tool and combining them with other language learning strategies, learners can effectively improve their English skills.

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