

Webinar: Google Translate – a tool for cheating or a tool for learning? Resources and Material

A. Q&A

- 1) How do you see the impact and usability of Google Translate differently for different language levels ("pure beginners" vs. intermediate vs. advanced)?

I think for the beginner level it is most important to focus on exercises that help students to develop good habits (e.g. using and comparing different dictionaries) right from the start and explain to students why using a translation device as a dictionary is not beneficial for their learning and is problematic in terms of academic integrity.

The exercises I suggest here should work for all levels. For example, the exercise about grammatical gender and professions could be included when you introduce professions and the exercises about word order works for different language levels as well.

In my experience, learners who are more advanced often have a different attitude towards language learning. Some of them might still try to use GT to cheat, but they are motivated in different ways – compared to beginners who might just take one course to fulfill their language requirements. In more advanced courses exercises that use GT as a pre- or post-editing tool might be more interesting for students.

- 2) How do you deal with students who just want the fastest solution (hence GT), and don't care about word choice? This applies from beginner to advanced. Thanks

I think I talked about this during the webinar a bit. All we can do is help students develop good habits by actively engaging them with different options, including exercises that train them to work on their critical electronic literacy – and be strict if we catch someone cheating. We all hope our students are intellectually curious and eager to learn, but for some a language course might not be their priority (for different reasons). The honest answer is, we can only support them in the process, but we will probably not reach everyone.

- 3) Your examples show how students can use English to learn German (or various other languages). Do you have examples of activities students with various L1s can use to learn English?

I think most of the exercises could be used in an EFL classroom as well. You could ask students to use their L1 and let them analyze the English translations. Especially the exercises that are multilingual could be useful.

In the reading list I provided you will also find several articles that focus specifically on the use of WBMT in the EFL classroom that might have specific examples that are more applicable in this context (e.g. Benda 2013, Sample 2015, Tsai 2019, Lee 2020).

- 4) My question: would asking students to work with a free online dictionary (e.g. the Pons multilingual dictionary en.pons.com) have the same benefit?

I would say yes. It could definitely be used for exercises that are part of the “2nd pillar” and I checked, Pons also seems to have a function that allows you to save vocabulary and create a vocabulary trainer (I have not tried it out yet).

A quick check of the translation function showed that (for example when it comes to grammatical gender) there are similar issues, but I would have to play around with it a bit more and do more research on how Pons translations are generated.

I think it is still helpful to use GT for the awareness raising exercises, if your goal is to explain the limits of WBMT and the issues relating to academic integrity since students mostly use GT these days. You could also make students compare and share their experiences with the two different tools.

- 5) Did you find students generally receptive to the different awareness raising activities? And do you think you could see a difference in their graded assignments?

I started including exercises from “pillar 1” in my intermediate classes and even just explaining the difference between dictionaries and GT made an impact. They started asking me about other dictionaries and we started writing colour coded flashcards for words they looked up and included them in warm-up exercises. I think the beginner classes need more – and more explicit exercises to develop good habits.

For the “language detective” exercises it also depends a bit on the group. Some students really liked to be in charge and detect patterns and rules, some were more passive. I think it is important to offer different approaches for to engage different types of learners.

In terms of plagiarism, I think – or at least it seemed – that students were more aware of the limits of WBMT. However, it is hard to make any long-term predictions or concrete observations without an actual study. I noticed that students started to simplify written assignments and used structures given in the textbook for their assignments – not just copying them but using them as a template to create their own version – which led to less mistakes and better grades. These are only observations; I do not have data on differences in students’ graded assignments.

B. Example Exercises

- 1) Use GT to teach students about Google Translate (GT):
 - a) Example exercise: The “single word myth”:

We often say that using GT is cheating and or plagiarism, but we do not always take the time to explain why. We should take that time – and actually use GT to explain, to show students very clearly that we understand the technology and what it is dishonest.

I usually use the example *went* → *ging* for this because it clearly shows how there are multiple steps involved if you use a dictionary (in comparison to letting a WBMT device do the work): finding the infinitive form, looking up the infinitive, deciding what tense is the correct one, knowing the past participle and choosing the correct auxiliary verb. This exercises also works with “*are* → *bist*”

Once students actually go through the process and see the steps involved, they have a better understanding of the differences between using a translator and using a dictionary.

b) Example exercise: Dictionaries

This exercise is supposed to show students why dictionaries are the better choice (also see Ducar & Schocket 2018: 790) and help them develop critical electronic literacy (see Williams 2006 and Valijärvi & Tarsoly 2019 for more information on this).

- Familiarize your students with the content GT offers that goes beyond simple translations (synonyms, context, information of frequency, examples)
- Ask students to compare GT with different dictionaries
- One option: Give all students the same vocabulary and assign different dictionaries (individually or in groups) – and let them compare results in a class vocab book (which can be as easy as using google docs).
- You could do that once or switch every week and let students decide which one they liked best and why – or assign different vocabulary and let students create the vocab book as a collaborative exercise
- Include explicit reflection tasks. Ask students to write a short text on why they prefer one dictionary over the other, who hosts the website, and how does the dictionary organize information?
- One thing that GT is really useful for is exporting vocab list: Here you can find some tips and tricks from Russell Stannard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7V7r1DL130w> (He explains all the features of GT that not everyone might be familiar with, e.g. how the “saving option” could be used for class glossaries and how students can test each other (export saved glossary to google sheets).
- Put students in charge – let them design vocab games, vocab tasks and quizzes for other students,

c) Example Exercise: Gender

Even though the “bad model” approach is not as useful anymore because of GT’s technical improvements, there are some things that can be used to help students reflect on the target language – and also on how the translations GT and others tools produce are created.

My cousin came to visit.	<u>Mein Cousin</u> kam zu Besuch.
The kindergarden teacher plays with the children.	<u>Die Kindergärtnerin</u> spielt mit den Kindern.
The nurse helps the patient.	<u>Die Krankenschwester</u> hilft dem Patienten.
The secretary filed documents for the boss.	<u>Die Sekretärin</u> reichte Dokumente für den Chef ein.
The surgeon gave the relatives an update.	<u>Der Chirurg</u> gab den Verwandten ein Update.

- Give students the English phrase and let them collect the German translations in a table
- Let them discuss in groups what the notice to get them to reflect on the result
- This is more of a “focus on form” exercise, but it helps to make students understand how GT works and why they should not trust every result

- 2) Use GT in class to teach grammar, register and intercultural communication - and to include authentic material

According to Alley: “comparisons of the target and native languages can help students better understand the language learning process and the limitations of translation. Ironically, computer translation Web sites can serve as a vehicle to accomplish these objectives“, especially when students do not really understand structures of their own language (Alley 2005: 63)

a) Example Exercise: Word order

- Let students explore word order in their first languages – which is not necessarily English
- This allows for multilingual approaches which are usually tough to include in the classroom because instructors probably do not speak all the languages represented in their classrooms.
- Give students an English sentence and ask them to use GT to translate into their own language
- Let them take notes about the word order and ask them to find out which parts belong together (what is an expression of time, what expresses location). Often students cannot identify parts of a sentence that belong together, so they have trouble with *Angaben* and *Ergänzungen*
- Ask students to translate either from English or from their L1 into German and to come up with rules for word order (in groups)
- Let them discover rules and patterns themselves (let them be language detectives) and then ask them to formulate their own rules

Similar exercises could also include

- Past tenses, progressive forms, word order in subordinate clauses
- Many textbooks I worked with include “discover and formulate the rules yourself” exercises, but GT can be a good way to do that in a fun way that allows for multiple languages being present in the classroom which fosters cultural competence, diversity and inclusion.
- These exercises could be warm-up tasks or part of grammar worksheets

b) Example Exercise Register: Composing dialogues in different contexts

- Even in intermediate language classes students often seem insecure about forms of address and greetings. e.g. in emails to professors
- I would use GT for reviewing “How are you” and then split students into groups and ask them to collect other phrases and expressions for a specific contexts: an email to your boss, a conversation with new colleagues, Facebook chats, conversations in the classroom – which could also lead to interesting discussions about cultural differences.
- I would ask them to compose a dialogue (or an email) using the phrases they collected (which could be saved in a class vocab book via GT)
- In order to ensure that they do not use GT all the time and practice without it, you can focus on speaking in the classroom, which is of course easier in a synchronous classroom setting (with breakout rooms etc.)

- You could also ask them to write a text for a different context to practice at home
- If you want to assess the dialogues and emails produced in class or as homework assignments, I would give more points for choosing the appropriate register and communicative output. Structural mistakes should of course still be corrected, but not weighed as heavily.

d) Pragmatics:

- Ducar & Schocket explain the importance of cultural differences when it comes to complaints or apologies, which is something GT cannot translate (for more information, please see Ducar & Schocket 2018: 786)
- Examples exercises: Ask to formulate requests in a restaurant or café, collect phrases and put them together without GT (similar to the exercise about register)

e) Example exercise(s): Working with authentic material

- Allow the use of GT for reading tasks for authentic original content that is motivating and more interesting than textbook readings
- Ask students to look up vocab from the original source in dictionaries, create a classroom vocab book → here GT might also be helpful since students could create a basic glossary and then group the vocab, e. g. with mind-maps, visual representations etc.
- GT allows students to grasp the general meaning of the text and create a glossary, but they would still do additional vocab work
- You can work with the original German text in class: e.g. questions about the text, find headlines, order the text (in German)
- Starting with an authentic text can help students to build vocabulary and context knowledge that could be the basis for understanding other texts (without a dictionary) and helps them to create their own texts or a larger group project.
- You can build on that, e.g. by bringing texts to class that fit with the groups' topics and let groups be in charge of teaching the vocab they collected to their peers or give mini presentations on their chosen topic throughout the term
- You could also have one big class project that the students decide on at the beginning of class and that results in a class portfolio, e.g. with short texts, video projects, or a class podcast series with all the different projects
- This shifts the approach from the teacher choosing a topic to students developing their own product. This could be great for remote or online teaching because we might have less or no classroom time
- With this approach you could, for example, have the group portfolio or class project as a meaningful capstone project that students start right from the beginning

Ducar & Schocket also suggest „InsertLearning and eComma“ as tools for collaborative reading, which enable more communication between students as they can work on a text together and help each other (for more information, please see Ducar & Schocket 2018: 791-92). I have not tried these tools yet, but they seem to be good tools for collaborative reading

exercises, and they could also be very helpful for flipped classroom arrangements (for more information on this, see Ducar & Schocket 2018: 792)

3) Alternative assignments:

Ducar & Schocket argue that “[j]ust as instructors must adapt their learning tasks and expectations, so too must they adapt their approach to assessment. Evaluations and assessments that value important content, meaningful communication, and linguistic and cultural growth“ (2018: 792).

Here are some general ideas that are inspired by this and/or based on current research (for more details, please consult the reading list I provided):

- More oral exams and focus on speaking
- More focus on re-writing texts, editing (Ducar & Schocket 2018: 792)
- Learning journals or portfolios (Ducar & Schocket 793) that include reflection tasks, such as a class vocab book or a compilation of smaller projects (see section about authentic tasks)
- Larger class projects that foster a group feeling and hold everyone accountable (important for online classes)
- Collaborative writing exercises: Students correct each other’s drafts and have to explain their corrections
- Task and outcome-oriented projects such as class: e.g. podcasts series about German culture